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- UK seeks 'common ground' with China during Economic, Financial Dialogue visit
- Families in shock begin to visit their charred homes in Los Angeles area

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- Shiv Sena (UBT) to contest Maharashtra local bodies polls solo
- Guv Ravi unable to 'digest' TN growing, his actions are 'childish': CM Stalin

Coal mine tragedy: Three more bodies recovered

Human tragedy should not be politicised, says Himanta

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Divers on Saturday fished out bodies of three workers from a flooded coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district, where they had been trapped since January 6.

With this recovery, bodies of four out of the total nine workers stuck in the flooded quarry were found. The first one was recovered from the mine in Umrangsu, around 250 km from Guwahati, on Wednesday. "The rescue operations resumed this morning and three bodies were recovered six days after the incident," the official said.

The three were identified as Ligen Magar (27) of Dima Hasao district, Khushi Mohan Rai (57) of Kokrajhar district and Sarat Goyary (37) of Sonitpur district. The body of one labourer hailing from Nepal was found on January 8.

The bodies were found floating on accumulated water in the mine after two days of dewatering. Divers of the army, navy and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) brought them out, the official said.



Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma informed about the recovery of the bodies in a post on X. "Rescue efforts in Umrangsu continue with unwavering resolve... Our hearts go out to the grieving, as we hold on to hope and strength in this difficult time," he added.

Currently, a search operation is being conducted with the help of an underwater Remote Operating Vehicle (ROV), the official added.

The chief minister on Friday night said that the mine was abandoned 12 years ago and was under the Assam Mineral Development Corporation till three years ago. "It was not an illegal mine but an abandoned one. The workers had entered the mine that day for the first time to extract coal," Sarma had said.

He said that the leader of the workers has been arrested and the police are conducting investigations into the case.

On the alleged involvement of a family member of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council's Chief Executive Member Debolal Gorlosa in the incident, the chief minister said, "This is a human tragedy and we should not politicise it".

Altogether nine workers were trapped inside the coal mine in Umrangsu district on Monday after a sudden gush of water flooded the quarry. (PTI)

'Indian economy likely to be a little weaker'

WASHINGTON, Jan 11: The Indian economy is expected to be "a little weaker" in 2025 despite steady global growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has said.

Georgieva also said she expects quite a lot of uncertainty in the world this year mainly around the trade policy of the US.

In her annual media roundtable with a group of reporters on Friday, she said global growth is expected to be steady in 2025, but with regional divergence.

Georgieva said she expects the Indian economy to be a little weaker in 2025. However, she did not explain it any further. The World Economy Outlook update week will have more details about it.

"The US is doing quite a bit better than we expected before, the EU is somewhat stalling, (and) India a little weaker," she said.

Brazil was facing somewhat higher inflation, she said.

In China, the world's second-largest economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was seeing deflationary (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gaurav writes to PM seeking SIT probe

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Saturday said he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a SIT probe into the mining tragedy in Assam, which left several labourers in a coal quarry dead.

He also alleged that "illegal mining continues unchecked" due to "weak law enforcement and local complicity" in the northeastern state.

Nine workers were trapped inside a coal mine in Umrangsu in Dima Hasao district on Monday after a sudden gush of water flooded the quarry. Of them, the bodies of four labourers have so far been recovered.

"As of today, rescue operations have entered their sixth day, but the fate of coal miners trapped in the illegal coal mine at Dima Hasao remains uncertain. Illegal mining continues unchecked in Assam, fuelled by weak law enforcement and local complicity," said the Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha.

"I have written to the Prime Minister



urging an urgent SIT probe to investigate this tragedy," he said.

Gogoi urged the Prime Minister that the proposed special investigation team (SIT) should not only look into the "illegal" operation of the mine and identify those responsible for this tragedy but also address the broader issues at play.

"This includes the failure to enforce the NGT's (National Green Tribunal) ban on rat-hole mining, the complicity of local authorities including the district administration and district police - who have enabled these illegal activities to persist, despite repeated accidents and warnings," the Congress leader alleged.

The SIT should also examine safety standards and working conditions in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Youtuber apologises for derogatory remarks

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: A man who made derogatory comments on Assam's history and traditions on social media tendered an apology on Saturday claiming that his intention was not to hurt anyone.

The police have already filed a case against Abhishek Kar for a video on a YouTube channel for his derogatory comments and for spreading misinformation, a senior police officer said, adding that an investigation has already been started.

Kar on Saturday tendered an apology and claimed that his intention was not to hurt anyone. Kar, who identifies himself as a 'trader, investor and mentor' in his YouTube channel description, assured of confirming 'secondary information' in future before putting it out to the public.

Kar had drawn the ire of the Assam government over his remarks made in a podcast.

"A video from a YouTube channel, named Riya Upreti, is in circulation where an individual named Abhishek Kar is seen making unacceptable comments on Assam's history and traditions. Appropriate action may be initiated against the said individual for spreading misinformation," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on X on Friday, asking the police to pursue the matter.

Responding to it, Director General of Police GP Singh said, "Noted Sir. Lawful action shall be taken. Warm regards." Additional DGP (CID) Munna (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

FIRST HMPV CASE IN ASSAM

10-month-old detected with HMPV: Officials

DIBRUGARH, Jan 11: A 10-month-old child has been detected with the human metapneumovirus (HMPV) infection, the first such case this season in Assam, officials said on Saturday.

The child is undergoing treatment at Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh and is "stable" now, they said.

AMCH superintendent Dr Dhrubajyoti Bhuyan said the child was admitted to the state-run hospital with cold-related symptoms four days ago.

"The HMPV infection was confirmed yesterday after we got test results from Lahowal-based ICMR-RMRC," the hospital superintendent said.

Bhuyan said that samples are sent to the Indian Council of Medical Research for tests in influenza and flu-related cases as a routine practice.

"It was a routine test during which the HMPV infection was detected. The child is stable now. It is a common virus and there is nothing to worry about," he said.

ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre, NE, Lahowal (Dibrugarh) Senior Scientist Dr Biswajit Borkakoty said, "Since 2014, we have detected 110 HMPV cases in Dibrugarh district. This is the first case this season. Every year it is detected, and nothing is new. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CEM's Open Interaction Programme commences

DIPHU, Jan 11: The Chief Executive Member's (CEM's) Open Interaction Programme kicked off from Phongbirkir under Korkanthi Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency in Karbi Anglong district on Saturday.

The programme will touch on all 26 MAC constituencies, aiming to foster direct communication between the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the residents to provide a platform for understanding their needs, aspirations, and concerns.

The CEM, addressing the gathering, said, "Within one year road connectivity, potable water facility, and electricity will reach Korkanthi."

Further, on the memorandum submitted by the villagers, the CEM said that KAAC would prepare plans and estimations for schemes. "Development of these con-



stituencies is always on the mind of team Karbi Anglong. We came here to know from you whether government welfare schemes are beneficial or not and to seek your support and cooperation and support in the best possible ways so we can develop our district. We assure you that all the grievances you put forward will be looked into," the CEM assured the people. Without naming the party, the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BHOGLI FEAST-IVITES



A Bhela Ghar and a Meji being made for the Uruka of Magh Bihu, at Lal Singh Academy, Kharguli in Guwahati on Saturday. HT Photo

CAG report on excise policy exposes Kejriwal: BJP

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: The CAG has projected a loss of ₹ 2,026 crore due to the Delhi government's excise policy, and the ruling Aam Aadmi Party has not tabled the report in the assembly to hide its misdeeds, the BJP claimed on Saturday.

BJP leader Anurag Thakur told a press conference the CAG report has arrived at 10 major findings about the policy, which was scrapped by the AAP government amid a row, asserting that former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal will have to answer the questions it has raised.

"He will have to say who pocketed the money," Thakur said, alleging that Kejriwal is the kingpin of the scam.

BJP president J P Nadda claimed the CAG report has exposed intentional lapses, leading to a loss of ₹ 2,026 crore loss to the exchequer.

Nadda said on X, "Intoxicated by power, high on misgovernance. 'AAP'DA model of loot in full display and that too on something like liquor."

He said it is just a matter of a few weeks before the AAP government is voted out and punished for its misdeeds. He alleged, "CAG Report on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ISRO: SpaDeX satellites positioned 230 m apart, health status 'normal'

BENGALURU, Jan 11: The two Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) satellites that the ISRO aims to unite in orbit are currently separated by a distance of 230 m, with their health status deemed 'normal', the space agency said on Saturday.

On Friday evening, the satellites were separated by 1.5 km. ISRO has said that the distance would be reduced to 500 m by Saturday morning.

In a post on 'X', ISRO said, "Arrested at Inter Satellite Distance (ISD) of 230 m, all sensors are being evaluated. Spacecraft's health is normal."

The space agency, however, has not committed to a date for conducting the docking experiments, which will bring the satellites together in space.

The SpaDeX project has already missed two announced schedules for docking experiments on January 7 and 9.

ISRO successfully launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on December 30.

The PSLV C60 rocket carrying two small satellites, SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target), along with 24 payloads, had lifted off from the first launchpad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and about 15 minutes after liftoff, the two small spacecraft weighing about 220 kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended.

According to ISRO, the SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft that were launched by PSLV.

This technology is essential for India's space ambitions such as the Indian on Moon, sample return from the Moon, the building and operation of Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), etc. In-space docking technology (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Wife can get maintenance from husband irrespective of cohabit decree: SC

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: In a significant judgement, the Supreme Court has ruled that a woman can be given the right to maintenance from her husband even after she has not complied with the decree to cohabit with her spouse if she has valid and sufficient reason to refuse to live with him.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar settled the legal dispute over the question of whether a husband, who secures a decree for restitution of conjugal rights, stands absolved of paying maintenance to his wife by virtue of law if his wife refuses to abide by the said decree and return to the matrimonial home.

The bench said there can be no hard and fast rule in this regard and it must invariably depend on the circumstances of the case.

It said the question as to whether non-compliance with a decree for restitution of conjugal rights by a wife would be sufficient in itself to deny her maintenance, owing to

Section 125(4) of the CrPC has been addressed by several High Courts but no consistent view is forthcoming, as their opinions were varied and conflicting.

After analysing various judgements of the High Courts and the apex court, the bench said, "Thus, the preponderance of judicial thought weighs in favour of upholding the wife's right to maintenance under Section 125 CrPC and the mere passing of a decree for restitution of conjugal rights at the husband's behest and non-compliance therewith by the wife would not, by itself, be sufficient to attract the disqualification under Section 125(4) CrPC."

The bench said it would depend on the facts of the individual case and it would have to be decided on the strength of the material and evidence available, whether the wife still had valid and sufficient reason to refuse to live with her husband, despite such a decree. "There can be no hard and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Gujarat has 65% share of domestic kite market; exports globally' 143 flyers from 47 countries participate in International Kite Festival

AHMEDABAD, Jan 11: Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Saturday inaugurated the four-day International Kite Festival, which has drawn 143 participants from 47 countries.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said Gujarat has a 65 per cent share of the country's kite market, with exports to countries like the US, UK, and Canada.

The 'International Kite Festival-2025' is being organised at Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad from January 11 to January 14. Apart from Ahmedabad, the festival has also been scheduled to be organised at the Statue of Unity (Ekta Nagar), Rajkot, and Vadodara on January 12 and Surat, Shivrajpur, and Dhordo on January 13.

State tourism minister Mulu Bera said this year, 143 international kite flyers from 47 countries and 52 kite flyers from 11 states in India are participating in the festival.

Patel said as the then chief minister of Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced modern elements to the festival by integrating them with tourism. "Thus, this kite festival has given Gujarat a global identity," he said.

The chief minister launched the festival by releasing a tricolour balloon into the sky and said that this year, ambassadors from 11 countries



have travelled to Gujarat to see the kite festival. He said PM Modi's Vocal for Local campaign has received a boost from tourists attending the kite festival.

"People setting up food and crafts stalls during the festival earn lakhs of rupees. More than five and a half lakh people joined the International Kite Festival last year," Patel said.

He said Gujarat has gained recognition in the world as the state that makes the most number of kites because Gujaratis love kites. He said Ahmedabad, Nadiad, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No more actions on derivatives on anvil: Sebi WTM Narayan

MUMBAI, Jan 11: The capital markets regulator is not planning any more measures to curb or restrict activity in derivatives, Sebi's Wholesale Member Ananth Narayan said on Saturday.

An expert group under former RBI executive director G Padmanabhan continues to work on bettering the system, and some moves on ease of doing business and better risk management are being mulled, he added.

"At this point in time, there is no thought of Sebi taking any further steps in this particular regard," Narayan said, addressing an event organised by Sebi-promoted NISM.

He also made it clear that the Sebi is not mulling any steps on "suitability and appropriability", which will determine who can trade in the derivatives market.

It can be noted that in November, Sebi imposed a set of restrictions to curb highly speculative



trades in the futures and options market after data pointed out that retail investors lost money in 93 per cent of the trades over the last three years.

Making it clear that Sebi has nothing against derivatives and that they help in price discovery and

deepening the market, Narayan assured that the tweaks will be introduced only after consultations.

"Some of the measures being discussed within the market regulator include steps to better measure risk in the derivatives market. What you need ideally is that the

volumes in the cash market should be nice and liquid, and there should be depth in the market. And likewise, the volumes in the derivative market should also have depth, should also have good volumes," he noted.

"It is important to make sure that there is some kind of connectivity in the liquidity of the two markets," he said.

"What is very clear to us is the current way of measuring open interest as notional of futures and notional of options is simply not right. It gives a very, very wrong picture, and there is a need to debate how we move forward into a more meaningful metric," he said.

Narayan said the Sebi is also considering linking market-wide position limits to delivery volumes. Linked to the same, it is considering a revision of index training limits imposed during the COVID pandemic to control volatility, the WTM said. (PTI)

2024 saw 71.7 pc jump in Indian tourists visiting Malaysia: Diplomat

CHENNAI, Jan 11: A record 71.7 per cent increase in travellers from India to Malaysia was witnessed in 2024, attributed to the rise in flight connectivity between the two nations, Consul General of Malaysia in Chennai, Saravana Kumar Kumarasagam, said here.

With Malaysia extending the 30-day visa exemption for Indian nationals until December 2026, he described it as a "significant milestone" in enhancing connectivity between India and Malaysia.

"This is a golden opportunity for the people of Tamil Nadu and across India to explore Malaysia's rich cultural heritage, pristine beaches, and vibrant cities without the hassle of applying for a visa," Kumar said in a press release on Saturday.

As Malaysia remains a key destination for Indian travellers, this extension of the 30-day visa exemption ensures seamless travel, he added.

Tourism Malaysia's Chennai Director, Hishamuddin Mustafa, noted that the visa exemption not only simplifies travel but also reaffirms Malaysia's commitment to being a preferred destination for Indian tourists.

"With strategic partnerships and robust promotional campaigns, we aim to showcase Malaysia's unparalleled hospitality, diverse attractions, and hidden gems," Mustafa added.

In 2025, Malaysia has rolled out unique offerings, including Community-Based Tourism, positioning Malaysia as a premier wedding des-

tination, promoting Malaysia as an education hub, and targeting high-potential customers under the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) segment.

Top officials from the Southeast Asian country also unveiled the logo of 'Visit Malaysia Year 2026', featuring the Malaysian Sun Bears—Wira and Manja—as mascots to symbolise the country's multicultural harmony and natural beauty.

Regarding tourist arrivals in Malaysia, the year 2024 marked a significant milestone, with 10,09,114 visitors from India—up by 71.7 per cent compared to 2023. This growth was driven by new flight routes, including Chennai to Penang, Bengaluru to Langkawi, and Bengaluru to Kuala Lumpur, he said. (PTI)

NLC India arm and APDCL to develop 1000 MW solar projects in Assam

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: State-owned NLC India Ltd on Saturday said its renewables arm has entered into a joint venture pact with Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd (APDCL) for developing 1000 MW solar power projects in Assam. The pact has been signed between NLC India Renewables Ltd (NIRL) and APDCL, a company statement said. While NIRL will have 51 per cent stake in the JV, APDCL will have 49 per cent.

As per the pact, NIRL will bring its expertise in renewable energy project development and APDCL will facilitate land acquisition, regulatory approvals, and power

evacuation infrastructure.

Power purchase pacts will be signed with Assam discoms for the sale of 100 per cent of the generated power for 25 years.

"This initiative will not only ensure energy security for Assam but also catalyse socio-economic development by creating green jobs and enhancing the state's sustainability index," NIRL Chairman Prasanna Kumar Motupalli said.

The joint venture aims to address Assam's growing energy demands by developing renewable energy projects, ensuring affordable and reliable power supply, and contributing to the state's long-term energy security. (PTI)

Singapore-based entrepreneur, felicitated with India's Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award 2025

BHUBANESHWAR (ODISHA), Jan 11: Global Schools Foundation (Singapore) Chairman & Co-founder Mr. Atul Temurnikar has been felicitated with the prestigious Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award (PBSA) by the Honourable President of India, Ms. Droupadi Murmu. Mr. Temurnikar received the award during the 18th edition of the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) Convention, held between January 8-10, at Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The Honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, inaugurated this year's event, which was themed around "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat." The mega event was jointly organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Odisha government.

Mr. Temurnikar has been conferred this award following his remarkable contributions to the education sector in Southeast Asia. He has played a pivotal role in spreading CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) education in Southeast and East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan. His pioneering efforts have revolutionised the educational landscape in these regions, offering world-class learning environments for the Indian diaspora and local communities alike.

Additionally, Mr. Temurnikar has significantly advanced India's educational and cultural ties with other countries. Through GSF, he has facilitated access to Indian education for over 45,000 students from 70 nationalities across 11 countries, thus fostering a deeper understanding of Indian culture and traditions amongst them. His efforts have strengthened bilateral relations of India with other coun-



tries of the world, particularly Japan and South Korea, where GSF schools are extremely popular. Moreover, he has contributed towards promoting education amongst the tribal population in India through a Public-Private Partnership with the Gujarat Government.

Commenting on the award, Mr. Temurnikar said, "I am grateful to the Government of India for bestowing this prestigious award on me. This will further motivate us to continuously work towards the upliftment of global education and cultural connect with the diaspora. We will continue to foster quality education and offer a world-class learning environment and cross-boundary cultural connect, transcending international boundaries."

The PBSA is the highest honour bestowed upon overseas Indians and Indian-origin individuals and organisations, highlighting their exceptional achievements for the betterment of the diaspora and the better understanding of India globally. Mr. Temurnikar's recognition comes as a result of his pioneering efforts in revolutionising education and strengthening the ties between India and its diaspora through cultural and community initiatives.

Mr. Temurnikar is a leading figure in global education who pioneered the start of CBSE-affiliated

Goyal assures garlic traders to look into alleged illegal imports issue



NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has assured garlic traders to look into their concerns over illegal imports of the agri commodity, an official said on Saturday.

A delegation of garlic traders met the minister on January 10 and highlighted difficulties faced by farmers and traders due to imports of Chinese garlic, the commerce ministry official said.

According to the traders, Chinese garlic is banned in India, but it is being brought into the country, which is hurting farmers and traders, apart from distorting the garlic market.

The traders have alleged that some imports were routed via Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq to circumvent the ban on Chinese imports.

"The minister assured them that the government will examine their petition and take strong action against illegal imports, if any," the official added.

The country's garlic imports stood at USD 7 million during April-October this fiscal. It was USD 31.4 million in 2023-24.

About 80 per cent of the imports are coming from Afghanistan. Other major exporters to India include UAE, Iran and Egypt. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

'Indian economy likely to be a

pressure and ongoing challenges with domestic demand, she said. "Low-income countries, despite all the efforts they are making, are in a position when any new shock can affect them quite negatively," Georgieva said.

"What we expect in 2025 is to have quite a lot of uncertainty, especially in terms of economic policies. Not surprisingly, given the size and role of the US economy, there is keen interest globally in the policy directions of the incoming administration, in particular on tariffs, taxes, deregulation, and government efficiency," Georgieva said.

"This uncertainty is particularly high around the path for trade policy going forward, adding to the headwinds facing the global economy, especially for countries and regions that are more integrated into global supply chains, medium-sized economies, (and) Asia as a region," she said.

That uncertainty is actually expressed globally through higher long-term interest rates, even though short-term interest rates have gone down, the IMF Managing Director said.

Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, replacing Joe Biden at the White House. Trump, 78, has announced plans to impose additional tariffs on countries like China, Canada and Mexico. He has publicly announced the use of tariffs as a key policy tool.

On inflation, the IMF expects global disinflation to continue, Georgieva said.

"As we all recognise, the higher interest rates that were necessary to fight inflation did not push the world economy into recession. They have delivered the desired results. Headline inflation is converging back to target sooner in advanced economies than in emerging markets," she said. (PTI)

Gaurav writes to PM

these mines, which are "consistently ignored", leading to deadly incidents, he claimed. "The investigation should expand its scope to identify and map out other illegal mining sites across Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, and Upper Assam, areas where these activities continue unabated," he alleged in the letter.

Additionally, the investigation must address the environmental impact of such "illegal mining operations and recommend necessary actions to curb the long-term damage to both human lives and the environment," Gogoi said.

"The people of Assam, and indeed all of India, deserve to know the truth and justice done. This must be a turning point in our collective efforts to end illegal mining and protect vulnerable workers from exploitation and harm," he said. The families of the victims deserve justice, and "we must ensure that such incidents are prevented in the future", he added. The deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha hoped that the Prime Minister would consider this "urgent request and take necessary steps for a fair and transparent investigation". (PTI)

10-month-old detected with

We have got the sample from AMCH and this has been found positive for HMPV." Human metapneumovirus is one of the many respiratory viruses that can cause infections in people of all ages, particularly during the winter and early spring months. The virus infection is usually a mild and self-limiting condition and most such patients recover on their own. (PTI)

Youtuber apologises for derogatory

Prasad Gupta told PTI on Saturday that an FIR against the accused has been lodged.

"He has made the offensive remarks and we have started our due process of investigation," Gupta said.

In a section of the video on the YouTube channel, Kar claims that there is a village in Assam, with dominant tantric practices, where women have such power that they convert a person into a goat and again back to a human.

Kar, replying to the CMO post on X, wrote: "Apologies to people, @CMOfficeAssam, @epsinghps and every concerned party who was hurt. The intent wasn't to hurt anyone and it will be kept in mind going forward that such incidents don't (sic) happen again."

Kar also said that he will be "more vigilant in research before using existing secondary data". (PTI)

CAG report on excise policy

'Liquorgate' exposes @ArvindKejriwal and @AamAadmiParty Gov. Intentional 'Lapses' in Policy Implementation. ₹ 2026 Cr Loss to Exchequer money."

The then chief minister Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia were arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the case of alleged corruption in framing the excise policy, which was later scrapped.

Both were released on bail after spending months behind bars.

The said CAG report has not been officially released as yet but its purported content has been reported in some sections of the media. Asked about the BJP allegations, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said, "Where is the report? The BJP itself keeps saying no CAG report has been tabled."

At his press conference, Thakur asked who will be the chief ministerial face of the Aam Aadmi Party as it has been left with no "honest face". Kejriwal cannot become chief minister, he said.

BJP leaders have often suggested that the Supreme Court's bail conditions for Kejriwal in the excise case rule him out for the job.

The former Union minister said the AAP's journey over the last 10 years is of scams and sins. It has delivered liquor scam and "sheesh mahal" instead of fulfilling the promises related to schools, sanitation, and self government. Its eight ministers and 15 MLAs ended up in jail, he said, adding that Kejriwal and Sisodia were also incarcerated.

The CAG, he said, has fixed accountability, putting the AAP government in the dock for ignoring expert opinion, allowing bidding despite complaints, not penalising violations and not following transparency in framing the excise policy. Kejriwal used to demand the arrest of Sonia Gandhi 11 years back for various scams and is now evading replies in the cases of corruption involving his party, Thakur said.

The AAP rose on the basis of reports of various constitutional institutions, he said, in an apparent reference to their critical references to some of the policies of the previous UPA government at the Centre.

They are now raising questions on these institutions, he said. (PTI)

SpaDeX satellites positioned 230

is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives. Through this mission, India is marching towards becoming the fourth country in the world to have space docking technology. (PTI)

Wife can get maintenance

fast rule in this regard and it must invariably depend on the distinctive facts and circumstances obtained in each particular case."

"In any event, a decree for restitution of conjugal rights secured by a husband coupled with non-compliance therewith by the wife would not be determinative straightaway either of her right to maintenance or the applicability of the disqualification under Section 125(4) CrPC," it said.

The bench gave the authoritative pronouncement, in the case of an estranged couple from Jharkhand, who entered into wedlock on May 1, 2014, but parted ways in August 2015.

The husband moved the family court in Ranchi for restitution of conjugal rights and claimed that she left her matrimonial home on August 21, 2015, and did not return thereafter despite repeated efforts to bring her back.

His wife, in her written submission before the family court, alleged that she was subjected to torture and mental agony by her husband, who demanded ₹ 5 lakh dowry for purchasing a four-wheeler.

She alleged that he had extramarital relations and she had suffered a miscarriage on January 1, 2015, but her husband did not come to see her from his workplace.

The wife further claimed that she was willing to return to her matrimonial home on the condition that she should be allowed to use the washroom in the house, as she was not allowed to do so earlier, and she should also be allowed to use an LPG stove to prepare food, as she had to do so by using wood and coal.

The family court on March 23, 2022, gave a decree for restitution of conjugal rights while noting that the husband wanted to live with her. However, the wife did not abide by the decree and instead filed a plea for maintenance with the family court. The family court ordered maintenance of ₹ 10,000 per month to be paid to the wife by her estranged husband.

The husband subsequently challenged the order before the Jharkhand High Court, which noted that his wife had not returned to the matrimonial home despite the decree for restitution of conjugal rights, which she had not chosen to challenge by way of appeal. The High Court ruled that the wife was not entitled to maintenance. Aggrieved by the order, the wife challenged the order before the apex court, which ruled in her favour.

The top court said the High Court ought not to have given such undue weightage to the said judgment and the findings therein. It said the fact that she was not allowed to use the toilet in the house or avail proper facilities to cook food in the matrimonial home, facts which were accepted in the restitution proceedings, are further indications of her ill-treatment.

"The appeal is accordingly allowed, setting aside the judgment dated August 4, 2023, passed by the high court of Jharkhand at Ranchi in...," the bench said.

It added the order of family court order dated February 15, 2022, is upheld and restored and directed the husband to pay ₹ 10,000 to his estranged wife.

"Such maintenance would be payable from the date of filing of the maintenance application, August 3, 2019. Arrears of the maintenance shall be paid in three equal instalments..." it said. (PTI)

143 flyers from 47 countries

Khambhat, and Surat have become kite manufacturing hubs. "Today, Gujarat has a 65 per cent share in the country's kite market. Every year, kites are exported from Gujarat to countries like the US, UK and Canada," Patel added. He said the kite of Gujarat's development should soar high to realise PM Modi's promise to make India a developed nation by 2047. (PTI)

CEM's Open Interaction Programme

CEM said there are leaders opposing the solar project and flyover setting up. They are opposing the development of the district.

The CEM also highlighted the issue with the setting up of the Sainik school at Samelangso saying the school was proposed at Langloko, but the villagers rejected it. "If it was set up, there would have been rapid development in the area. But the golden opportunity was lost. Now Executive Member (EM), KAAC, Surjya Rongphar has come up with an idea to set up at Langvoku in his Borjan MAC constituency. By setting up the Sainik School there will be more development in Langvoku."

Rongphar highlighted several schemes implemented for the development of the district. Among the schemes that have been implemented, the CEM said there are medical sub-centres at Lobonghat, Samelangso, Tekelanguin, a six bedded hospital at Belughat and a road connecting Dokmoka to Rongmongve, which is a shorter way to reach Kaziranga from Diphu.

More schools will be provincialised by KAAC in consultation with the State government, the CEM announced. The interaction programme was attended by MP Amarsing Tisso; EMs; MLAs and EMs, principal secretary, KAAC, Mukul Kumar Saikia and district commissioner, Nirola Phangchopi.

ENGINEERING WORK
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. TSK/E/Eng/01 of 2025, dated 08-01-2025.
E-tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work. Item No.1: Brief Description of item: Fabrication assembly in-situ G-3/L type glued insulated joints under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/ITinsukia. Tender Value: ₹62,58,380/-; Earnest Money: ₹1,25,200/-; Item No.2: Brief Description of item: Dibrugarh: Provision of Catwalk facility on yard side of 4th pit line (Line No.- 11B) at Dibrugarh Coaching Depot. Tender Value: ₹4,39,87,777/-; Earnest Money: ₹3,59,900/-; E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 31-01-2025 and opened at 16:00 hrs. on 31-01-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 31-01-2025 in website www.treps.gov.in

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Event draws participants from countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan

Bodo Sahitya Sabha Dwimu Nwgrw session witnesses huge gathering

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11: The 64th annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) on Saturday entered the third day held at the Dwimu Nwgrw, Dimakuchi in Udalguri district.

As part of the programme scheduled, Bodo Sahitya Sabha president, Dr Surath Narzary hoisted sabha flag followed by floral tributes to the martyrs on the occasion.

The grand event witnessed marking the celebration of Bodo language and literature that showcased multi community cultural demonstration, various activities across the state.

The conference features a variety of programs, including discussions, literary events, and cultural exchanges, aimed at celebrating the rich heritage of Bodo literature and promoting the language across the country as well as



globe.

The event has drawn participants from across Assam and neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, states of India, namely West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh etc, with scholars, writers, and cultural enthusiasts coming together to share ideas and insights.

The session is expected to strengthen efforts toward preserving and advancing the Bodo language and culture.

On the third day of the event, the exhibition venue of the ongoing conference saw a huge gathering of visitors from the districts of the region.

During the event, more than fifty books including the souvenir

of the reception committee of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha conference "Dimakuchi" was unveiled that gathered an attraction on the occasion.

An open discussion on the career building amongst the young was also organised on the occasion.

Several awards giving from the Bodo Sahitya Sabha including Someswari award, Rangshar awards were given away amongst the award winners.

Assam chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma will present as the chief guest on the open session of the conference to be held on January 12.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, several cabinet ministers of the state, and many distinguished dignitaries are gracing the event on the concluding day.

Visa expiry leaves AAU former Afghan student in the lurch

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 11: An Afghan national whose visa has expired is on the tenterhooks as he awaited the response of the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer's (FRRO's) nod for further stay in this country.

With no funds to go back and his visa extension application rejected by the Afghanistan Embassy at Delhi, Selim Rehmani, who had passed his Masters from Assam Agricultural University recently, hoped to study further in India, but faces deportation if the FRRO rejects the application.

Jorhat District Commissioner Jay Shivani told this correspondent that he had received a communication in this regard from the Assam Agricultural University Registrar Tapan Gohain and he had forwarded it to the Jorhat Superintendent of Police Shwetank Mishra, who is the Foreigners Registration Officer here.

"The SP has written to the FRRO at Kolkata and based on what decision the FRRO takes, action will be taken. If the response is negative then a notice will be issued to the student to go back," the DC said.

The DC further said that the student also had a student refugee certificate furnished by his Delhi embassy. SP Mishra said that he had forwarded the communication to the FRRO, Kolkata and he was awaiting a response.

He, however, said that the student refugee certificate was not recognised here.

"For the time being we have asked the University authorities to lodge the youth at the AAU guest-house. Depending on what feedback we get from the FRRO, we will proceed," he said.

AAU Registrar Tapan Gohain said that Selim Rehmani had passed his 2-year Masters in Agricultural Business Management, a

course under the Economics and Farm Management Department of AAU, and had also been given the certificate.

Gohain said that Rehmani was hoping to get a seat in some other institute in India where he could do his doctorate degree but with expiry of the visa, chances were slim, more so as his student visa extension application had also been rejected by his embassy.

Gohain further said that for the time being he was being lodged in a boys hostel in the University.

Regarding the student refugee certificate possessed by Rehmani, he said that the student had come through an official procedure -- that is with passport and visa, so he could not be considered to be a student refugee.

Gohain further said that Rehmani was suffering from paucity of funds due to which he was hoping to get a scholarship to study further.

Trinamool Congress party meeting in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 11: The Nagaon district unit of Trinamool Congress party organised a party meeting at Nagaon Udmari Bataluguria daily bazaar on Saturday here.

The meeting was chaired by Mayur Mazumder, the district president of Nagaon District Trinamool Congress party where Ramen Chandra Borthakur, president of All India Trinamool Congress party, party's chief coordinator Dulu Ahmed and Milton Kuya attended the meeting as the chief guest and special invitees.

During the meeting, several hundred of people from across the district joined Trinamool Congress party and pledged to work for Trinamool Congress party in the days to come. The party leadership of Trinamool Congress welcomed the new comers, felicitating each of them with a gamusa and party badge.

Hojai admin gears up for 76th Republic Day celebration

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 11: The Hojai district admin has geared up to celebrate the 76th Republic Day in a befitting manner.

Notably, in connection to this a preparatory meeting was organised at the conference hall of district commissioner at district headquarter Srimanta Sankardev Nagar in Hojai district on Thursday.

The meeting was chaired by DC Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati, where officers from all the departments along with police officials joined the meet. Speaking on the occasion, DC Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati said Republic Day is an auspicious occasion, it marks our respect, towards our constitution and democracy. He also apprised each department about their responsibilities and shared full details of the programmes. He further asked all the departments to work with full zeal and in coordination, so that the celebration can be held smoothly. During the meeting, an awareness video message by CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on Road Safety and significance of wearing helmet was played via a projector.

Workshop on space technology and geospatial advancement in Tamulpur

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11: A workshop on 'space technology and geospatial advancement' was held at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's office in Tamulpur recently. The event was organised in collaboration with the district administration, Tamulpur and the Assam State Space Application Centre (ASSAC), under the department of science, technology, and climate change.

The workshop began with an inaugural speech by ASSAC director PLN Raju, who emphasised the potential of space technology in transforming Tamulpur into a model district.

The district commissioner, Pankaj Chakraborty, addressing the gathering, highlighted the use of space technology to tackle local issues such as human-elephant conflicts, a significant concern in the region.

DC Chakraborty has welcomed the workshop and expressed hope of useful activities in days to come ahead.

A book on Tamulpur was also unveiled during the event. The ASSAC team elaborated on various applications of space technology and geospatial tools. Sandikai from the North East Space Application Centre (NESAC) provided insights into the utilization of space technology for the Northeast region. Additionally, Utpal Sharma, additional director of ASSAC, discussed applications of Remote Sensing (RS) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

Demonstrations of NESDR, NRSC, ISRO's mobile apps, and dashboards were showcased by NESAC officer, Niloy Nishant. Scientists and officials from ASSAC, including Runjun Baruah, Kaustav Baruah, Debashish Baruah, Dipankar Sharma, Jumoni Baruah, Kalyanjit Sharma, and Pranjit Kalita, presented critical aspects of space technology in the event. The workshop also included online discussions with Shashikant Sharma from ISRO Ahmedabad and Dr Harish Karnatak from IIRS Dehradun which especially attracted the discussion at length in depth.

Cleanliness goes haywire at Margherita Bazaar

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 11: At a time when PM Modi wielded broom and cleaned a road as part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, cleanliness went haywire at ward number 6 of Margherita Bazaar under Margherita Municipal Board. Dr Om Prakash Sahu noted homeopathic physician and president of Assam Bihari Nagarik Bikash Manch have come down heavily on Margherita Municipal Board which allegedly only collects taxes.

Sahu complained that despite having more than 30 Safai Karmachari at Margherita Municipal Board, waste and garbage collection remained unattended, drains clogged and public toilets remain unhygienic.

"There are near more 1000 shops and petty shops in Margherita Bazaar area but unfortunately there is only one public toilet for which customers hesitate due to filthy conditions. Customers when necessary have to visit nearby houses at Margherita Bazaar for urine and defecation," he said.

NFR registers 0.878 MT freight loading during last month

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: NFR continues to make steady progress in freight loading, and during the month of December 2024, the railway registered 0.878 million tonnes (MT) of freight loading across various commodities.

During the month of December 2024, loading of few commodities have registered significant growth in comparison to corresponding period of the previous year. During the month, cement loading has increased by 233.3%, POL loading has increased by 3.7% and container loading has increased by 66.7% as compared to corresponding period of the previous year. In the segment of other items, loading of Stone Chips has also been increased by 9.5% as compared to the previous fiscal year, during the same period.

Speedy execution of doubling and electrification works at important sections over NF Railway has led to increased inward and outward movement of freight traffic. This unprecedented loading accomplishment was made possible through simultaneous efforts in enhancing capacity. This continuous growth in freight loading reflects the increasing economic activity in the region, a PR stated.

Valuables looted from ret teacher's house in Salaguri

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 11: Two armed decoits entered into the retired principal of Sivasagar Government HS School Jayram Nath's residence in Salaguri, 7 km from here on Friday and decamped with cash and valuables worth ₹ 20 lakhs in broad daylight. Nath told this correspondent over the phone on Saturday that his daughter was alone in the house mopping the floor when the decoits entered, gagged her, and threatened her to shoot incase of

any mishaps. They then opened the Almira vault and took away the jewelry and cash. Jaysagar Police has been making an investigation with CCTV footage from another house in front.

Such incidences have risen in Sivasagar and its suburbs for about a year. There was another case of decoity on broad light in Uttam Hazarika's residence in the same area. Local people have urged SP Sivasagar to take strict monitoring action.

Asomi Bhogali Mela tickles taste buds in Silchar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: The much-awaited Asomi Bhogali (Poush) Mela 2025 has commenced with immense enthusiasm at the Community Managed Training Centre (CMTC) near Itkhola Bazar, Silchar.

This vibrant celebration of Assamese culture and traditions, organised by the District Mission Management Unit, Cachar, in collaboration with the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) under the panchayat & rural development department is scheduled to captivate visitors from January 10 to 12. The mela promises a rich tapestry of local artistry, culinary delights, and cultural heritage, drawing crowds from across the region.

The grand inauguration ceremony was graced by prominent dignitaries, including Silchar MP Parimal Suklabaidya, Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, district commissioner of Cachar, Mridul Yadav, and chief executive officer of Cachar Zilla Parishad, Pranab Kumar Borah. Their presence underscored the significance of the mela as a platform for cultural preservation and economic growth.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Suk-



labaidya highlighted the unifying essence of the Bhogali Mela. He stated, "The Bhogali Mela is not just a celebration of Assamese culture but also a platform to promote local artisans and entrepreneurs. It fosters unity and brings our heritage to the forefront of public consciousness."

Echoing his sentiments, MLA Chakraborty commended the efforts of ASRLM and the District Mission Management Unit, asserting, "Such initiatives are essential to preserve and celebrate our rich traditions. This mela will undoubtedly inspire the younger generation to take pride in

CM meets delegates of Karmachari Parishad

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held a meeting with a delegation of the newly elected committee members of the Sadou Assam Karmachari Parishad, led by its president Dipen Sarma and secretary general Pankaj Barman at Janata Bhawan on Saturday.

During the meeting, several key matters were deliberated upon, aimed at addressing the needs and aspirations of the employees of the state government. These included proposed amendments to service rules, the enhancement of the Apun Ghar housing scheme, and the age of retirement for government employees, reflecting the evolving dynamics of workforce management. The need for cashless treatment facilities at health institutions for government employees and their dependants was another focal point of the discus-



sion, alongside other critical concerns that significantly impact the welfare and interests of the state's workforce.

The delegates of the Sadou Assam Karmachari Parishad expressed their appreciation to the chief minister for his proactive approach and openness to hear and address their concerns.

Sarma stated that the submissions of the delegates would be

deliberated upon and reiterated his government's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the state's employees.

The meeting was attended by chief secretary Ravi Kota, principal secretary to chief minister K K Dwivedi, other senior officials of the Government of Assam, along with the newly elected committee members of the Sadou Assam Karmachari Parishad.

Infighting within BPF party escalates political tension

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 11: Abu Bakkar Ali, who has served two terms as general secretary of the BPF party, has challenged allegations made against him by Intaz Ali, vice president of the district committee.

Addressing a press conference at Gossaigaon Press Club, Abu Bakkar Ali, along with recently resigned district committee vice president Amardeep Roy and nearly fifty other members, raised explosive allegations against Intaz Ali, demanding investigations by the CBI and the Chief Minister's Vigilance Cell into his sources of income.

According to Abu Bakkar Ali, Intaz Ali has acquired properties worth crores of rupees through fraudulent means, including misappropriating funds by deceiving hundreds of people who took KCC loans from banks. He accused Intaz Ali of involvement in illegal activities such as cattle smuggling and illegal teakwood transportation, stating that large quantities of teakwood were being smuggled out of the region using trucks for sale in other states.

Ali further alleged that Intaz Ali's brother amassed wealth through a broiler chicken syndicate, owning several luxurious properties and five expensive vehicles. These extravagant displays of wealth have led local people to perceive Intaz Ali as a mafia figure.

Regarding the defamation lawsuit threatened by Intaz Ali, Abu Bakkar Ali said he would present all

evidence in the appropriate time and place, challenging the allegations against him as baseless. He stated that if the claims against him, such as land grabbing or misappropriating funds sent by laborers from Gujarat, were proven, he would willingly accept any punishment and retire from political life.

Amardeep Roy, the recently resigned district committee vice president, also demanded a thorough investigation into Intaz Ali's sources of income. He claimed that including Intaz Ali, who joined the BPF in 2023, has led to severe disruption within the BPF party. Roy alleged that since 2003, loyal and dedicated members have been side-lined, with certain leaders prioritizing wealth over the party's integrity, damaging its reputation and eroding public trust.

Highlighting the discontent, Roy stated that 31 loyal leaders and workers from the Guma constituency have resigned from the party, citing dissatisfaction with the leadership's decisions. He warned that fielding a controversial figure like Intaz Ali as a candidate could lead to a severe political downfall for the BPF.

It is noteworthy that the arrival of Intaz Ali in the party has caused significant infighting within the BPF in the Gossaigaon sub-division. Discussions are ongoing about how the senior leadership plans to address this internal conflict, and how Intaz Ali will respond to these allegations remains a critical aspect of this unfolding situation.

NCC cadets take part in firing exercise in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 11: A firing training exercise was conducted under the 9 GR unit which saw participation from over 100 National Students Corps (NCC) trainees from various educational institutions in Margherita.

Cadets from Margherita College, Digboi College, Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bargolai and Margherita Public Higher Secondary School took part in the camp. The NCC firing training was led by 26th Assam Battalion NCC Digboi SM Upendra Chetry and AO Bijoy Lamba. Upendra Chetry noted said that conducting firing training camp in Namdang Pihkhana was particularly challenging due to its location in a sensitive, mountainous area of Tinsukia district, which is considered to be hot bed for militant activities.

The trainees expressed pride in participating in the exercise which was a collaborative effort between 9 GR unit and 26th Assam Battalion NCC, Digboi and the trainees also expressed their determination to serve the country by joining in Indian Army if given the opportunity.

AGP lays stress on religious minority

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Jan 11: The regional party Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) has geared up for panchayat and assembly elections. An executive body meeting of the religious minority cell in this regard was held at its district office on Saturday.

The regional political party AGP has prepared a political strategy to draw the voter's minds ahead of the elections in the crucial meeting.

The meeting was chaired by Morigaon District Religious Minorities Cell president Abdul Jalil. AGP's Assam Religious Minorities Council's general secretary Manik Hussain addressed the gathering in the meeting.

Speaking on the meeting he said the Assam Gana Parishad is a large regional political party formed by the people of Assam. The parents of this party are the people of Assam. Therefore, the AGP is always committed to the people of Assam. He urged the party leaders and workers to take steps to make the party symbol 'elephant' more popular among the people than the party leaders. He thanked and congratulated AGP president Atul Bora and executive president Keshav Mahanta for strengthening and adding dynamics to the party. The meeting was attended by the vice-president of the Religious Minorities Cell Mohammad Ali.

He said that AGP can never be completed without the minorities. Therefore, he urged the minority people of Assam to come out spontaneously and join the AGP to further strengthen the party. The meeting was attended by Assam Gana Parishad Central Committee secretaries Shantanu Sharma, Khalich Uddin Ahmed, Morigaon district AGP secretary Vijay Kumar Nath, Morigaon Constituency AGP president Navkant Deka Raja, Jagiroad Constituency Committee president Prema Das and several other central and district committee office bearers.

Tractor loses control

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 11: One died when a tractor without a registration plate lost control and fell into a field near Nayara petrol pump in Kheroni at midnight in West Karbi Anglong. The driver has been identified as Chandra Teron of Teso Bill village. People nearby heard the crash and rushed to the site.

The driver of the tractor was found dead in the accident. It is believed he was alone on the tractor. Police rushed to the scene and took necessary action.

Noted businessman passes away

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 11: Udayan Bordoloi, a noted businessman of Jorhat, passed away on Friday morning due to a massive heart attack. He was 60. Bordoloi, was the youngest son of late freedom fighter Tileswar Bordoloi, and nephew of freedom fighter late Sarbeswar Bordoloi. Originally a resident of Sonariganj here, he was currently residing at KK Baruah Road (popularly known as DCB Road) with his business partner Pikul Bordoloi.

Bordoloi who was a bachelor, was the owner of a known furniture shop, inner decor, and was associated with a number of socio-cultural organisations. His elder brother late Samiran Bordoloi, was a former in-charge general secretary of the Assam Sahitya Sabha and also a former member AASU leader who actively took part in the Assam agitation. His demise has been widely mourned.

their roots."

The mela offers a kaleidoscopic experience for visitors, featuring an exhibition and sale of handmade products by local artisans, food stalls serving an array of traditional Assamese dishes, and mesmerizing cultural performances that showcase the region's artistic diversity. Interactive workshops further engage attendees, providing hands-on experiences and insights into Assamese craftsmanship and heritage.

Earlier, in his inaugural address Yadav emphasised the cultural and economic significance of the event. He remarked, "This event is a tribute to the spirit of Bhogali Bihu, a festival of harvest, abundance, and togetherness. It also provides a significant boost to local artisans and entrepreneurs by giving them a platform to showcase their talents."

Asomi Bhogali Mela 2025 stands as a testament to the rich heritage of Assam, seamlessly blending tradition with modern avenues for economic and cultural growth. With its diverse offerings and engaging activities, the mela promises to be a memorable experience for attendees and a proud celebration of Assamese identity.

Editor's pick

Donald Trump's H-1B dilemma

By: Kalyani Shankar

As the US President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office on January 20, he faces a unique challenge. The issue of immigration and the H-1B visa has become a contentious point among the two key groups. He is trying to satisfy the conflicting interests of the billionaire tech community, who heavily fund his campaigns, and his 'America First' base. Trump's recent favourable statements on H-1B visas for foreign skilled workers have sparked renewed discussions on the future of this critical programme. The New York Post quoted Trump, "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas."

That's why we have them." He added: "I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."

Trump admitted, Trump has backed Elon Musk and his other wealthy funders from Silicon Valley (South Africa-born Musk had an H1B visa himself). While tech leaders want a liberal H-1B visa regime, 'America First' hardliners wish for stricter restrictions on immigration at all levels.

In his first term, Trump prioritised protecting American citizens' interests, which had significant implications on the H-1B visas. 'America First' advocates argue that H-1B visas take jobs away from American workers. The looming question is, will the Trump's second term may prioritise American workers' jobs, or it could revert to the traditional Republican belief that immigration primarily benefits employers. Debates arose over H-1B visas following Trump's appointment of India-born Sriram Krishnan as his advisor on artificial intelligence. It caused divisions within Trump's team—opponents of the H-1B visa claim that the immigrants take away American jobs. The intriguing question is whether a second Trump term will prioritise jobs for American workers or revert to the traditional Republican stance that immigration is primarily beneficial for employers. Influential supporters like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy argue that H-1B visas are crucial for addressing the US engineers shortage.

Musk, who built his empire, and Vivek Ramaswamy have strongly supported the program. Musk expressed his readiness to go to war over it. They highlight a significant skills gap in the US labour market, particularly in STEM fields.

What is an H-1B visa, and why is there such controversy surrounding it? Would India suffer if H-1B visas were eliminated? The visa system for skilled workers from other countries was introduced in 1990 by President Bush to work legally in the US. The visa is for three years. Applicants must have a job lined up with a US-based sponsoring company or institution. Since 2004, the United States has limited the number of new H-1B visas to 85,000 yearly.

This cap includes 20,000 visas for international students with advanced degrees from US universities. In the fiscal year 2023, the US approved just over 386,000 H-1B applications. For the fiscal year 2024, there were 758,994 eligible registrations, an increase from 474,421 in 2023. Most approved applicants work in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The issue is more than just an economic concern; new developments in artificial intelligence and advanced computing technology make it vital for US defence and national security. India receives approximately 72 per cent of H-1B visas, while Chinese citizens account for around 12 per cent.

Eliminating country-specific caps could increase job opportunities for Indians in the United States. It is a significant concern for many prospective applicants. Major employers in the tech industry, including Indian companies like Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro, represent 35 per cent of the top 10 beneficiaries of H-1B visas. Beginning with FY 2025, USCIS changed from an employer-based to a beneficiary-centric registration system, following the agency's "serious concerns" noted after the FY 2024 registration period. Amazon, the largest H-1B sponsor, saw a steep decline in approvals, dropping from over 11,000 in 2023 to just above 9,000 in 2024. Major US companies, including tech giants like Amazon and Google, are significantly scaling back their sponsorship of H-1B visas. Indian IT firms, including Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), also recorded substantial reductions. Not everyone wants to get rid of the visa system.

According to the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, increasing the H-1B visa cap could generate 1.3 million new jobs. It would contribute approximately \$158 billion to the US GDP by 2045. H-1B visa holders often add to the workforce instead of taking jobs from US workers. Trump's recent statement about H-1B visas has given hope to many visa seekers, especially Indians.

He stated that the US needs skilled and intelligent people and promised more job opportunities. It provides a positive outlook for H-1B visas. H-1B visa holders often complement, rather than compete with, US workers.

Now many H-1B visa holders are hopeful after Trump has sided with Musk. He claimed that there was a need for skilled and intelligent workers. His promise of unprecedented job opportunities offers a positive outlook for those seeking H-1B visas. The Indian government closely monitors any backlash against Indian H-1B visa holders in the US. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Swami Vivekananda - A powerful link of the guru-shishya parampara

Throughout the history of humanity there were personalities who chose to appear in a particular period of time and help societies around and within their personal access to flourish through the thoughts they propagated. This has been the reality everywhere. Impact of such philosophical interferences by great people in the journey of societies had been tremendous. As time passed, ideals of many influencers among this clan of religious, philosophical and spiritual reformation could not survive as they confronted more convincing ideologies that sprung in the same way and fashion. And people in every millennium kept changing their choices, shifting their focus from one philosophy to the other. As a result of this, there have been multiple thought-provoking approaches to life gaining momentum and there have also been countless saints and sages walking on the planet with amazing thoughts for the wellbeing of generations. India stands out with its legacy of a chain of seekers turning their essential inquisitiveness into an unfathomable genre of philosophical classics that the country time and again propagated with complete earnestness. Lessons those spiritual luminaries drew our attention to were full of values for life on this planet and beyond.

Putting a well-competent analysis on Buddha's appearance in India, Swami Vivekananda makes it clear. He says the presence and life and messages of Buddha, was an essential requirement of a society that was fully enmeshed in the influence of authoritative priests who thought the ever-powerful God can be attained only through them. Vivekananda says this was basically a contradiction that Buddha thought he should attend and help the society to grow with adequate clarity. Vivekananda goes on saying that the birth of Buddha enjoying all the royal luxuries and the sacrifice that he made in a later period had paved the way for his philosophical expressions to flourish. Dismantling the common notions which were prevalent in the society came his thoughts and the social connect he thought establish was the result of his preaching the most common truths, the truths that societies remained oblivious for centuries. The space, the gap in which Siddhartha Gautama made his entry was apt and the impact of his contribution was deep and profound. Though there had been intellectual encounters, the chain of philosophical interferences that he made through his disciples had spiritually resonated and strengthened the imaginations of people.

Why could Buddha connect to the common men? The ideals that he was propagating for the society gained sudden traction due to their well-connectedness with common human life. Systematically sidelining the ceremonial existed in societies calling them delusive and misleading; Buddha began to find solutions for the miseries that protruded in human life. For peo-



ple, his assertions were real and exact. They understood the power of his words as they were simple and heart-touching. Teachers, with their prophetic farsightedness and common bond with people could always successfully connect. Though their teachings are sometimes criticized as unscientific, they are universally accepted and practiced. From Buddha to Shankara to Vivekananda, our assessment on the impact of their thoughts helps generate a better understanding

of their deep involvement in the life of ordinary people. The eras they communicated with the societies still remain the best examples for such profound socio-spiritual interventions. Their thoughts and their marvelous aroma of philosophical grace overflowed, and a large part of our life even today is influenced by their essence.

Before pronouncing anything about the spiritual movement that Vivekananda strengthened India with, there should be words adorably amplifying the inner potency that he received from his spiritual master Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda makes candid efforts to explain as to why in his life he thought that the presence and essence of a Guru was the most essential. Addressing the basic tenets of India's Guru-Shishya Parampara he says, "Every soul is destined to be perfect and every being, in the end, will attain the perfection. Whatever we are now is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. The perfection, according to Vivekananda, brings a spiritual awakening in life and growth is animated and man becomes holy and perfect in the end. This quickening im-

pulse cannot be derived from books. We may study books all our lives, in the end, we find that we have not developed spiritually. And to quicken this spiritual impulse it must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru-the teacher and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Shishya-the student." Though delivered in a relatively modern period, the Guru-Shishya tradition that he

highlighted here began millennia ago.

Extending this articulate narrative on the tradition, Vivekananda further expounds the qualifications of the aspirant and the teacher. "How are we to know a teacher, then?" asks Vivekananda. "The Sun requires no torch to make him visible; we need not light a candle in order to see him. When the sun rises, we instinctively become aware of the fact and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know the truth has already begun to shine." So, what according to Vivekananda are the conditions necessary to become a student? He says the first condition necessary for the teacher is purity, a real thirst for knowledge and perseverance. None of us can get anything other than what we fix our hearts upon. The second condition necessary in a teacher according to Vivekananda is sinlessness. It is not what he says that matters. What should matter for the student is his teacher's behavior. Religion cannot be taught by impure minds. The worthy vibration of spirituality in a pure personality can be transmitted to a student, who is a seeker. The third condition he says is regard to the motive. The teaching with ulterior selfish motives can never suc-

ceed. The Guru-Shishya tradition existed in India with the student's intense desire for seeking knowledge and the teacher's wisdom penetrating his intellect through various strategies. Religion according to Vivekananda cannot be bought nor can it be acquired from books as it is the highest knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda's master has dominated this domain of influence so vividly that he could liberate his students from the baggage of ignorance almost completely. After his passing away, it was the responsibility of his students to discover the unseen sides of wisdom that the Guru left for them to experiment and experience. This empirical learning was the principal reason that forced Vivekananda to come out and pace the length and breadth of India. That was an irresistible movement and a moment that demanded deep reflections. This could not have been possible without a well-realized spiritual luminary igniting the thirst in his students.

Sri Ramakrishna, though illiterate, had the spiritual eminence of a prophet who controlled the spiritual imaginations of a nation through his unfathomable penance. The splendor of his spiritual greatness was capable of disseminating the ideal and intellectual essence of Sanatana Dharma after Adi Shankara. Throughout his life he remained a pure personification of truth, innocence, compassion and extreme spiritual devotion. Going through his revelations, one thing becomes clear, that his intense sadhana was the foundation of his saintly makeover. With him began an indubitable flow of Dharmic renaissance in India, especially through idol worship. The temple priest in him developed an intense devotion to the symbol of divinity that he worshipped in an idol with extreme purity of mind. And with this unconvinced spiritual fantasy of Sri Ramakrishna began the modern version of Bhakti movement, a spiritual renaissance, which opened doors for idol worship during the days when India was passing through the crucial period of external invasion. This, with its absolute commitment to divinity was the well framed strategy that the saint of Dakshineswar propagated and the one practice his chief disciple Vivekananda questioned in his initial days. What was the most astonishing element of this spiritual tradition that Sri Ramakrishna began with his intense penance was that, for all practical reasons, he never forced his students into the path of idol worship. Though it began quite informally, the spiritual tradition that unfolded from the days of Sri Ramakrishna and evolved through the penance of Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna Mission has successfully transcended the limits of ordinary human nature. Its involvement in the field of spiritually disciplining people has succeeded for generations. (The author is a freelance journalist based in Kerala. He can be reached at 841-4918976 or mrlalu@30gmail.com)

Economic crossroads: Global dynamics and India's path in 2025 Baburao Vishnu Paradkar: The pioneer of Hindi journalism

By: Dipak Kurmi

As the world steps into 2025, five major economic themes are poised to shape the global landscape, defining the direction of nations' economies while offering both opportunities and challenges in a period marked by uncertainty and flux. Despite the anticipated steady global growth, the decisions made in the United States and China will undoubtedly have profound ripple effects across the globe, with particular repercussions for emerging markets like India. This interconnectedness underscores the complexity of the modern economic ecosystem, where domestic policies of major powers can influence global trade, investment, inflation, and fiscal stability in ways that are increasingly difficult to predict.

The first of these dominant themes revolves around the economic policy approach of the United States. As the world's largest economy, the United States' decisions in both trade and domestic policy will have far-reaching consequences. While the era of unchecked globalization may be waning, the influence of US policies remains formidable. In 2025, with the prospect of a new US president, there is keen interest in how economic policies, especially those surrounding tariffs, trade relations, and fiscal management, will evolve. If Donald Trump, who has firmly articulated his economic stances, returns to power, his policies could significantly alter the course of the global economy. Trump's focus on reducing immigration could exacerbate labor shortages within the United States, potentially inflating wages and driving cost-push inflation. Meanwhile, his proposal to slash corporate taxes may stimulate short-term investment but also increase the federal deficit, leading to higher interest rates and global inflationary pressure.

Trump's protectionist rhetoric—particularly his stance on tariffs—also looms large. His plans to impose aggressive tariffs, possibly ranging from 10 to 20% on imports from a variety of countries, including even traditional allies, could disrupt established trade flows, stoking inflation and creating volatility in global markets. The potential escalation of trade tensions, especially with China, could prompt the Federal Reserve to

adjust interest rates in response, with implications for global bond markets and capital flows.

The second key theme centers on China, whose post-pandemic recovery will be a critical factor in the global economic equation. China's efforts to rebound from the economic challenges posed by Covid-19 will involve significant fiscal and monetary stimulus, but the real test lies in how it manages its complex relationship with the United States. While China's economic structure remains largely export-driven, any punitive trade actions from the US against Chinese exports could disrupt supply chains and reverberate throughout the global economy. With China already increasing its assertiveness in Africa and parts of Asia, it is evident that the country is actively seeking to diversify its economic relations in order to counterbalance potential trade restrictions from the West. The intertwining of Chinese and Indian economies means that India, despite its reliance on domestic demand, will be closely attuned to shifts in China's economic policies, particularly regarding the supply of critical commodities such as rare earth metals, which are vital for industries across the globe.

The third major theme for 2025 is India's Union Budget, to be announced in February. The government's fiscal roadmap and policy decisions regarding capital expenditure, taxation, and fiscal deficit targets will be scrutinized by both domestic and international audiences. India's economic trajectory will be shaped by the budget's focus on infrastructure development and job creation, particularly in the face of global economic pressures. The fiscal deficit target of 4.5% for FY26 will be a key indicator of the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation, while any moves to ease taxation—particularly through income tax cuts—could stimulate consumption and boost disposable income for the middle class. The markets will be keenly watching for signals of fiscal discipline, especially in light of inflationary pressures that have eroded purchasing power across the country.

The fourth theme that will dominate in 2025 is the Reserve Bank of India's credit policy. With the potential appointment of new members to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the stance on repo rates and

inflation will be of paramount importance. The RBI's interpretation of inflation data and growth prospects will dictate monetary policy, which in turn will influence borrowing costs for businesses and consumers alike. While inflation may stabilize, the question of whether the RBI will cut interest rates to stimulate economic growth will be a key point of focus. A reduction in rates could ease the burden of borrowing, potentially aiding economic recovery and bolstering consumer confidence. The global markets will also be attuned to the RBI's approach, as changes in interest rates in one of the world's fastest-growing economies will have repercussions for capital flows and investment decisions.

Finally, as the world navigates these complex and interconnected forces, the projections for GDP growth in FY25 and FY26 will be critical in assessing the overall health of the global economy. The Indian economy, which recorded an impressive 8.2% growth in FY24, is expected to moderate in 2025, with estimates ranging between 6.5% and 7%. This projection will not only shape fiscal planning within the country but also guide investor expectations in global markets. The interplay between these growth projections and the actual performance of the economy will provide valuable insights into how well India, and other emerging economies, can weather the global economic storm. The government's Economic Survey, combined with the Union Budget, will offer a clearer picture of India's fiscal strategy, including expectations for growth and development in the next fiscal year.

2025 promises to be a year of economic reckoning, with key decisions from the United States and China casting long shadows over the global economy. India, as a major emerging market, will be at the center of these developments, monitoring the shifting dynamics of global trade, fiscal policy, and credit markets. While the global economy is expected to grow steadily, the challenges posed by inflation, trade tensions, and fiscal management will require deft navigation. The economic decisions of 2025 will have lasting implications, shaping the trajectory of nations and influencing the global financial system for years to come. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmipltd@gmail.com)

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

Baburao Vishnu Paradkar, the inspiration behind the magazine of ideological revolution, was born on 16 November 1883 in a Marathi family in Kashi. The renowned editor of the Hindi daily 'Aaj', who earned immense fame by setting the best standards of journalism, had three aspects of his personality: (1) Revolutionary leader of the freedom struggle, (2) Master of literature, and (3) Pioneer of modern Hindi journalism.

Despite Marathi being his mother tongue, Paradkar gave a new direction to Hindi journalism and made Hindi prose beautiful and impressive. He spent 12-13 years of his youth in Kolkata, where he received the best education in journalism from his maternal uncle Ram Ganesh Deoskar. Paradkar entered the field of journalism in 1906 as an assistant editor of the Hindi newspaper 'Bangwasi'. After working in it for some time, he edited 'Hitvarta' and 'Bharat Mitra' published from Kolkata. Through these newspapers, he exposed the anti-national colonial politics of that time and inspired and encouraged the people to participate in the freedom movement.

In 1920, Paradkar came to Kashi and took up the important responsibility of the editor of the daily 'Aaj'. He discharged this responsibility throughout his life. During the days of the Salt Satyagraha, when the British government banned 'Aaj', Paradkar edited and published a two-page secret magazine called 'Ranbheri' and distributed to the revolutionaries spread across the country. The daily 'Sansar' published from Kashi from 1943 to July 1947 flourished under his editorship. He also edited 'Kamla', the ideal magazine for women.

The comments and editorials he wrote as an editor are of historical importance. His writings not only raised the voice of nationalism, but he also enriched the Hindi language and coined new Hindi words like Shri, Sarvashti, Shrimati, Rashtrapati, Mudrasphiti, Vayumandal, Antarrashtriya, Magar Aansu etc. He showed generosity in adopting words from other languages, but did not consider it appropriate to use Arabic-Persian adjectives with Sanskrit words. The promotion, support and guidance he gave to the national language and literature

through journalism for 50 years will be unforgettable.

Paradkar had the good fortune of coming in contact with many great men and personalities of Bharat, prominent among whom are Vitthal Bhai Patel, Purushottam Das Tandon, Arvind Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sampurnanand, Rasbihari Ghosh, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Dr. Bhagwan Das, Babu Shripurush, Shiv Prasad Gupta and Banarasi Prasad Chaturvedi. By staying in the company of these personality, he played an important role in the freedom struggle. He was imprisoned from 1916 to 1919.

While presiding over the first Hindi Editors' Conference organized on the occasion of Vrindavan Sahitya Sammelan in 1925, Paradkar said - "The policy of future Hindi editors will not be the policy of patriotic, religious or great editors who worship humanity..... The work of Hindi editors is very difficult. We are directly connected to the society. But we have to understand ourselves. The more success we can show in this and the deeper we go, the more success we will achieve. Till we do not adopt the common society and make our newspapers their reflection, we will neither be able to progress nor will we be able to truly serve the country."

In 1938, he was made the President of the Shyamala (Shimla) session of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. In 1950, in the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan held in Mumbai, he delivered an impressive speech on the development of Indian newspaper publication from the chair of the press conference. Paradkar wrote a book named 'Desh Ki Baat', which was a translation of 'Deshor Katha' written by his maternal uncle and guru Sakhararam Ganesh Deoskar. 'Vishwashanti Ka Agradoot' written by him on 15 August 1947 was an excellent editorial.

Paradkar wrote about a hundred editorials on various subjects such as - Language and Literature (14 editorials), Memoirs and Tributes (9 editorials), Journalism (8 editorials), Freedom Struggle (37 editorials), World and India (11 editorials), Economy and Inflation (9 editorials), Social and Rural Problems (8 editorials). His last editorial was published in the daily 'Aaj' on 8 February 1954 under the title 'Amrit Kumbh Ya Vish Kumbh'. Paradkar, who

had contact even with pigeons and hawks, was an expert in the knowledge of the afterlife. He was a supporter of widow remarriage and married a widow for the third time.

Some of the precious statements of Paradkarji related to journalism are still inspiring and useful: (1) "The ideal of Hindi journalism is great, and its objective is to enhance the glory of the nation by bringing about its all-round development. The help of journalism is required in finding solutions to the challenges facing the nation." (2) "News should be a reflection of the society and must also set high ideals before its readers. Description of the natural state of society, analysis of its merits and demerits, reform, guidance and entertainment, all these are the duties of newspapers. Public education is our true religion." (3) "In my opinion, apart from knowledge of literature and language, it is necessary for the editor to have detailed knowledge of Indian history and general knowledge of world history and general knowledge of sociology, political science and international laws. He may not be an expert in economics, but at least he should have the ability to understand the Indian and provincial budget. It is also necessary for editors of newspapers published with different objectives to have special knowledge of those subjects."

Journalism was both a weapon and a shield for Paradkar. Whenever the black law of the British tried to snatch away the power of the pen, he wrote the entire editorial column "We are silent against the black law" and left it plain. This great architect of Hindi journalism died in Kashi on 12 January 1955. In the words of President Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Paradkar was the pillar of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Hindi journalism world.

Through journalism, Paradkarji not only raised consciousness against the British in the minds of the people, but also tried to make the country socially and culturally prosperous. He recognized, tested and patronized the creative potential of new writers and put them on the path of progress. Undoubtedly, he was a pioneer in the art of editing. The generations to come in journalism will continue to draw inspiration from him for ages. (The author is an engineer and educationist who can be reached at 8541128428)

The visionary educator: Mohesh Ronghang's revolutionary odyssey in Karbi Anglong



By: Sarim Tisso

In the western expanse of Karbi Anglong, a young luminary has emerged, kindling a beacon of hope in a region where altruistic endeavors have become an anachronism. Mohesh Ronghang, a trailblazing educator, has embarked upon a mission to revitalize the educational landscape of his native land. His odyssey is a testament to the transformative power of selflessness and vision.

Upon completing his Bachelor of Arts degree from Guwahati, Mohesh felt an inexplicable sense of urgency to return to his roots. Disillusioned with the prospect of pursuing a conventional career, he was propelled by an inner conviction to make a meaningful impact in the lives of his people. "A deep sense of purpose stirred within me, propelling me to take action and make a meaningful contribution to the betterment of my community," Mohesh recalls.

With a modest loan from his father, Mohesh laid the foundation of the Sardokpo Ronghang Memorial Academy in 2013. Named after his grandfather, the school, situated in Theso Terang Village, has grown from humble beginnings to encompass classes from nursery to VI. Mohesh's unwavering commitment to excellence has led him

to continually upgrade his institution, leveraging available resources to provide a holistic education.

Mohesh's students hail from impoverished households in the surrounding areas, and he has ensured that the fees remain affordable, thereby democratizing access to quality education. To achieve this, he has had to navigate numerous challenges, including securing funds to pay his teachers. "My earliest struggle was scraping together enough money to pay my teachers on time, a challenge that often led me to take out loans from generous benefactors, shouldering the added burden of interest," Mohesh recounts, his eyes gleaming with a sense of accomplishment.

A tech-savvy individual, Mohesh has harnessed the potential of social media to chronicle the school's journey, sharing updates on various activities and initiatives. His perseverance has yielded dividends, as his efforts have caught the attention of cultural activists, philanthropists, and educators from India and abroad, including the United Kingdom and Sweden. These benevolent individuals have contributed generously to the school, enabling Mohesh to enhance its infrastructure and expand its offerings.

Today, Mohesh provides free education to a select group of students whose parents struggle

to make ends meet. He has also established a hostel to accommodate students from distant areas. Furthermore, he has forged partnerships with esteemed institutions, including the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG), to provide his students with access to specialized knowledge and expertise.

Mohesh's institution has

evolved into a beacon of excellence, surpassing the standards of even the most prestigious private schools in the region. His roadmap for the future is ambitious, yet grounded in a deep understanding of the needs of his students and the community. As he continues to push the boundaries of educational innovation, Mohesh remains an inspiration to all those who believe in the transformative power of education.

It is indeed ironic that while Mohesh's achievements have garnered international recognition, the local administration remains oblivious to his contributions. Despite his efforts to secure support from the district council, he has been met with indifference. This disparity between the appreciation he has received globally and the neglect he has faced locally serves as a poignant reminder of the systemic apathy that often hinders grassroots initiatives.

Mohesh Ronghang's story is an example to the power of individual initiative and the impact one person can have on their community. His selfless dedication to education has inspired countless individuals, both within and outside the region. As he continues to strive for excellence, Mohesh remains a shining example of the transformative power of education and the boundless potential of the human spirit.



Charles Dickens' novel and Oliver Twist

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

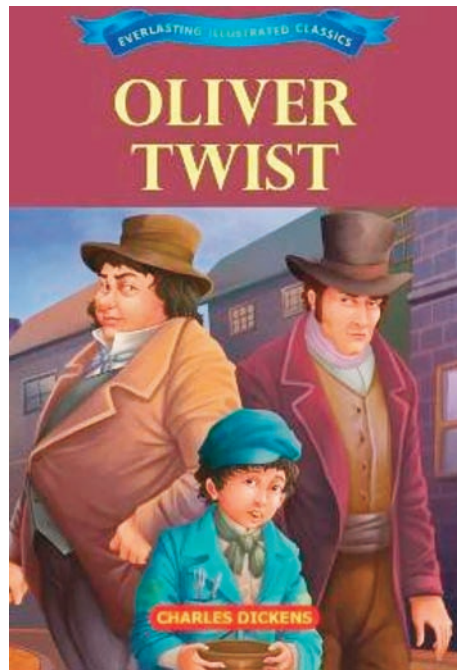
Charles Dickens became very popular as a novelist in the Victorian era. Born into a middle-class family, Charles Dickens' formal education was also incomplete. Nevertheless, he meticulously studied the picture of lower-middle class society in the city of London. He also beautifully observed the workers and peasants and portrayed them realistically in his novels. His novels were published in magazines and newspapers. Dickens' novels are famous for their use of humor and satire. He portrayed the hypocrisy of Victorian society in his novels. Dickens is interested in the decent or correct form of society. He believes that the progress of society and industry is stagnant due to corrupt society. Dickens' novels can be classified as follows: (a) Humorous novels: The Pewee Papers (b) Historical Novels: A Tale of Two Cities, Barnaby Rudge (c) Passionate or sensuous novels: A Christmas Carol, David Copperfield (d) Social novels: Oliver Twist, The Ottoman Curiosity Shop, Great Expectations

No novelist has painted such a detailed picture of the social system as Charles Dickens. As a careful observer, Dickens incorporated many of the complex and colorful social customs and facts of the Victorian era into his novels. These include the natural environment, the tall concrete palaces built under the capitalists, the big buildings of London, the churches and the inhuman industries or workplaces. Dickens skillfully matches these issues with his characters and paints a distinctive, three-dimensional social context. Through these, Dickens tried to instill morality in Victorian society. He sought to remove the selfish, negative aspects of society in order to accurately evaluate realism compared to his contemporaries of the Victorian era. In fact, each of Dickens' novels reflects social problems in a very powerful way. For example, Oliver Twist exposes inhuman treatment in the workplace.

Successful character creation is another feature of Dickens' novels. He was a master of distinctive characterization according to the environment and used language appropriate to the mouths of each character, large and small, according to their activities. However, he was also adept at combining exaggerations with interesting characters. However, even through the exaggerated descriptions, his characters are vivid and alive. T.S. Eliot compares Charles Dickens to Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare, Dickens was able to bring the characters of his novels to life. The characters in Dickens' novels

can be divided into three categories: (1) The first ideal characters, such as David Copperfield. (2) The rival or villainous character of the second ideal hero. (3) The third emotional or sensitive character, which can represent or blend with all the people in the society. For example, Mr. Mikawa.

Charles Dickens is a popular satirical writer. He brings the scene to life with the use of humor according to the actions of the characters. He always used humor to highlight positive aspects. He also used satire as a powerful weapon to fight against the evil or negative aspects of society. They used this weapon to make fun of people's hypocrisy, ignorance, and crimes. The process of plotting the story in Dickens' novels is complex and fascinating. He creates sometimes main and sometimes secondary plots based mainly on personal or family experiences. Sometimes two parallel plots are presented in a novel. He also introduced



mysterious situations to make the story of the novel interesting. Or they maintain excitement in the story and present it to the reader in an interesting way. Flat characters are more common in Dickens' novels. In general, the characters in his novels are often not fully developed. It remains in the same state. Furthermore, he believes that what is good is always good and that what is bad is always bad. There is no opportunity to improve. There is no change in temperament. With a few exceptions, Dickens' novels

always have happy endings. This is a special feature of his plot construction formula. However, the growing despair and cruel reality of the contemporary context makes the happy ending of his novel irrelevant and unconvincing. But Dickens deliberately wants to give the reader such a happy ending.

As the greatest novelist of nineteenth century England, Charles Dickens was undoubtedly an important novelist who took a critical stance towards capitalist society and his extraordinary artistic talent and skills were a milestone in literature.

Dickens' "Oliver Twist" is a unique addition to the history of literature, not only in English literature, but in the entire world. Dickens, the author of the novel, himself once lived as a child labourer. Dickens' father was sent to jail for default and Dickens became a child labourer. It was during this time that he had a better encounter with the picture of poverty in England. Dickens began writing Oliver Twist in 1834 after the adoption of the Poor Law in England. Through the 'Poor Policy', the Government of England adopted a scheme to place the poor in workplaces and provide them with clothing and food. However, this scheme only made the situation of the poor and orphans worse. Embezzlement, torture and exploitation of funds in the name of work centers became routine. All of Oliver Twist's events began in this workplace. It would be a mistake to say that Dickens' novel was merely a depiction of nineteenth-century London society. It was a strong criticism of Dickens' policies by the government and the poverty that gripped contemporary society. So in a nutshell, Oliver Twist is an oral novel as well as a document of nineteenth-century London society.

Oliver Twist gained widespread popularity upon its release. The first condition for creating a social novel is to present the contemporary society in a vivid manner. The first condition for creating a social novel is to present the contemporary society in a vivid manner. The success of the novel depends on the society from which the novelist has drawn the subject matter. Dickens' unique portrayal of contemporary society has not diminished the popularity and acceptance of the novel.

Oliver Twist is also recognized as a unique work of Charles Dickens for his excellence in story development, conflict, setting, dialogue, and characterization.

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Kaziranga National Park: A sanctuary of wildlife and heritage

By: Satvrat Borah

Kaziranga National Park is one of India's most celebrated wildlife sanctuaries, located in the state of Assam. This famous national park has earned global recognition for its efforts to conserve biodiversity and protect endangered species. Kaziranga is particularly famous for its population of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros, and it is considered one of the last remaining strongholds for this majestic animal. It covers an area of approximately 430 square kilometers, and its landscapes range from lush grasslands to dense forests, winding rivers, and vast marshes. This mix of terrains creates an ideal habitat for a variety of animal and plant species. Kaziranga was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, a recognition of its outstanding natural beauty and ecological importance. This status emphasizes the global importance of the park, not only for India but for the entire world, as it protects rare and unique species of flora and fauna. Kaziranga is also an important part of Assam's cultural heritage, with locals viewing it as a symbol of pride and natural wealth.

Kaziranga's journey toward becoming a protected area began in the early 20th century, mainly due to the efforts of Lady Mary Curzon, the wife of Lord Curzon, who was the British Viceroy of India at the time. In 1904, Lady Curzon visited the area, hoping to see a one-horned rhinoceros. However, she was disappointed to find that the species was on the brink of extinction in the region. Deeply concerned, she urged her husband to take steps to protect the area and its wildlife. Following her intervention, Kaziranga was declared a reserved forest in 1908, and over time, it gained further protection status, eventually becoming a national park in 1974. This history shows how individuals and local communities can play crucial roles in conservation efforts, which often start with a single act of awareness and compassion.

One of the most striking features of Kaziranga National Park is its population of Indian one-horned rhinoceroses. The park is home to the largest concentration of these animals, making it one of the best places to observe them in the wild. The one-horned rhino is one of the rarest species on the planet, and Kaziranga has contributed significantly to its conservation. Poaching remains a constant threat to rhinos, mainly due to the demand for rhino horns, which are highly valued in illegal markets. Despite the challenges, Kaziranga's conservation programs have been successful in increasing rhino numbers over the years. Dedicated anti-poaching units, surveillance technology, and the support of local communities have all played a part in protecting these animals. The one-horned rhino has become a symbol of Kaziranga and Assam, and it represents the success of focused conservation efforts in preserving a species.

Apart from rhinos, Kaziranga is also home to a variety of other animals, including tigers, elephants, wild buffaloes, and swamp deer. The park has a high density of tigers and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006, further enhancing its significance as a conservation area. Tigers are elusive creatures, and spotting one in the wild is a rare and thrilling experience for visitors. The presence of tigers in Kaziranga also serves as an indicator of a healthy ecosystem, as these apex predators require a large population of prey animals to thrive. The Indian elephant is another major attraction, and large herds of elephants are frequently seen grazing in the grasslands or bathing in the rivers. Elephants are intelligent and social animals, and observing their behavior in the wild offers a glimpse into their complex social structure and family bonds. Wild buffaloes and swamp deer are also prominent residents of Kaziranga, each adding to the diversity of life in the park. These animals depend on the park's grasslands and marshes, highlighting the importance of preserving different habitats within Kaziranga to support a range of species.

Kaziranga is also a paradise for bird lovers. The park is home to numerous species of



birds, both resident and migratory. Birds like the lesser adjutant stork, great Indian hornbill, pelicans, and various species of eagles, herons, and ducks can be spotted here. The Brahmaputra River flows along the park's boundary, creating wetlands that serve as an important habitat for migratory birds. Every winter, thousands of birds from distant regions, including Siberia and Central Asia, come to Kaziranga to escape the harsh cold in their native habitats. This seasonal migration adds a unique charm to the park, and birdwatchers from all over the world come to witness this natural spectacle. The park's wetlands and forests offer excellent bird-watching opportunities, and even amateur bird watchers can enjoy the sight of colorful and rare birds.

These migratory birds also play a significant role in maintaining the ecological balance of the park, as they contribute to seed dispersal and help control insect populations.

The landscape of Kaziranga is an impressive blend of ecosystems that support its rich biodiversity. The park mainly consists of alluvial grasslands, which are divided into tall and short grasslands. Tall grasslands are primarily elephant grass, which can grow up to several meters in height. This dense vegetation provides cover for rhinos, tigers, and other animals, making it easier for them to stay hidden from both predators and humans. The short grasslands are often flooded during the monsoon season, and they offer grazing grounds for animals like deer and wild buffaloes. Besides grasslands, Kaziranga also has tropical moist forests and riverine forests, adding diversity to the park's vegetation. The presence of the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries makes Kaziranga a wetland paradise, with many marshes and ponds scattered across the landscape. These water bodies are essential for the park's animals, providing drinking water and places to bathe, cool down, and find food. This variety of habitats within Kaziranga ensures that the needs of different species are met, supporting a thriving ecosystem.

The climate of Kaziranga is influenced by the monsoon season, which brings heavy rainfall to the region. The park experiences three main seasons: summer, monsoon, and winter. Summers are hot and humid, with temperatures often reaching around 37 degrees Celsius. The monsoon season, which lasts from June to September, brings intense rainfall, and the Brahmaputra River often overflows, causing floods in the park. These floods, although challenging for the animals, are essential for the ecosystem. They replenish the soil with nutrients, making the grasslands lush and fertile. Many animals, such as rhinos and elephants, are known to adapt to these floods, seeking higher ground until the waters recede. The winter season, from November to February, is mild and dry, making it the best time for tourists to visit. During this time, the weather is cool and comfortable, and the chances of seeing animals are high, as they often gather near water sources in search of food and water.

Tourism in Kaziranga National Park plays an important role in supporting conservation efforts. The park attracts thousands of visitors each year, both from India and abroad. Jeep safaris and elephant rides are popular activities that allow tourists to experience the beauty of Kaziranga and observe its wildlife up close. Trained guides accompany tourists on these safaris, providing valuable information about the animals and the park's history. Tourism generates revenue that

helps fund conservation programs, anti-poaching efforts, and park maintenance. However, tourism is managed carefully to minimize its impact on the environment and wildlife. The number of vehicles allowed into the park each day is restricted, and specific routes are followed to prevent disturbing the animals' natural habitat. Eco-tourism initiatives have also been introduced to promote responsible travel and raise awareness about conservation among visitors. These initiatives include promoting local handicrafts, supporting sustainable practices, and involving local communities in tourism activities. This approach benefits both the environment and the local people, creating a win-win situation for all.

Local communities play a significant role in the conservation of Kaziranga National Park. Many people from nearby villages are employed as guides, drivers, and forest guards, and they actively contribute to protecting the park's wildlife. Their knowledge of the local flora and fauna is invaluable in conservation efforts. In recent years, there has been an emphasis on involving local communities in decision-making processes related to the park. This collaboration has helped build a sense of ownership and pride among the locals, as they see themselves as guardians of Kaziranga's natural heritage. By participating in conservation activities, local communities have a direct stake in preserving the park's resources, as they benefit from tourism revenue and employment opportunities. Educating the younger generations about the importance of Kaziranga and its biodiversity is also a key focus, ensuring that the conservation values are passed down through generations.

Despite its successes, Kaziranga National Park faces several challenges. Poaching is a constant threat, especially to rhinos, whose horns are highly valued in illegal markets. Strict anti-poaching measures, including patrols, surveillance, and harsh penalties, have been put in place, but the threat persists. Habitat loss and fragmentation are also significant issues, as human settlements, agriculture, and infrastructure development put pressure on the park's boundaries. Floods, while beneficial for the ecosystem, can be dangerous for animals, especially when they are extreme. The park authorities have created artificial highlands where animals can take refuge during floods, but managing these natural disasters remains a challenge. Climate change is another emerging threat, as changing weather patterns could affect the monsoon season, which is crucial for the park's ecosystem. Conservationists and park authorities are working together to address these challenges, constantly adapting their strategies to ensure that Kaziranga remains a safe haven for wildlife.

Kaziranga National Park holds a special place in the hearts of nature lovers, conservationists, and the people of Assam. It is a reminder of the importance of preserving natural heritage and the role that individuals and communities can play in protecting it. Kaziranga's success in conserving endangered species like the one-horned rhino offers hope for other conservation efforts around the world. The park is not just a sanctuary for wildlife but also a symbol of the rich biodiversity and cultural heritage of Assam. Through responsible tourism, community involvement, and ongoing conservation efforts, Kaziranga continues to thrive as one of India's most precious natural treasures.

UK seeks 'common ground' with China during Economic, Financial Dialogue visit

'More widely, today is a platform for respectful and consistent future relations with China'

LONDON, Jan 11: The UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, arrived in China this weekend for the first UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) since 2019 in an effort to seek "common ground" on trade and investment with Beijing.

According to the UK Treasury department, Reeves met with her counterpart, Vice Premier He Lifeng, on Saturday for a series of conversations around the support for safe trade and investment.

It claims to have resulted in agreements worth GBP 600 million to the British economy as both sides agreed to deeper cooperation across areas such as financial services, trade, investment, and the climate to support secure growth.

"By finding common ground on trade and investment while being candid about our differences and upholding national security as the first duty of this government, we can build a long-term economic relationship with China that works in the national interest," said Rachel Reeves.

"The agreements we've reached show that pragmatic cooperation between the world's largest economies can help us boost economic growth for the benefit of working people — a priority of our Plan for Change.

More widely, today is a platform for respectful and consistent future relations with China. One where we can be frank and open on areas where we disagree, protecting our values and security interests, and finding opportunities for safe trade and investment," she said.

The minister is joined on her visit by the Indian-origin chief executive of the Financial Conduct



Authority (FCA) Nikhil Rathi, Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey and senior representatives from some of Britain's biggest financial services firms.

Her visit comes at a time of turmoil for the UK economy, with the Opposition Tories accusing the minister of having "fled to China" rather than explain how she plans to fix the UK's flatlining economy as the pound dropped, increasing government borrowing costs.

The government, however, is keen to highlight that the Chancellor's visit is to follow up the meeting between Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Xi Jinping at the G20 Summit last year.

The duo discussed deepening the economic and trade relationship shared by the UK and China, in order to yield mutual benefits, support growth, and have candid discussion on issues where our views differ. As part of this, the Chancellor is expected to raise constraints on rights and freedoms in Hong Kong and to urge China to stop its "material and economic support for the Russian war effort in Ukraine".

"This is part of the consistent,

long term and strategic approach that the government is taking in managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in UK and global interests. The government will cooperate where it can, compete where it needs to, and challenge where it must, including to protect our values and national security as the first duty of government," the Treasury said.

Among the outcomes of Saturday's EFD includes the granting of new licences and quota allocations for UK firms such as HSBC, Schroders, and Aspect Capital to enhance their business in China. Alongside this are initiatives to improve capital market connectivity — including a commitment to further enhance the UK-China Stock Connect and welcoming the launch of UK-China over-the-counter bond business — as well as initiatives on pensions, countering illicit finance and sustainable finance cooperation, the Treasury revealed.

China also announced plans to issue an inaugural overseas sovereign green bond — to be used to finance environmentally sustainable

projects — in London during 2025.

The UK and China are also set to explore a Wealth Connect programme in recognition of the role asset management has to play in supporting growth.

While in Beijing, the Chancellor will also visit Brompton's flagship store as the British bike brand celebrates its 50th anniversary year as a major success story for UK exports to China.

In addition to building on the financial services relationship, the UK-China EFD is aimed at bringing down barriers that British businesses face when looking to export or expand to China, supporting them to seize growth opportunities and follow in the footsteps of brands like Brompton, and other cornerstones of British culture and industry like Tata Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), Unilever and Diageo — three companies whom Reeves will also meet with during her visit.

Reeves is also to visit Shanghai on Sunday to engage with representatives across British and Chinese business.

Alongside London, Shanghai is seen as a leading global financial centre which has long been important for UK-China economic and financial links, including in financial services with the landmark financial market connectivity initiative between the London Stock Exchange and the Shanghai Stock Exchange entering its sixth year.

According to official UK data, China is the UK's fourth-largest single trading partner with a trade relationship worth almost GBP 113 billion and exports to China supporting over 455,000 jobs in Britain in 2020. (PTI)

Over 150 workers of Imran Khan's party granted bail by anti-terrorism court in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 11: An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan granted bail to at least 153 workers of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, more than a month after they were arrested during a protest.

During a hearing, presided over by Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) judge Abul Hasan Zulqarnain, petitions of 177 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers were heard.

Subsequently, bail was granted to 153 of them while the court rejected the pleas of 24 on Friday, Dawn newspaper reported.

Khan, 72, had on November 13 issued a "final call" for nationwide protests on November 26, demanding the restoration of the PTI's electoral mandate, the release of detained party members, and the reversal of the 26th constitutional amendment.

Responding to his call, thousands of PTI workers reached Islamabad but faced a crackdown by police, which forcibly dispersed them while arresting more than 1,400.

Dawn reported that during a hearing on Friday, the court granted them bail against surety bonds of Rs 5,000 each.

Earlier, on January 3, the ATC granted bail to 250 protestors while on January 6, as many as 192 PTI workers, who were detained in Jhelum district jail, were released after their bail petitions were accepted by an ATC in Islamabad.

According to police, the cases of many other detained PTI workers were being processed and more bail could be granted in coming weeks.

Khan has been lodged at the Adil Jail in Rawalpindi since mid-2023 in multiple cases. (PTI)

Families in shock begin to visit their charred homes in Los Angeles area

LOS ANGELES, Jan 11: Many watched their homes burn on television in a state of shock.

Since the flames erupted in and around Los Angeles, scores of residents have returned to their still smoldering neighbourhoods even as the threat of new fires persisted and the nation's second-largest city remained unsettled. For some, it was a first look at the staggering reality of what was lost as the region of 13 million people grapples with the gargantuan challenge of overcoming the disaster and rebuilding.

Calmer winds enabled firefighters to start gaining some control of the biggest blazes in metropolitan LA on Friday before gusty weather returns over the weekend to an area that hasn't seen rain in more than eight months. But by Friday evening, new evacuations were ordered as the eastern side of the Palisades Fire spread, nearing Interstate 405 and The Getty museum.

Bridget Berg, who was at work when she saw on TV her house in Altadena erupt in flames, came back for the first time with her family two days later "just to make it real."

Their feet crunched across the broken bits of what had been their home for 16 years.

Her kids sifted through debris on the sidewalk, finding a clay pot and a few keepsakes as they searched for Japanese wood prints they hoped to recover. Her husband pulled his hand out of rubble near the still-standing fireplace, holding up a piece of petrified wood handed down by his grandmother.

"It's OK. It's OK," Berg said as much to herself as others as she took stock of the destruction, remembering the deck and pool from which her family watched fireworks. "It's not like we just lost our house — everybody lost their house."

Since the fires first began popping up around a densely populated, 25-mile (40-kilometer) expanse north of downtown LA, they have burned more than 12,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. No cause has been identified yet for the largest fires.

Allegations of leadership failures and political blame have begun and so have investigations. Gov Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon (440 million-liter) reservoir was out of service and some hydrants ran dry, calling it "deeply troubling."

Meanwhile, Los Angeles Fire chief Kristin Crowley said city leadership failed her department by not providing enough money for firefighting. She also criticized the lack of water.

"When a firefighter comes up to a hydrant, we expect there's going to be water," she said.

At least 11 people have been killed, with five from the Palisades Fire and six from the Eaton Fire, according to the LA County medical examiner's office. Officials said they expected that number to rise as cadaver dogs go through levelled neighbourhoods to assess the devastation to an area larger than San Francisco.

Officials on Friday set up a centre where people could report those missing. Tens of thousands of people remained under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 56 square miles (145 square kilometers).

The disaster took homes from everyone — from waiters to movie stars. The government has not yet released figures on the cost of the damage, but private firms have estimated it will climb into the tens of billions. The Walt Disney Co. announced Friday it will donate USD 15 million to respond to the fires and help rebuild.

Indonesia, Japan promise deeper defence, economic ties as regional tensions spike

BOGOR (INDONESIA), Jan 11:

Japan and Indonesia pledged on Saturday to deepen economic and defence ties during a visit by the Japanese prime minister amid heightened global geopolitical tensions.

Shigeru Ishiba arrived in Jakarta on Friday from Kuala Lumpur after meeting Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. His visit to the two countries is meant to promote regional cooperation to counter Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea as the US presence in the region may decrease after President-elect Donald Trump takes office later this month.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto welcomed Ishiba at the Bogor presidential palace, just outside Jakarta, along with greeters wearing Indonesian traditional clothes and a military band that played both national anthems before the two leaders — both former defence ministers — held a bilateral meeting.

During the meeting, Ishiba pledged to support Indonesia's

goal of food and energy self-sufficiency, participate in its defence development and the industrialisation of its natural resources, including the strategic mining of minerals, and to provide nutritious meals to Indonesian schoolchildren.

In a joint press conference with Subianto, Japan's prime minister also promised to help Indonesia become a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The two sides signed an agreement on a Japanese loan of up to 90.4 billion yen (USD 573 million) for projects including a new port construction at Patimban to improve Indonesian transportation and distribution systems.

Subianto said the meeting was "warm, friendly and intensive," and that they also discussed the regional situation and rising political tensions.

"Indonesia has a desire to maintain good relations with all nations, so that it can contribute to an atmosphere that can reduce tensions between major countries," the In-

donesian president said.

Malaysia and Indonesia are maritime regional powers near vital shipping lanes and are key to Japanese and global security and the economy.

"Regarding bilateral relations in the field of security, we have agreed to launch discussions between defence officials regarding maritime security from both countries, including engagement in defence equipment technology cooperation," Ishiba said.

The visit came days after Japanese defence minister Gen. Nakatani met with his Indonesian counterpart Sjafie Sjamsuddin on Tuesday in Jakarta, where both ministers agreed to continue negotiations on joint development of naval ships and other military equipment and on technology transfer.

Japan is unable to export finished frigates or submarines under its current guidelines on transfer of defence equipment and technology, and it is believed that joint development is the most feasible way to make transfers. (AP)

There were remnants of the front porch where Yeager had photographed his children nearly daily since 2020 and had planned to keep doing that until they reached high school. That gave her hope.

"The porch is still there and it's to me, it's a sign to rebuild and not leave," she said. "You know, it's like saying, Hey, I'm still here. You can still do this." (AP)

Power lines everywhere. Fires still going everywhere" she said, adding that when they walked up to their home "it was just dust."

Charred grapefruits littered their yard around a blackened tree, a few still hanging from its branches.

Yeager's neighbourhood of Tudor homes was planning to celebrate its 100th anniversary in May.

"You build a world for yourself and your family, and you feel safe in that world and things like this happen that you cannot control," she said. "It's devastating."

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"The porch is still there and it's to me, it's a sign to rebuild and not leave," she said. "You know, it's like saying, Hey, I'm still here. You can still do this." (AP)

Uyghurs detained in Thailand say they face persecution in China

BANGKOK, Jan 11: A group of Uyghur men who were detained in Thailand over a decade ago say that the Thai government is preparing to deport them to China, alarming activists and family members who say the men are at risk of abuse and torture if they are sent back.

In a letter obtained by The Associated Press, 43 Uyghur men held in Bangkok made a public appeal to halt what they called an imminent threat of deportation.

"We could be imprisoned, and we might even lose our lives," the letter said. "We urgently appeal to all international organizations and countries concerned with human rights to intervene immediately to save us from this tragic fate before it is too late."

The Uyghurs are a Turkic, majority Muslim ethnicity native to China's far west Xinjiang region.

After decades of conflict with Beijing over discrimination and suppression of their cultural identity, the Chinese government launched a brutal crackdown on the Uyghurs that some Western governments deem a genocide.

Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, possibly a million or more, were swept into camps and prisons, with former detainees reporting abuse, disease, and in some cases, death.

Over 300 Uyghurs fleeing China were detained in 2014 by Thai authorities near the Malaysian border. In 2015, Thailand deported 109 detainees to China against their will, prompting international outcry. Another group of 173 Uyghurs, mostly women and children, were sent to Turkey, leaving 53 Uyghurs stuck in Thai immigration detention and seeking asylum.

Since then, five have died in detention, including two children.

Of the 48 still detained by Thai authorities, five are serving prison terms after a failed escape attempt. It is unclear whether they face the same fate as those in immigration detention.

Advocates and relatives describe harsh conditions in immi-

gration detention. They say the men are fed poorly, kept in overcrowded concrete cells with few toilets, denied sanitary goods like toothbrushes or razors, and are forbidden contact with relatives, lawyers, and international organizations. The Thai government's treatment of the detainees may constitute a violation of international law, according to a February 2024 letter sent to the Thai government by United Nations human rights experts.

The immigration police has said they have been trying to take care of the detainees as best as they could.

Recordings and chat records obtained exclusively by the AP show that on Jan. 8, the Uyghur detainees were asked to sign voluntary deportation papers by Thai immigration officials.

The move panicked detainees, as similar documents were presented to the Uyghurs deported to China in 2015. The detainees refused to sign.

Three people, including a Thai lawmaker and two others in touch with Thai authorities, told the AP there have been recent discussions within the government about deporting the Uyghurs to China, though the people had not yet seen or heard of any formal directive to do so.

Two of the people said that Thai officials pushing for the deportations are choosing to do so now because this year is the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China, and because of the perception that backlash from Washington will be muted as the U.S. prepares for a presidential transition in less than two weeks.

The people declined to be identified in order to discuss sensitive internal discussions. The Thai and Chinese foreign ministries did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Beijing says the Uyghurs are jihadists, but has not presented evidence. Uyghur activists and rights groups say the men are innocent

and expressed alarm over their possible deportation, saying they face persecution, imprisonment, and possible death back in China.

"There's no evidence that the 43 Uyghurs have committed any crime," said Peter Irwin, Associate Director for Research and Advocacy at the Uyghur Human Rights Project. "The group has a clear right not to be deported and they're acting within international law by fleeing China."

On Saturday morning, the detention center where the Uyghurs are being held was quiet. A guard told a visiting AP journalist the center was closed until Monday.

Two people with direct knowledge of the matter told the AP that all of the Uyghurs detained in Thailand submitted asylum applications to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which the AP verified by reviewing copies of the letters. The U.N. agency acknowledged receipt of the applications but has been barred from visiting the Uyghurs by the Thai government to this day, the people said.

The UNHCR did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Relatives of three of the Uyghurs detained told the AP that they were worried about the safety of their loved ones.

"We are all in the same situation — constant worry and fear," said Bilal Ablet, whose elder brother is detained in Thailand. "World governments all know about this, but I think they're pretending not to see or hear anything because they're afraid of Chinese pressure."

Ablet added that Thai officials told his brother no other government was willing to accept the Uyghurs, though an April 2023 letter authored by the chairwoman of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand first leaked to the New York Times Magazine and independently seen by the AP said there are "countries that are ready to take these detainees to settle down." (AP)

Sanctions by Biden administration 'unlawful', unfair competition from unfriendly countries: Rosatom

WASHINGTON, Jan 11: Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom has said the Biden administration's sanctions against it were "unlawful" and being seen as a form of unfair competition from unfriendly countries.

"Sanctions targeting Rosatom's management are regarded as unfounded and unlawful. Today, Rosatom is a global leader in the export of nuclear energy technologies, so the sanctions are seen as a form of unfair competition from unfriendly states," it said.

"For nearly three years, we have operated under growing sanctions pressure, adapting successfully and remaining prepared for any scenario. Rosatom continues to meet all its commitments to partners in full," Rosatom said in a statement.

President Joe Biden's administration announced Friday that it's expanding sanctions against Russia's

critically important energy sector, unveiling a new effort to inflict pain on Moscow for its grinding war in Ukraine as President-elect Donald Trump gets set to return to office vowing to quickly end the conflict. Two Indian companies—Skyhart Management Services and Avision Management Services—and senior officials from Rosatom which specialises in nuclear energy, nuclear non-energy goods and high-tech products were among the over 150 entities and individuals, including major Russian oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas, Russian insurance companies, and shadow fleet vessels, were imposed with restrictions.

Officials said the sanctions, which punish entities that do business with the Russians, have the potential to cost the Russian economy upward of billions of dollars per month. (PTI)

MENLO PARK (US), Jan 11:

Joining companies such as John Deere and Walmart, Facebook and Instagram's parent company Meta Platforms Inc is getting rid of its diversity, equity and inclusion programme that includes hiring, training and picking vendors, a company spokesperson confirmed on Friday.

The move, which was first reported by Axios, comes on the heels of the social media giant's decision to end its third-party fact-checking programme and scale back policies on hate speech and abuse.

Citing an internal memo sent to employees, Axios said the Menlo Park, California-based tech giant said the US Supreme Court "has recently made decisions signalling a shift in how courts will approach DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion programmes)... The term DEI has also become charged, in



part because it is understood by some as a practice that suggests preferential treatment of some groups over others."

In practice, this means Meta will no longer have a team focused on diversity and inclusion and the company said it will instead "focus on how to apply fair and consistent practices that mitigate bias for all,

no matter your background."

The company will also end its "diverse slate approach" to hiring, which meant that a diverse pool of candidates was considered for every open position.

Other companies that have curbed DEI programmes recently include McDonald's and automaker Ford as well as Walmart

and farm equipment maker John Deere.

Amazon also said it is halting some of its DEI programmes, although it did not specify which ones. In a Dec 16 memo to employees that Amazon shared on Friday, Candi Castleberry, a senior human resources executive, said the company has been "winding down outdated programs and materials, and we're aiming to complete that by the end of 2024."

"We also know there will always be individuals or teams who continue to do well-intentioned things that don't align with our company-wide approach, and we might not always see those right away. But we'll keep at it," she wrote.

Rather than "have individual groups build programmes," she added, Amazon is "focusing on programs with proven outcomes — and we also aim to foster a more truly inclusive culture."

35 from NE invited to Republic Day parade

SHILLONG, Jan 11: Thirty-five people from the Northeast were invited to witness this year's Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path in New Delhi, officials said here on Friday.

Among these 35 people are women entrepreneurs, National Award winners, and beneficiaries of flagship government schemes, besides self-help group members working for environmental protection, nutrition, sanitation, and gender empowerment, they said.

Eight of them are from Assam, 22 from Sikkim and five from Meghalaya, they added.

"These special guests will not only witness the grandeur of the Republic Day Parade but also visit iconic landmarks, including the National War Memorial and the PM Sangrahalay," an official said.

"Additionally, they will engage in interactive sessions with key government ministers, deepening their understanding of India's heritage and ongoing governance initiatives," he said. (PTI)

Health insurance schemes in Nagaland fully operational: NHPS



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 11: The Nagaland Health Protection Society (NHPS) asserted that the services under both PM-JAY and Chief Minister Health Insurance Scheme (CMHIS) are fully operational and have not been suspended.

It issued the clarification following recent concerns regarding the suspension of services under the PM-JAY and the CMHIS by certain empanelled hospitals in Nagaland.

The NHPS is a registered entity under the Nagaland health and family welfare department, which is responsible for managing public health protection schemes in the state. It said there was a miscommunication from the insurance company - FGI - which has now been resolved.

The NHPS added all empanelled hospitals have been duly informed that these services will continue without interruption.

It said the PM-JAY and CMHIS services remain active unless a hospital unilaterally decides to suspend them, which would be in violation of the signed MoU.

Arunachal Guv stresses on real-time monitoring of development projects

ITANAGAR, Jan 11: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik on Friday emphasised the need for real-time monitoring of developmental works in the state. During a meeting with chief secretary Manish Kumar Gupta at Raj Bhawan here, Parnaik stressed on timely implementation and quality work of the projects.

The governor said that regular inspections and reviews need to be carried out for central and state government-sponsored programmes and policies, a Raj Bhawan communiqué said. He underscored the review of programmes for the eradication of tuberculosis by 2025.

The chief secretary apprised the

CM urges Naga leaders to take greater role in resolving Manipur's ethnic crisis

'Concern of the indigenous people should be addressed'

IMPHAL, Jan 11: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday requested the church, community and other leaders of the Naga community to take a greater role in resolving the ongoing ethnic conflict in the state. Clashes between Kuki and Meitei communities have left over 250 people dead and thousands homeless since May 2023. The Nagas were not involved in this conflict.

Addressing a programme at Maram in Naga majority Senapati district, Singh said "I want to appeal to the Naga communities that a third party is required to resolve the current issues and for restoration of peace. For this, church and community leaders needs to take responsibilities and initiatives."

All grievances and problems can be resolved under the Constitution and the laws of the Manipur gov-



ernment, he said.

"Whatever happened has happened. As I said during my New Year's message, it's time to forget and forgive. We need to jointly walk on the path of peace and bring back the former Manipur. We need

to jointly work together to resolve this crisis.

"I seek the support of all those gathered today including elected members, former elected members, and church leaders to overcome this crisis," Singh said. The chief min-

ister said he is available 24/7 and will provide whatever help is needed from the government to establish peace in the state, he added.

Singh said "I need your help. Somebody has to come forward. During the Kuki and Naga clashes of the '90s, we tried hard to bring a solution. Similarly, I seek your support now. I have heard of such endeavours to bring peace being taken but I urge all of you to take the initiation assertively."

The concern of the indigenous people should be addressed and all 34 recognised tribes of the state need to live together, the chief minister said.

He said that his government has waged a war against narcotic drugs, while identifying illegal immigrants is required to protect the numerically less indigenous communities. (PTI)

Considerable improvement in law and order in Tripura: Guv

AGARTALA, Jan 11: Tripura Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu on Friday claimed that the law and order situation in the state has improved considerably.

While addressing the assembly on the first day of the winter session, he said that the crime rate in the state has decreased.

Nallu said the insurgency problem has been resolved with the signing of a memorandum of settlement with two outlawed groups -- National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) -- on September 5 last year.

"The Centre has approved a package of ₹ 250 crore for the development of the tribal communities of the state as part of the peace accord. I welcome returnees to the mainstream and hope that they will contribute to building a developed Tripura and India," he said.

Asserting that the state is witnessing progress in every sector, ranging from infrastructure to healthcare, education, and the welfare of all communities, the Governor said the Union government has sanctioned ₹ 2,800 crore for key road projects in the northeastern state.

Nallu said the state has signed an agreement with the Asian Develop-



ment Bank (ADB) for the overall development of the power sector.

"Besides, the state is also implementing the World Bank-funded North Eastern Regional Power System Improvement Project with an investment of ₹ 1,800 crore," he said.

"In the 2024-25 financial year till the month of October, ₹ 1,005 crore of GST, ₹ 307 crore of VAT and ₹ 231 crore of excise duty have been collected which is a growth of 8.37 per cent, 9 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively," he said, adding 164 tax-payers were felicitated for timely depositing tax.

Nallu said the state has approved

the setting up of a private open university -- Mata Tripura Sundari Open University.

"The government is committed to providing employment by following a transparent process of recruitment through which it has created jobs. The government has recently completed the process of recruitment of 2,410 candidates through JRBT (Joint Recruitment Board of Tripura). Further, it has been making all-out efforts for creating job opportunities for unemployed youth through skill development and other means for which the process is underway," he added. (PTI)

Manipur Guv discusses state's situation with CRPF



the ethnic strife-torn state, an official statement said.

The governor met Raja Srivastava, special DG, CRPF North East Zone, and two other senior officers.

The officers briefed the governor on the deployment and operational activities of the CRPF in the region, it said. The governor also held a separate meeting with representatives of the All Manipur Bar Association, who had called on him and apprised him about various challenges and concerns arising from the current situation in the state. The governor assured them of extending all possible help, the statement added.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Lo groups in Manipur since May 3 last year. (PTI)

IMPHAL, Jan 11: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Saturday held a meeting with senior CRPF officials and discussed the situation in

BJP government criticised for failing to fill up vacant posts

AGARTALA, Jan 11: Tripura opposition leader Jitendra Chaudhury on Saturday slammed the BJP-led coalition government for failing to fill up the vacant posts in its departments.

While addressing a rally organised by the CPI(M)'s tribal wing Tripura Rajya Ganamukti Parishad (GMP), he said the number of government employees in Tripura has been reduced by 56,000 during the BJP rule.

"The BJP had promised to clear a proposal to fill up 50,000 posts in the government sector in the first cabinet meeting, if the party was voted to power," Chaudhury said.

"It also promised 7 lakh employment generation in the five years. Now, the number of employees in the government sector has reduced by 56,000 from March 2018 to March 2024," he said.

Chaudhury also lamented over the BJP lawmakers' allegation of fomenting unemployment youth against the government by raising a 'motion' in the Assembly on Friday.

"When we raised a motion in the Assem-

bled over employment, the treasury bench members blamed us for fomenting the youth! We want the government to fill up vacant posts in the government sector to address the unemployment problem," he said.

Chaudhury also strongly demanded the holding of elections to the Village Committee in Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD) at the earliest. "There has been no election in the village committees for the past four years citing different reasons by the state government. During the Left Front regime, development used to take place in village committee areas despite insurgency. Now, the development has become a standstill in tribal council areas," he said.

Later, a five-member delegation of GMP, headed by its state president Naresh Jamatia met Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu at Raj Bhawan and submitted a six-point charter of demands.

The demands include immediate elections in village committees and implementation of ST reservation in the government sector. (PTI)

Army organises tour for border villagers of Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, Jan 11: The Indian Army, under its 'Operation SADBHAVANA' and the Vibrant Village Programme, has launched a spiritual tour for 22 senior villagers from West Kameng and Tawang districts in Arunachal Pradesh.

The initiative is aimed at fostering cultural preservation, spiritual enlightenment, and national integration, a defence statement said here on Saturday.

The tour, which was flagged off on Friday, will offer participants, including village headmen and ex-servicemen, their first experience beyond their remote villages, fostering socio-cultural ties.

Their itinerary includes visits to some of India's most iconic spiritual and historical landmarks, the statement said. (PTI)

SIKKIM, Jan 11: Sikkim recorded a 0.35 per cent increase in its voters to 4.67 lakh, a statement said on Friday.

There are a total of 2,33,828 male voters, 2,33,495 female voters, and four transgender, it said.

This Special Summary Revision 2025 saw an enrolment of 1,387 new voters in the age group of 18-19 since the draft list was released on October 29.

A total of 2,598 service voters have also been enrolled so far, the CEO office said in the statement.

There has been a total addition of 1,625 voters during the period, while names of 2,347 people were deleted, it said. (PTI)

Centre clear about flag and Constitution, says Patton



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Jan 11: Nagaland's acting chief minister Y Patton on Saturday said the Government of India is amply clear about one nation one constitution and one nation one flag.

Patton, the deputy chief minister, was given the charge of chief minister on January 8 during the leave period of chief minister Neiphiu Rio.

Without naming the NSCN-IM which has been demanding separate Naga flag and constitution for resolution of the decades-old Naga issue, Patton said the Centre has consented to a cultural flag for the Nagas and Yehzabo, the Naga constitution, which will be incorporated into the Indian Constitution.

He was addressing the 75th anniversary celebration of Duncan Bosti Dimapur as the special guest at the multi-purpose hall of Dimapur Ao Baptist Arogo, Duncan Bosti.

Noting that there are 28 Naga

underground factions in Nagaland, Patton said it is like one family making one faction.

He added that of the 28 groups, only five are under ceasefire agreement. He said while there are some genuine groups who want solution to the Naga issue, some other factions do not want it as they will have no place to go after a solution is arrived at.

"They want to extort our money and live," he said.

Raising serious concern over multiple taxation imposed by various Naga groups, he said: "We must rise up together. There should be only one tax."

Patton appealed to all the 28 underground factions to come together for solution like all the 60 MLAs from different parties in the state who formed an opposition-less government for the same purpose.

"If they really want to resolve the Naga issue, they must come together," he stressed.

Patton also urged the Naga civil society organisations to unite to work for the future generation.

Duncan Bosti was named after SJ Duncan, who served as the deputy commissioner of the erstwhile Naga Hills district in the 1950s.

Dr RH Duncan Lyngdoh, grandson of SJ Duncan, who is a retired professor of North eastern Hill University, and Nagaland adviser to I&PR and soil and water conservation Imkong L. Imchen attended the programme as the guests of honour.

16th Finance Commission to arrive in Tripura on Jan 29: Official

AGARTALA, Jan 11: The full team of the 16th Finance Commission, headed by its chairman Arvind Panagariya, is expected to arrive here on January 29 for a four-day visit to Tripura, an official said on Saturday.

During their visit to the northeastern state, they will meet chief minister Manik Saha and hold discussions with government officials and other stakeholders to learn about the wish list of Tripura, state Finance Secretary Apurba Roy told PTI.

"The Finance Commission's full team will hold meetings with top officials of the Tripura administration to learn about the state's wish list," Roy said. The commission will also hold meetings with representatives of local urban bodies, including Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC), Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD), and delegations from the political parties to know their demands and views.

The panel will examine the fund requirement for the state's non-plan expenditure for the five years starting from April 1, 2026, another official said.

The team also includes members Ajay Narayan Jha, Annie George Mathew and Manoj Panda, and secretary Ritvik Pandey.

They will leave the state on February 1, the official said. (PTI)

Four Bangladeshis nabbed in Tripura for illegally entering India



AGARTALA, Jan 11: Four Bangladeshis nationals have been arrested in Tripura's Khowai district for entering India without valid documents, police said on Saturday.

An Indian person was also arrested for facilitating the entry of the Bangladeshis.

Acting on a tip-off, police nabbed them near Teliamura railway station on Friday night.

"During preliminary investigation, the Bangladeshis said they had come from Moulvibazar district and had plans to go to Dharmanagar in North Tripura district in search of work. As all the four persons entered Indian territory without valid documents, they were arrested," Sub-Inspector Kamalendu Dhar told PTI.

The arrested Bangladeshis nationals were identified as Moinuddin Miah, Ruman Miah, Rahim Ahmed and Simon Miah.

One Indian, identified as Aamir Uddin of Dharmanagar was with the four Bangladeshis citizens and was arrested for helping the infiltrators, he said.

"All the arrested persons were produced before a local court on Saturday seeking three-day police remand for interrogation. An investigation is underway," he said. (PTI)

Arunachal CM interacts with participants of Brahmaputra river rafting team

Undertaken by the Dirang-based National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS)

ITANAGAR, Jan 11: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu Saturday interacted with a team which will raft the entire length of the Brahmaputra River within Indian borders, a defence statement said.

The expedition, undertaken by the Dirang-based National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS), will commence from Gelling in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, on January 14 and would culminate at Hatsingimari in Dhubri district of Assam on February 14.

Khandu symbolically flagged off the journey here, when NIMAS Director Col Ranveer Singh Jamwal briefed the chief minister, who is also the vice president of the institute, about the expedition's objectives, challenges, and anticipated outcomes.

Khandu interacted with the entire team, offering his blessings and expressing his confidence in their successful completion of this challenging endeavour. He also expressed his eagerness to welcome the team back upon their return.

Participants of the first-of-its-kind journey will traverse 916 km of Brahmaputra River.

The expedition aims to promote adven-



ture tourism, foster environmental awareness, and inspire youth to engage in adventure sports, defence spokesperson Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said in the statement.

The historic expedition will not only be a testament to the indomitable human spirit but will also significantly contribute to the advancement of river rafting as an adventure sport in India, the statement added.

Khandu, in a social media post, said, "Pushing the boundaries of adventure, NIMAS is all set to script history with a record-breaking 916-km rafting expedition on the Brahmaputra River!"

Starting from Gelling, Arunachal Pradesh and culminating at Dhubri-Hats-

ingimari, Assam, this journey will traverse one of the world's most majestic and challenging river systems, the chief minister added.

Led by NIMAS director Col Ranveer Singh Jamwal and Capt Kavitha Vasupalli, along with a dedicated team, including seven members from Arunachal Pradesh, this pioneering expedition will commence on January 14 and conclude on February 14, he said.

"We trust the team to conquer this challenge and bring glory to NIMAS and the nation! Here's wishing them the very best for a safe, successful journey," the chief minister added. (PTI)

No.KDB-415/2023-2024/10997

Dated Gurufela the 09/01/2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and twenty five rupees) only with a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently to be covered and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractor Class-I (A, B, C) & Class-II Categories Assam P&RD and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15th FC fund for the year 2024-25 as stated below. The tender will be received by the undersigned upto 2.00 PM of 30/01/2025 and will be opened on same day at 3 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Location	Estimated value (Rs. In lakh)	Cost of bid document	Amount of bid security	Time of completion
1	Construction of community toilet North Rajadabri Bazar	Rajadabri	Rs. 11.00 L	0.03%	SC/ST= 1% OTH= 2%	3 months

Details N.I.T may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned tender will be issued to the contractors of their authorized agent from 10/01/2024 to 30/01/2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/banker's cheque from any Nationalized bank, duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Kachugaon Dev. Block, Gurufela.

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1293

Sd/- Block Development Officer, Kachugaon Dev. Block, Gurufela

Shiv Sena (UBT) to contest Maharashtra local bodies polls solo

'We were not able to appoint even a convenor for the INDIA bloc'

NAGPUR, Jan 11: Amid a blame game over the Maha Vikas Aghadi's rout in the state assembly elections, key constituent Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) on Saturday announced to contest local bodies polls solo, a move raising question mark over the opposition bloc's unity.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut cited the lack of opportunities for workers of respective parties in an alliance and the right to organisational growth as the major considerations for contesting solo.

Two days back, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party announced its support for Arvind Kejriwal's AAP in the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections, in a snub to the Congress.

Reacting to Raut's announcement, a Congress leader said the party's central leadership will take a call on whether Congress will contest solo or otherwise in local body polls, the schedule of which is yet to be declared.

Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) said the Sena (UBT)'s decision will impact the poll prospects of all three constituents of the MVA coalition.

Raut said the INDIA bloc and Maha Vikas Aghadi alliances-

comprising Sena (UBT), Congress, and NCP (SP)- were meant for Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

"In an alliance, workers of individual parties don't get opportunities, and it hampers organisational growth. We will contest polls to the Mumbai, Thane, Nagpur and other municipal corporations, zilla parishads and panchayats on our strength," he told reporters.

Raut further said Uddhav Thackeray gave the party indications that it should go alone.

The Mahayuti alliance of BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP won 230 of the state's 288 seats in the recently held assembly polls, shrinking MVA's tally to 46 seats, with Sena (UBT), Congress, and NCP (SP) each contributing 20, 16 and 10 seats, respectively.

Raut blamed Congress for the lack of coordination in MVA.

Hitting out at Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar for indulging in a blame game over the MVA's defeat in the assembly polls, Raut said those who don't believe in consensus and compromise have no right to be in an alliance.

He further claimed that the INDIA bloc didn't hold a single



meeting after the Lok Sabha election results were declared.

"We were not able to appoint even a convenor for the INDIA bloc. It isn't good. As the largest party of the alliance, it was the Congress's responsibility to convene a meeting," the Sena (UBT) MP said.

NCP (SP) group leader in the legislative assembly, Jitendra Awhad, said they can't stop Sena (UBT) if it's keen to go alone.

"If they wish to go alone, who are we to stop them? We can't take along anyone forcibly. We need to stay together after the assembly

to do so. Congress senior leader and AICC in charge of Goa, Manikrao Thakre, however, said the party's central leadership will decide on local body polls.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis downplayed the Sena (UBT) announcement.

"We are not concerned whether MVA remains intact or not. My government is committed to ensuring the progress and development of Maharashtra. I am confident of people's support in all upcoming elections," he told reporters.

The announcement by the Shiv Sena (UBT) to go solo in local body elections comes amid rumours of the party softening its criticism of BJP in recent days and Fadnavis' "anything can happen in politics" remark.

"If you see the developments from 2019 to 2024, I realise never say never and anything can happen. Uddhav Thackeray goes to some other party and Ajit Pawar comes to us. In politics anything can happen though I am not saying this should happen." On chances of the NCP (SP) and NCP coming closer or reuniting, Fadnavis said in an interview on Friday. (PTI)

Shivakumar rules out any 'political turn,' says he and CM Siddaramaiah will follow party's direction

CHIKKAMAGALURU (KARNATAKA), Jan 11: The people of Karnataka have blessed the Congress for five years and he and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will continue functioning as per the directions of the party high command, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said on Saturday, while seeking to downplay reports of power tussle within the ruling party.

With supporters hailing him as the 'next Chief Minister' on his arrival here, Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress President, said he does not need anyone's support and will abide by what the party tells him.

"No one should worry; there is no need for any political turn. People have blessed us and given us an opportunity, and we will continue for five years. All the talks going on are without any value. The Chief Minister and I will continue functioning as per the directions of the party," Shivakumar told reporters in response to a

question. Asked about workers or supporters demanding that he should be the next CM, Shivakumar said, "I don't want anyone to demand anything from me; I don't want anyone's support. I do not need any legislator's backing. This is between me and the Congress party. Whatever the Congress party says, I will function accordingly. I don't want workers or legislators to shout for me or stand in my support. I will do my duty."

"I believe in the saying: 'Karmanye vadhnikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana'—make your efforts, and leave the results to God," he added.

His comments came a day after his cabinet colleague K N Rajanna, who is close to Siddaramaiah, suggested that Shivakumar should aim to become Chief Minister by successfully leading the party in the next elections, rather than aspiring for the top post during the remaining two and a half years of the incumbent government.

Following Siddaramaiah's recent dinner with select Dalit and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Cabinet colleagues, speculation about a possible change of leadership in Karnataka has created a buzz within the Congress. There are rumours of a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" formula being implemented after March.

After the Assembly election results in May 2023, there was intense competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the Chief Minister's post. The Congress eventually convinced Shivakumar to take the role of Deputy Chief Minister. At the time, reports suggested that a compromise had been reached under a "rotational chief minister formula," which would make Shivakumar the Chief Minister after two and a half years. However, the party has not officially confirmed this arrangement.

Shivakumar, a Vokkaliga, has been open about his ambition to become chief minister. (PTI)

Mann seeks ₹ 600 cr from Shah to battle drug menace

CHANDIGARH, Jan 11: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday sought a one-time financial assistance of Rs 600 crore from Union Home Minister Amit Shah to set up special NDPS courts for faster disposal of drug cases.

Mann said the drug problem in Punjab is disturbing the socio-economic balance, leading to an increase in crime, domestic violence, and health issues.

Speaking via a video link in the regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security,' Mann urged the Centre to give Punjab financial assistance for 10 years – Rs 60 crore per year – for the creation of Special Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances courts and recruitment of public prosecutors, said an official release.

Mann said, there were 35,000 drug cases pending for trial as of January 1, 2025, adding, at the present rate of disposal, on average, a sessions court takes seven years to complete the trial.

In the next five years, the average disposal time will increase from seven years (35,000 pending cases) to 11 years (55,000 pending cases), he pointed out.

"In order to clear the pendency in the next five years, the state needs to create 79 new exclusive NDPS Special Courts in Punjab and to appoint 79 public prosecutors along with

supporting staff for these special courts, this financial assistance is solicited," Mann said.

The CM also asked Shah to ensure a "generous" grant from the National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse for the anti-narcotics task force (ANTF), live monitoring systems for six bordering districts, purchase of technical surveillance equipment, infrastructure and logistics for 5G jamming solution for prisons.

The state had sought Rs 2,829 crore through the 16th Finance Commission which should be approved at the earliest for effective law enforcement and upgrading infrastructure and logistic support of the ANTF and prisons, he said.

Mann said the state had sought ₹ 107 crore from the Centre in 2022 for hiring of counsellors and coordinators to survey the impact of CADA (comprehensive action against drug abuse) amounting, but nothing has been allotted till date.

He said the state faced a full-scaled insurgency in the late 1970s and 1980s, and it is now fighting a proxy war with Pakistan, which is playing it with drugs.

Mann said 552 km of the international border shared with Pakistan is porous and is marked by a fencing gap of around 43 km and a riverine gap of 35 km. (PTI)

BJP attempting to deceive EC with fake voter registration applications: AAP



NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday accused the BJP of attempting to deceive the Election Commission by submitting fake voter registration applications in large numbers from the residential addresses of its leaders. Addressing a press conference, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh claimed that dozens of voter registration applications had been filed from single small shops and basements.

He also accused the BJP of submitting multiple new voter registration applications using the residential addresses of their leaders. "This is the reality of the biggest political party in India. This is how Prime Minister Modi's party plans to win the elections," Singh said, listing the names of BJP leaders, including union ministers, for their alleged involvement in the issue.

"The BJP and its leaders are trying to deceive the Election Commission. This is BJP's election scam, being carried out by their Union ministers and MPs, and they are undermining the integrity of the Election Commission," Singh added. Delhi heads to the poll on February 5 and results will be declared on February 8. (PTI)

BJP rolls out campaign song for Delhi Assembly polls



NEW DELHI, Jan 11: The BJP rolled out a campaign song for Delhi Assembly polls "Bahane Nahi Badlav Chahiye..." rendered by party MP Manoj Tiwari on Saturday. The song "Bahane Nahi Badlav Chahiye, Delhi Mein BJP Sarkar Chahiye" (need change not excuses, Delhi requires BJP government) reflects the mood of the city to oust the Aapda (AAP) government that "cheated" people with false promises and set record of corruption, charged Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva.

The song was launched officially during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Parivartan Rally" last week in Rohini, now it has been rolled out extensively for the poll campaign, he said at a press conference.

Sachdeva alleged that the people of Delhi are fed up of Kejriwal's party looting them and they want to

bring BJP into power. Tiwari, a three-time BJP MP from North East Delhi and a popular singer-actor, said that there are times one is required to give voice to the people's feelings. This song represents that time one time for him.

"The theme song summarises the manifesto," said Tiwari humming a few lines at the press conference. The BJP has yet to come up with its manifesto for the elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly scheduled on February 5. The party has so far released a list of 29 candidates and the next list is expected soon.

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced its candidates in all 70 seats and recently launched its campaign song "Phir Layenge Kejriwal" in the run-up to the polls. (PTI)

Priyanka Gandhi demands answers from govt on value of rupee

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday demanded answers from the government on the value of the rupee reaching its "lowest level ever" against the US dollar.

The rupee declined 18 paise to breach the 86-mark against the US dollar for the first time on Friday. It settled at 86.04 against the US currency.

"The value of rupee against the dollar has reached its lowest level ever. For the first time in history, the value of one dollar has become 86.4 rupees," Priyanka Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X. She said during Manmohan Singh's tenure, when the value of one dollar was 58-59 rupees, Narendra Modi used to link the value of the rupee with the prestige of the government. He used to say, "I know everything. The currency of any country cannot fall like this..." she said. "Today he himself is the prime minister and all the records on the fall of the rupee have been broken. He should answer to the people of the country," the Congress leader said. (PTI)

Dark web, cryptocurrency, drones continue to be challenge: Amit Shah

'The MHA is implementing a three-pronged strategy to achieve a drug-free India by 2047'

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday that dark web, cryptocurrency, online marketplace and drones continue to be a challenge for the country and these have to be checked by strict measures.

Chairing a regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' here, Shah also asserted that the country will not allow even a single kg of drugs to be smuggled in or out of the country.

He said the government has not only been successful in eliminating many networks of drugs, but the terrorism linked with them too was also destroyed. He said many cases of narco-terrorism were busted in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh and these were major achievements.

"The use of dark web, cryptocurrency, online marketplace, drones continue to be a challenge for us even today," he said.

Shah said a technical solution to these problems have to be found through joint efforts by the states and the central government and technocrats for the country's security and development.



He said the fight against drugs has gained a new strength under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

"In the last 10 years, there has been a seven-fold increase in the seizure of drugs which is a major achievement. The Modi government has given a strong message of destroying the entire ecosystem of drugs through strict action," he said.

The home minister said that in 2024, a total of 3.63 kg of drugs were seized while during 2014-24, altogether 24 lakh kg of drugs were seized - a

seven-fold increase as compared to the previous decade.

He said drugs worth ₹ 8,150 crore were disposed off in 2004-14 but in 2014-24, drugs worth ₹ 54,851 crore were destroyed - eight times more than the previous decade.

The conference, organised by the NCB, aims to address the growing concern of drug trafficking and its impact on national security, with a special focus on eight states and Union Territories of northern India.

Shah also launched the drug disposal fortnight starting from Saturday to January 25. He said that during this period, one lakh kg of narcotics worth ₹ 8,600 crore will be destroyed.

The home minister also inaugurated the new office complex of the NCB's Bhopal zonal unit and extension of the MANAS-2 helpline to all 36 states and UTs.

The main focus of the conference is on the sharing of real-time information from the National Narcotics Helpline 'MANAS' portal with the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of states and UTs, evaluating the progress of states in combating drug trafficking, and assessing the effectiveness of the Narcotics Coordina-

tion Mechanism (NCORD).

Other issues to be discussed at the conference include strengthening and enhancing the functionality of State Forensic Science Laboratories (SFLS), utilising the NIDAAN database to bolster efforts against drug trafficking, implementing provisions of the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act, establishing special NDPS courts for the speedy trial of drug-related cases, and fostering a Whole-of-Government approach to ensure comprehensive collaboration among all agencies to combat drug trafficking and abuse effectively.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has adopted a zero tolerance policy against drug trafficking, an official release said.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is implementing a three-pronged strategy to achieve a drug-free India by 2047. This includes strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing coordination among narcotics agencies, and launching a public awareness campaign. (PTI)

Guv Ravi unable to 'digest' TN growing, his actions are 'childish': CM Stalin



CHENNAI, Jan 11: Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi was unable to "digest" that the state was developing and his decision not to address the Assembly was "childish", Chief Minister M K Stalin said on Saturday.

The state Legislative Assembly has been witnessing strange scenes for the last few years after Ravi took over as Governor, he said.

"The Governor comes to the Assembly but returns without addressing the House. That's why I had said that his actions were childish," Stalin told the Assembly.

As per Article 176 of the Constitution, the Governor has to deliver his address to the Legislative Assembly at the commencement of the session. "But he appears to be keen on violating the rules in a planned manner," the CM said winding up the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor for his address.

In 2022, this Governor delivered his address without altering the speech. But in the following three years, he avoided delivering his customary address citing 'absurd' reasons, the Chief Minister said.

Singing the Tamil anthem (Tamil Thai Valthu) before the session starts and playing the national anthem after the address has been the tradition for long. "I think, the Governor is unable to digest the fact that Tamil Nadu is developing. I may be an ordinary person but this Legislative Assembly came into existence due to the feelings of crore of people," Stalin said.

This House cannot bear to see the Governor doing something with political motives that drags the position and responsibility he held by not respecting the dignity of this Assembly, not respecting the people's feelings, and 'daring' to insult the Tamil anthem. "We should not see such things again," the Chief Minister added.

On January 6, Ravi left the Assembly without delivering the customary address. The Raj Bhavan later said that he left 'in deep anguish' as the national anthem wasn't played.

"Disrespecting the Constitution does not augur well for democracy," the Governor had then said. Reacting, Stalin had said, "it was childish of the Governor choosing not to read the government address."

In his reply to the House today, Stalin reminded that the Dravidian uprising arose against neglect, humiliation, and oppression. Stalin, who is president of DMK, exuded confidence that his party would certainly form the government for the seventh time.

On the opposition AIADMK members turning up in the Assembly wearing black shirts and sarees to protest against the state government over the Anna University student sexual assault case, he sought to know if they had the courage to stage a 'black shirt' protest against the Governor who continued to insult Tamil Nadu.

"I would have been happy if the AIADMK had worn black shirts to condemn the Union Government or the national education policy," the Chief Minister said.

On the law and order situation, Stalin said the police functioned independently and brought down the crimes. He was a liberal in permitting agitations by the opposition parties, the CM said.

Later, Leader of the House Duraimurugan asked Speaker M Appavu to pronounce his ruling on the discussion between the chief minister and leader of the opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami over the facts on filing FIR in the Pol-lachi sexual assault case.

Appavu stated that after perusing the evidence submitted to him by the chief minister and Palaniswami, it was clear that the FIR was registered twelve days after the crime was reported.

"The Chief Minister had conveyed the correct information to the House," Appavu said.

As the AIADMK members protested against his ruling, Appavu said he would rest the case at this juncture without going into details, and adjourned the House sine die. (PTI)

RAIL DISPLAY NETWORK & COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING CONTRACT OVER TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Auction for Awarding of Rail Display Network Contract (RDN) over Tinsukia Division & Commercial Advertising contract LCD/LED TVs at Jorhat Town Railway Station has been invited. **Auction Catalogue No.: TSK-RDN-2025-01. Auction Start (All Lots): At 10:00 hrs. on 24-01-2025; Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee; Days: 1095; Seq No.: AA/1; Lot No./Category: ADVT-TSK-TSK-OSD-209-24-1 (Advertising-On Station Premise (Digital)); Description:** Rail Display Network Contract (RDN) through Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance Rail Display Network Contract (RDN) through Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Video Wall of (size 6' x 4') 33 stations at Namtiali, Titabar, Amguri, Selenghat, Nakachari, Golaghat, Bhulokmara, Baruaabumgaon, Numaligarh Furkating, Kamarbandha Ali, Dulajjan, Naharkatia, Namrup, Borhat, Sapekhati, Bhojo, Lakwa, Simaluguri, Tinsukia, Makum, Digboi, Margherita, Ledo, Chabua, Panitola, Kowang, Dhamalgaon, Dikom, Lahowal, Chalkhova, Moranhat, Sivasagar Town with scope of display of advertisements along with railway messages in 50:50 Time Slot / Space sharing. **Seq No.: AA/2; Lot No./Category: ADVT-TSK-JTTN-OSD-159-24-1 (Advertising - On Station Premise (Digital)); Description:** Commercial Advertising LCD/LED (7 Nos. of TVs) at Jorhat Town Railway Station. **Auction Close Date/Time:** At 10:40 hrs. on 24-01-2025. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Maximum Auto Extensions: 10 Times. For details please visit website www.ireps.gov.in.

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Security beefed up around Z-Morh tunnel in J-K's Ganderbal ahead of inauguration

The deployment of security personnel has been increased in vulnerable areas

SRINAGAR, Jan 11: Security has been beefed up around the Z-Morh tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district which is likely to be thrown open by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 13, officials said on Saturday.

The prime minister is likely to address a public rally after the inauguration of the tunnel in Gagangir in the Sonamarg area of the central Kashmir district, they said.

The security has also been strengthened in many areas of the valley, including Srinagar.

"Security has been tightened near the Z-Morh tunnel. Multi-layered security arrangements have been put in place and the PM's security team, comprising SPG personnel, has taken over the venue," the officials said.

They said the venue is now off-limits for the public.

Jammu and Kashmir Police, paramilitary forces and the Army are part of the security apparatus for Monday's inauguration. Extensive area domination exercises, searches and patrols are being conducted for the smooth conduct of the event, the officials said.



They said sharpshooters have been deployed at vulnerable points while aerial and technical surveillance, including through drones, is also being undertaken. The area is being monitored round-the-clock, they added.

Seven people, including a local doctor, were killed in a terrorist attack near the tunnel site in the Gagangir area on October 20 last year. Authorities have closed the Srinagar-Leh national highway from Saturday to Monday "due to icy road conditions caused by inclement weather and to facilitate

maintenance work by road maintenance agencies".

However, it is widely perceived that the arterial road link between Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has been shut for the PM's visit.

Meanwhile, security has also been strengthened in Ganderbal district and the neighbouring Srinagar.

"Tight security is being maintained along the Srinagar-Sonamarg road passing through Ganderbal and area domination exercises are being conducted," the officials said.

The deployment of security personnel has been increased in vulnerable areas and checkpoints have been set up at several places, they said.

Checking and frisking of people and vehicles have been intensified while patrolling exercises are also taking place, they said.

Built at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway, the strategic 6.5-km Z-Morh tunnel will be a major step towards making the Ladakh region accessible by road throughout the year. The work on the project began in May 2015 and was completed last year.

The soft opening of the tunnel was done in February 2024.

The tunnel is vital in terms of the defence needs of the country in the Ladakh region and also connecting the youngest union territory to the rest of the country.

Situated at an altitude of 8,650 feet, the Z-Morh tunnel is a two-lane road tunnel equipped with a parallel 7.5-metre-wide escape passage for emergencies.

The tunnel ensures seamless connectivity between Gagangir

and Sonamarg, and will ease summer travel to Ladakh.

Along with the under-construction Zojila tunnel, the Z-Morh tunnel will ensure uninterrupted connectivity to Baltal and Ladakh regions for civilian and military traffic.

National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), which oversees the project, has said that the "engineering marvel" is a game changer for the region.

"The Sonamarg Tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir is a game-changer for the region, offering more than just a connection between Gagangir and Sonamarg. This engineering marvel is poised to unlock the full potential of the region's trade and tourism sectors," the NHIDCL said on X.

It said the tunnel is equipped with cutting-edge technologies that provide real-time updates and seamless connectivity for users. This futuristic infrastructure will not only enhance the travel experience but also set a new standard for road connectivity in the region. (PTI)

Sharmila demands resignation of Union Minister Amit Shah over Ambedkar remarks



VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 11: Andhra Pradesh Congress chief YS Sharmila on Saturday demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing him of "ridiculing" B R Ambedkar in his speech in Rajya Sabha.

The APCC president alleged that Shah had mocked Ambedkar by saying that it has become a fashion to chant his name and BJP leaders kept laughing at these remarks.

"Ambedkar mocked Amit Shah and BJP leaders laughed over this. He (Shah) insulted him (Ambedkar) that it has become a fashion (to chant Ambedkar's name)," said Sharmila, addressing a roundtable in the port city.

The roundtable was also at-

tended by CPI, students and others. Noting that India's first law minister, Ambedkar, was a legend and an ideology, the opposition leader said the BJP will never understand this matter.

For this reason, she said the Congress party is organising 'Jai Babu, Jai Samvidhan' campaign across the country.

According to Sharmila, BJP is a "communal and casteist party", which is indulging in politics of caste and religion.

Further, she alleged that the country's assets are being handed over to business tycoon Gautam Adani, including 'submitting' the institutions of the country, among other allegations. (PTI)

Dozen illegally built houses demolished in anti-encroachment drive in Jammu

JAMMU, Jan 11: A dozen illegally built houses and four plinths were demolished in a major encroachment drive here on Saturday, leading to retrieval of 10 kanals of the land belonging to the Jammu Development Authority (JDA), a senior government official said.

The successful drive was conducted by the JDA in close coordination with the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC), Jammu district administration and police at Sidhra, Majeen and Rangoor areas, the official said.

He said the areas with large-scale recent encroachments, including Dingyali, Gulshan Nagar, and Asrarabad in revenue villages Majeen and Ragoora, Sidhra, were identified for the drive. Despite issuing notices or warning in such areas, the land mafia along with a team of contractors with labourers continued their activities.

During the drive, 12 illegal houses and four plinths were demolished, retrieving 10 kanals of the JDA land on the spot, the official said, adding besides giving a strong message to all encroachers

and other builders in the area that no one will get away with impunity.

The drive was a success, not only in removing illegal encroachments but also in raising awareness among residents about the importance of knowing the procedure for carrying out construction on the land with clear title under ownership as the government or the JDA land shall be retrieved, he said.

Vice Chairman, JDA, Pankaj Sharma said his department is committed to ensuring that public land is safeguarded against unauthorised encroachments and will continue such efforts in the future.

"The drive is a clear message to the public that they should ensure construction of housing after verifying the title of land and following the due procedure for construction of buildings," he said, advising public not to construct buildings on the acquired JDA land in Ragoora, Majeen, and Sidhra areas for larger public interest as the JDA has earmarked the land for development of township in the area. (PTI)

Hold panchayat elections within 90 days or face agitation: AJKPC to JK govt

JAMMU, Jan 11: Expressing concern over the delay in conducting panchayat elections, the All Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Conference (AJKPC) on Saturday asked the Jammu and Kashmir government to hold the polls within 90 days or face an agitation.

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha assured people in November last year that the elections to the panchayats and urban local bodies (ULB) would be held soon. These elections were last held in 2018.

The panchayats and ULBs completed their term more than a year ago. The elections could not be held on time due to various reasons, including the delimitation exercise and reservation of wards for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

"The issue (of holding panchayat polls) is urgent because panchayats play a vital role in local governance. Their prolonged inactivity has hindered development and left rural residents without proper representation or an avenue to voice their concerns," AJKPC



president Anil Sharma said.

He said holding elections on time and redefining boundaries is essential for reviving democracy and improving governance in the region. "The term of panchayats... in J&K expired on January 9, 2024, and the J&K government, through an order, appointed block development officers as administrators of panchayats."

"For over a year now, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been defunct and there seems to be no sincere effort by the government to hold these elections. Even the State Election Commission appears to be silent on the matter," Sharma said.

Cautioning the government and the poll body, Sharma said, "If elections to panchayats are not held within 90 days, the AJKPC will launch a mass agitation."

He also said that AJKPC functionaries would soon be meeting LG Sinha, chief minister Omar Abdullah, and the state election commissioner to press their demand for immediate action. (PTI)

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He also said that AJKPC functionaries would soon be meeting LG Sinha, chief minister Omar Abdullah, and the state election commissioner to press their demand for immediate action. (PTI)

NGT issues show cause to DPCC member secretary for violation of order

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: The NGT has issued a show cause notice to the member secretary of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) asking him to appear before it and explain why proceedings should not be initiated against him for violating the tribunal's order of imposing a fine on a violator.

In May last year, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the member secretary to impose environmental compensation (EC) on a private banquet (Jhankar Banquets) for unauthorised use of around 18,500 square metres green area around the Asiad Tower near the Siri Fort complex for commercial purposes, such as marriages and parties.

In its order passed on Friday, the tribunal noted that the DPCC had filed an action-taken report dated December 10, 2024, stating that despite the green panel's earlier order, the EC had not been

imposed and that it did not intend to levy the fine.

"It is evident from the record that the green area was found to be misused by project proponent (Jhankar Banquets) thereby causing damage to the environment, yet DPCC has taken a view otherwise and contrary to the specific directions given by the tribunal," said a bench of judicial member Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel.

"We direct member secretary, DPCC to appear in person before the tribunal to show cause as to why action may not be taken for his violation of tribunal's order by initiating proceedings under Section 26 of National Green Tribunal Act, 2010," it added.

Section 26 of the NGT Act details the penalties for failing to comply with the orders, awards or decisions of the tribunal.

The matter has been posted on February 19 for further proceedings. (PTI)

Delhi: Man flees after attacking 2 co-workers in jeans manufacturing factory

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: A man attacked two of his colleagues with a pair of scissors following a dispute at a jeans manufacturing factory in the Kardampuri area of northeast Delhi, an official said on Saturday. The incident occurred around 10 pm on Friday when the complainant, Aamir, was working alongside his cousin at the factory, the official said.

According to Aamir, the altercation began when his co-worker, Instkar, made an indecent comment about his wife. Upon objecting to the remark, an argument ensued between the two.

The situation quickly escalated into a physical scuffle, during which Instkar allegedly assaulted Aamir and his cousin with a pair of scissors before fleeing the scene. Aamir immediately reported the assault to the police and a case was registered at the Jyoti Nagar Police Station.

Authorities have launched an investigation into the matter, the official said. (PTI)

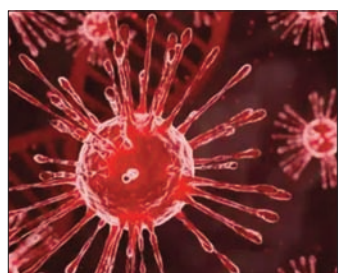
Delhi: 20-year old suffers injuries after being stabbed by three men

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: A 20-year-old man was injured after being attacked by three unidentified men in the Shani Bazar area of northeast Delhi, an official said on Saturday. The incident occurred around 10:15 pm on Friday when Atif was attacked by the assailants in the market, the officer said.

The assailants inquired about a person named Sameer, accusing Atif of assaulting him, to which the victim denied any knowledge of or issue with anyone named Sameer. Despite Atif's response, the attackers proceeded to stab him before fleeing the scene.

The victim was immediately rushed to GTB Hospital for medical treatment. (PTI)

9-month-old child tests positive for HMPV in Gujarat; cases rise to four in state



AHMEDABAD, Jan 11: Gujarat has reported its fourth human metapneumovirus (HMPV) case, with a nine-month-old child contracting the infection in Ahmedabad, officials said Saturday. All the cases have been reported in less than a week.

The baby boy was admitted to a private hospital in the city on January 6 with a cold, cough and difficulty in breathing. He has no history of foreign or other travel, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation said.

On Friday, an eight-year-old boy from Sabarkantha district was confirmed to be infected

with HMPV, making him the third case in the state.

Two days back, an 80-year-old man tested positive for the viral infection in Ahmedabad. The patient, who has been suffering from asthma, is currently being treated at a private hospital.

Gujarat recorded its first case of HMPV on January 6, when a two-month-old boy from Rajasthan was found to be afflicted with the viral disease, which has symptoms like fever, nasal congestion, runny nose, and cough. He was discharged after being treated at a hospital here.

With the infant's infection, the state has seen four HMPV cases since January 6.

HMPV, discovered in 2001, belongs to the Paramyxoviridae family. It is closely related to the Respiratory Syncytial Virus. It spreads through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing as well as by touching contaminated surfaces or coming into direct contact with infected individuals. (PTI)

Five youngsters drown in Konda Pochamma reservoir in Telangana

HYDERABAD, Jan 11: Five youth drowned in Konda Pochamma Sagar reservoir in Siddipet district of Telangana on Saturday, police said.

Seven people from Hyderabad reached the reservoir today to spend some time, they said. Five of them ventured into the reservoir and drowned. Two others were clicking photographs.

The youngsters, who visited the Konda Pochamma temple in the district, reached the reservoir by taking a different route. Outsiders are not allowed entry into the reservoir, they said.

Efforts are on to recover the bodies of the deceased.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy expressed grief over the incident and directed district officials to carry out relief works.

BRS MLA from Siddipet T Harish Rao condoled the deaths and urged the government to take measures to prevent recurrence of such tragedies.

He demanded ex-gratia of ₹ 15 each to the kin of the dead. (PTI)

PM Modi to attend Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue

'It will also include deliberations on the themes led by mentors and domain experts'

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will spend the entire day on Sunday with the participants in the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue', being held as part of his efforts to bring one lakh youths having no political link in politics.

The programme is being held on National Youth Day, which marks the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

An official statement said Modi will engage with 3,000 "dynamic young" leaders from across India. Modi said on X that he will spend the entire day with "my young friends" and over conversations and lunch, they will discuss various subjects aimed at building a "Viksit Bharat".

The youths who he will be meeting have shown great passion for



science, technology, innovation, culture and more, he added.

The statement said the event aims to break the 25-year-old tradition of holding the National Youth Festival in a conventional

manner. It aligns with Modi's Independence Day call to engage one lakh youths having no political affiliation in politics and provide them with a national platform to make their ideas for Viksit Bharat

a reality. Modi will participate in multiple activities designed to inspire, motivate, and empower the nation's future leaders, it said.

It added, "Innovative young leaders will make 10 PowerPoint presentations representing the 10 thematic areas pivotal to India's development before the prime minister. These presentations reflect the innovative ideas and solutions proposed by young leaders to address some of India's most pressing challenges."

He will also release a compilation of the best essays written by participants on the ten themes. These themes encompass diverse areas such as technology, sustainability, women empowerment, manufacturing, and agriculture. During the dialogue, which

starts on Sunday, the young leaders will engage in competitions, activities, and cultural and thematic presentations.

It will also include deliberations on the themes led by mentors and domain experts. It will also witness cultural performances showcasing India's artistic heritage while symbolising its modern advancements.

A total of 3,000 youths have been selected to participate in the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue through the Viksit Bharat Challenge, a meticulously crafted, merit-based multi-level selection process to identify and showcase the most motivated and dynamic young voices from across the nation, the statement said.

It saw the participation of around 30 lakh young minds. (PTI)

Chris Martin gives 'Punjabi aa gaye oye' shoutout to Diljit Dosanjh at Abu Dhabi concert



NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Coldplay frontman Chris Martin surprised his Indian fans as he read Diljit Dosanjh's famous catchphrase "Punjabi aa gaye oye" from a fan poster during his Abu Dhabi concert.

Martin, who is set to perform in India later this month, was interacting with the audience during his concert at Zayed Sports City stadium.

During his performance, Martin came across a fan-holding poster with "Punjabi aa gaye oye" written over it, which is often used by Dosanjh at his performances.

The singer was quick to read the phrase, which was followed by a loud cheer from the crowd. "We love you too," he added.

The phrase, which translates to "Punjabis have arrived", has become synonymous with Punjabi pride and representation globally. The video of the moment has gone viral on social media after Dosanjh's team shared it on Instagram Stories.

"Chris Martin says 'PUNJABI AA GAYE OYE'. Chris Martin reading Coldplay fan posters and flags is so wholesome," posted Team Dosanjh.

Coldplay's highly-anticipated concerts in India are touted to be the biggest draw of 2025.

As part of their 'Music of the Spheres World Tour', the British band has three shows at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on January 18, 19 and 21. A fourth show will be held at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on January 25.

They earlier performed in the country in 2016 at the Global Citizen Festival in Mumbai. (PTI)

Ram Charan's 'Game Changer' collects ₹ 186 crore worldwide on day one

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Actor Ram Charan's Telugu film "Game Changer" earned ₹ 186 crore gross at the global box office on its opening day, the makers announced on Saturday. The political action film, which made its debut in theatres worldwide on Friday, marks renowned filmmaker S Shankar's foray in Telugu cinema after directing several commercially-successful Tamil titles such as "Indian", "Anniyan", "Sivaji: The Boss", "Enthiran" and "2.0".

Production banner Sri Venkateswara Creations shared a day one box office collection of the movie on its social media handles.

"King size entertainment unleashes in theatres #GameChanger takes a blockbuster opening at the BOX OFFICE #BlockbusterGameChanger GROSSES 186 CRORES WORLDWIDE on Day 1," the company said.

"Game Changer" features Charan as Ram Nandan, a former IPS officer turned district collector with a fiery temperament, who takes on corrupt politicians, including Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Bobbili Mopidevi, to uphold his father Appanna's vision of a corruption-free nation. The film also stars Kiara Advani as the female lead alongside Anjali, S J Suryah, Srikanth, Sunil, Jayaram and Samuthirakani.

It is produced by Dil Raju through the banner Sri Venkateswara Creations. (PTI)



Assam's Anuradha Roy to participate in Miss India World Wide pageant in New York this year

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Anuradha Roy, hailing from Guwahati, has recently won the inaugural title of Miss India Poland 2024. The beauty pageant was organised by India Poland Women's Federation and Razvi Events for Indians living in Poland. She has also received the Miss Photogenic title at the same pageant held in Warsaw, Poland.

The 27-year-old triumphed over 400 contestants in the screening phase, with 16 advancing to the final round. In a press conference held in the city at Guwahati Press Club today she said that she is now gear up to participate in the Miss India World Wide pageant in New York in September 2025.

Anuradha Roy completed her secondary education at Khanapara Kendriya Vidyalaya in Guwahati and her Higher Secondary in Humanities from Army Public School Narangi. She earned her Bachelor's Degree with Honours in Psychology from the University of Delhi and holds two Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology and Criminology.

While she grew up in Guwahati, she was fond of dance, music and enthusiastic in beauty pageant and also holds visharad in Bharatnatyam. From her school days she used to participate in various beauty events both in schools and competitions and won several recognitions. She would like to establish Assam's proud Culture, Tourism and Assamese Mekhela Sador in the global platform.

In her speech she said, "I would like to stay in Assam very much. I love Assam to spare my leisure time here with my family, friends and people of this very beautiful state. I would like to establish the state and its culture in the global platform in tourism. In 2021, Anuradha received a scholarship from the Polish government to pursue further studies. She is currently working as the Senior Technical Recruiter in Poland and practices as a psychologist alongside."

Artistes must constantly strive to evolve and grow: Sonal Mansingh



GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Eminent Indian classical dancer Sonal Mansingh on Friday cautioned upcoming artistes from remaining confined to their safe zone and emphasised that they must constantly strive to evolve and grow.

While more openings are available for aspiring artistes in current times, the new generation must not appear to be 'fragile' and has to pursue their art forms with passion, she added. "There are so many openings now that we never had. In my time there was no television, no big 'utsavs'. It was by word-of-mouth and reviews by dance critics. Now word-of-mouth is gone as social media is there," she said in an interview with PTI. "Social media gives thumbs up or thumbs down, and young people get discouraged very fast, they go into depression," she added.

Mansingh asserted that her generation used to take up everything as a challenge and never went into depression. "If another artiste was getting 10 shows and I was getting two, I would show in these two that I can do it. We only worked harder. But now there is this thing of being very fragile, and that will never help," she maintained. She exhorted the youngsters to pursue the art forms of their choice as a challenge and with professionalism, with passion and discipline being the cornerstones.

On opportunities that reality shows offer to the present generation, the former Rajya Sabha member said that such shows have provided a platform for artistes from far-flung areas to showcase their talent and earn money or recognition which otherwise would not have been possible.

But on the flip side, such fame is short-lived and most of them remain confined to their own coterie, she maintained.

"They do not go forward. I think there is hardly a handful like Shreya Ghoshal who could make a name later. They remain in that very happy, pleasant area, they don't grow, and life and art is all about constant growth," the veteran dancer told PTI ahead of a dance performance scheduled here on Saturday.

She stressed that constancy has to be maintained with hard work and constant struggle. On some dance forms getting more recognition than others, Mansingh said it has to be corrected or balanced by the local artistes.

"They have to do more research, they have to try and see how to present it because when they present it, it has authenticity," she said.

"They can also come and meet artistes like me, and see how we integrate," Mansingh said when asked how well-known artistes can help the lesser-recognised art forms find a more wider audience. Pointing to the rich history of Assam, she said, "Assam has a very rich tribal, folk, classical history, all three levels are here and it is reflected in the music, art forms, even attire, weaving. I would really urge the great artistes from Assam to pay attention to that." On her performance scheduled for Saturday, Mansingh said it will be the premier of her 'Bhava-Ganga' recital, in which she will present her interpretation of the river Ganga as a perennial flow of life. The performance will have three episodes, with the first depicting the descent of Ganga to the earth at the prayers of King Bhagirath, the second narrating the encounter of a boatman and Lord Rama while crossing the river and the third having Lord Shiva asking for alms from Annapurna Devi.

"Each of these episodes has its own message. The first signifies how the Ganga flows for the welfare of the people and land. The second is on social equality and the third on the importance of women in our lives," she said.

Mansingh expressed her gratitude to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region for its support for the performance. (PTI)

The ultimate adventure of MTV Roadies Double Cross begins!

MTV Roadies Double Cross kicks off on its epic 20th season adventure!

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Celebrating 20 iconic years, the adventure reality juggernaut MTV Roadies is all set to bring to fans its boldest and most unpredictable season yet—MTV Roadies Double Cross! The landmark season of the legacy show raises stakes higher, in a world where betrayal lurks around the corner, trust is rare, and every move is a double-edged sword. This season, fans will be treated to an adrenaline-fueled journey. Hero Karizma MTV Roadies Double Cross co powered by Avvatar Sports Nutrition and POCO, premiered on Saturday.

Hosting this electrifying odyssey is Rannvijay Singha, the OG Roadie, whose return as the host cements the legacy of the show as it embarks on its boldest season. Joining him are the formidable Gang Leaders, each bringing unique strengths and their distinct style to the Journey. Gang Leader Prince Narula, celebrating a remarkable 10-year journey with MTV Roadies, solidifies his legacy as a master tactician and fearless competitor. Neha Dhupia returns with a fiery comeback, bringing her trademark blend of wisdom and firepower. Reigning champion Rhea

Chakraborty is set to defend her title, while youth icon Elvish Yadav makes his debut as a Gang Leader, injecting fresh energy with his unfiltered persona.

With grueling twists and intense challenges, contestants must navigate a high-stakes play where every decision could seal their fate. Both contestants and Gang Leaders are drawn into a web of fragile alliances and game-changing moves, keeping viewers on the edge of their seats. Adding an exciting new dimension to the experience is the debut of the GD (Group Discussion) live raw experience exclusively available only on JioCinema. For the first time ever in the history of the genre-defining show, fans will be treated to an exclusive, unfiltered look at the chaotic madness and drama of making it to

the biggest adventure reality show of the country.

Speaking about this milestone season, Rannvijay Singha shared his excitement saying, "MTV Roadies has always felt like home to me and being part of this milestone season is truly special. With the Double Cross theme, fans are in for the most intense and unpredictable MTV Roadies journey yet. I am excited to reunite with Prince and Neha. And of course, I am all excited to work alongside Rhea and Elvish for the first time!"

Gang Leader Prince Narula expressed his pride in completing a decade with MTV Roadies and promised to bring his signature strategy and intensity to the table once again, saying "After a decade with MTV Roadies, it still gives me goosebumps. Double Cross is going to test everyone and I'm ready to lead my gang through every twist and turn."



Returning as the Gang Leader, Neha Dhupia said, "The love from fans has been overwhelming, and I'm back to fulfill their wish. MTV Roadies has always been about strength and power, and as a woman, I'm here to lead with courage and inspire my gang to break boundaries and shine. This journey has given me the strength to speak my mind under all circumstances and stand firmly by what I believe in—a lesson I will pass on to my gang as we strive for the best."

Gang Leader Rhea Chakraborty said, "Winning last season was exhilarating, but this time, I'm prepared to defend my crown with twice the grit. The theme of Double Cross aligns perfectly with the fierce competition that MTV Roadies stands for and I am excited to experience it."

Joining as the Gang Leader for the first time, fan favourite Elvish Yadav said, "I'm here to bring the josh and shake things up! MTV Roadies Double Cross is the right place for the bold and I'm ready to lead my gang with full power. Get ready for some strong competition and true sportsmanship!"

Mumbai eye return to winning ways, Jamshedpur FC target top-two spot



MUMBAI, Jan 11: Title holders Mumbai City FC will look to regain their footing at home when they face Jamshedpur FC in the Indian Super League here on Sunday.

The Islanders are determined to recover from a disappointing home defeat and will aim to avoid back-to-back losses at the Mumbai Football Arena for the first time since early 2023.

Mumbai City FC have lost two of their last five matches at the Mumbai Football Arena, including a 0-3 defeat to NorthEast United FC on December 30, 2024. The last time they suffered consecutive home losses was in early 2023.

The Islanders enter the match with concerns over their defensive structure.

After maintaining an impres-

sive run of four consecutive clean sheets, Mumbai City FC have now conceded multiple goals in back-to-back matches -- a worrying trend that head coach Petr Kratky will be eager to address.

With their last two home matches yielding a defeat and a draw, the Islanders need a solid defensive display to secure three points.

Despite their defensive strug-

gles, Mumbai City FC's attack remains potent.

Leading the charge is Lalianzuala Chhange, a consistent performer with three goals and two assists against Jamshedpur FC in ISL history.

Chhange's ability to unlock defences could be crucial in breaking down the Red Miners' resilient backline.

"Regardless of how we play,

every game is important for me. We need to win and that's our No. 1 priority. We need to play good football, as it gives us more chances to succeed," Mumbai City FC coach Petr Kratky said.

Jamshedpur FC, with a poor away record this season, on the other hand will seek to break their streak of four consecutive road defeats and keep their momentum alive as they push for a top-two spot.

Jamshedpur FC thrive without dominating possession. The Red Miners have the lowest average possession in the league (41.1%) but are masters of the counter-attack.

By absorbing pressure and striking swiftly on the break, they've managed to keep pace with the league's top teams.

The key to their strategy is Muhammed Uwais, who has been instrumental in transitioning play from defence to attack.

His dual role makes him a crucial player for Jamshedpur's counter-attacking setup.

Adding further strength to their cause is Stephen Eze, whose aerial dominance and defensive prowess make him a standout performer.

"It's an away game. So, it's very important. We must take full responsibility and work hard to get a positive result," the Red Miners coach Khalid Jameel said.

The Islanders are sixth in the table, with 23 points from 14 games, courtesy of six victories and five draws. (PTI)

Australian Open 2025: Alcaraz and Sinner have a real rivalry atop men's tennis

MELBOURNE, Jan 11: When Carlos Alcaraz is on court for a training session, perhaps working on his newly revamped service motion, he's doing so to buttress a game already good enough to claim four Grand Slam titles.

He's also got his young rival, Jannik Sinner, in mind.

"The good thing for me is, when I'm seeing him winning titles, when I'm seeing him in the top of the ranking, it forces me to practice even harder every day. In practice, I'm just thinking (about) the things that I have to improve to play against him," Alcaraz said Saturday, a day before the start of the Australian Open. "That, I think, is great for me: Having him (and) such a great rivalry, so far, just to (force me to) give (my best), every day."

Alcaraz, 21, and Sinner, 23, head into the 2025 tennis season at the top of the men's game, coming off a year that portended greatness for both. With Rafael Nadal now joining Roger Federer in retirement, leaving 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic as the lone remaining member of the Big Three on tour, it appears as though Alcaraz and Sinner have separated themselves from the rest of the next generation, each taking two of the four Slam singles trophies in 2024. Forever, it seemed, the sport's most important laurels were dominated by Federer, Nadal and Djokovic, and anyone harboring hopes of claiming them needed to defeat at least one, and often two, of that trio.

The names have changed, but the dynamic is similar.

"I feel like now, with Jannik and with Carlos, it kind of moved toward the same way, just with new guys. You have to go through them to win big tournaments. It's as simple as that," said Alexander Zverev, a two-time major finalist who is seeded No. 2 at Melbourne Park, between No. 1 Sinner and No. 3 Alcaraz. "They both won two Grand Slams (last) year. And they're the two best players in the world, for sure. And you have to beat them to win the tournament."

Sinner is the defending champion in Australia, and went on to also win the U.S. Open in September, part of a season in which he went 73-6 with eight titles — but also dealt with a doping case in which he tested positive twice for trace amounts of an anabolic steroid, blamed it on accidentally being exposed to a banned substance via a massage from his trainer and was exonerated. (The World Anti-Doping Agency appealed that ruling; a closed-door hearing will be held at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland on April 16-17.)

Alcaraz exited from the Australian Open in the quarterfinals against Zverev last January, but then triumphed at the French Open, getting past Zverev in the final, and Wimbledon, where he won against Djokovic in the final for the second year in a row.

On Sunday, Zverev faces wildcard entry Lucas Pouille at night, after defending champion Aryna Sabalenka takes on 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens. Other top names scheduled for Day 1 action include 2024 Australian runner-up and Paris Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen and three-time major finalist Casper Ruud.

Alcaraz, Sinner and Djokovic, along with five-time major champ Iga Swiatek and 2023 U.S. Open winner Coco Gauff, all will get started Monday.

If Alcaraz, whose first major title came at the 2022 U.S. Open at age 19 and propelled him to a debut at No. 1, wins this Australian Open, he would be the youngest man in tennis history to complete a career Grand Slam, with at least one championship from each of the sport's four most prestigious events. "It's truly remarkable," former player Feliciano Lopez said, "what he has achieved in the last three years." Alcaraz and Sinner already are establishing quite a head-to-head rivalry, one that already has shown glimpses of the potential to become as memorable as Federer vs. Nadal, or Djokovic vs. Nadal. (AP)

Rani Rampal hopes Women's Hockey India League will inspire future Olympic stars

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Former captain Rani Rampal believes the Women's Hockey India League (HIL) can have a similar impact on the sport as the Indian Premier League (IPL) has had on cricket, providing a platform for young girls to earn national team spots for the 2032 Olympics. The inaugural WHIL, scheduled from January 12 to 26 in Ranchi, will feature four teams: Delhi SG Pipers, Odisha Warriors, Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers, and Soorma Hockey Club.

"There may be four teams only this time but starting the league has been a long time coming. Hockey India needs to be complimented for this," Rampal, who will serve as a mentor and coach for the Soorma HC, told SAI Media.

"The men's hockey team won back-to-back bronze medals in the Olympics in Tokyo and Paris because the foundation was laid by the men's Hockey India League years back," said the former India hockey captain.

"Now thanks to the introduction of the women's HIL, we will get to see a lot of talented young women showcase their mettle in the 2032 and 2036 Olympics. This platform will turn out immensely fruitful." The 30-year-old from Haryana, who has played over 250 international matches, is embarking on her first stint as a support staff member. The Hockey India League (HIL) began in 2013 with six men's teams, running for five years before it was discontinued primarily due to commercial challenges. It

was revived after seven years with the addition of a women's league.

Reflecting on the rise of women's cricket, Rampal drew parallels with the success of the Women's Premier League, which gave the sport a lot more prominence. "Nobody knew much about women's cricket, but now you see, how the sport has become so popular in the nation. Through the women's IPL (WPL), people came to know about it and have started following the sport manifold." (PTI)

Jamwal shocks former Youth champ to join Shiva, Siwach in quarters

BAREILLY, Jan 11: Himachal Pradesh's Abhinash Jamwal pulled off a major upset, knocking out former Youth World champion Vanshaj Kumar, while Shiva Thapa and Sachin Siwach continued their dominant run to sail into the quarterfinals of the 8th Elite Men's National Boxing Championship here on Saturday.

Jamwal defeated the 2022 youth champion Vanshaj of the Services with a decisive 5-0 victory in the 63.5kg category.

Representing Assam, the former World Championship bronze medalist, Thapa, showcased his skills as he eliminated Himanshu Sangwan with a clean 5-0 win in the 60-65kg category.

Former World Youth Champion Sachin Siwach delivered another stellar performance, defeating Kingson Pukhrambam of Manipur by the same margin.

Competing in the 47-50kg category, Rajasthan's Devendra Solanki bagged his third consecutive win, dismantling Mizoram's Zorammuana via a unanimous decision to book his quarterfinal berth. The Services reinforced their status as favourites, with multiple boxers advancing to the next stage.

Alongside Sachin, Hitesh Gulia (light middleweight), Deepak (welterweight), Jugnoo (cruiserweight), and Vishal (heavyweight) delivered commanding wins, maintaining Services' stronghold in the championship.

Punjab's Gopi ended Govind Sahani's impressive streak with a Round 3 victory in the flyweight division.

Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh's Bhanu Prakash stole the show with a powerful knockout win over Goa's Umesh Chavan. (PTI)

Bhutia urges 'sports first' shift in Indian education to create world champions



NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Former Indian football team captain Bhaitung Bhutia has called for a transformative shift in the country's education system, emphasising the need for a more sports-oriented curriculum to nurture future world champions.

Speaking at the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue and National Youth Festival, Bhutia expressed concern that India's current education policies prioritise academics over sports, limiting the potential to produce world-class athletes.

"One view out of all the discussions of taking sports forward which I strongly feel is that we need to collaborate with the min-

istry of education so that our education system supports the sports policies in a big way," Bhutia told PTI Videos in an exclusive interview on the sidelines of the event on Saturday.

"Every kid is specialised to study, become a doctor or an engineer, but a more sports-friendly system has to be in place and that is how we will be able to produce world champions in this country," he said.

Bhutia stressed the need for collaboration between the ministry of education and the ministry of youth affairs and sports to revamp the curriculum.

"The sports minister and education minister should sit together

and have a word on this and ensure that sports is one of the major subjects in the curriculum," he added.

Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviva inaugurated the festival.

The former captain also lauded the government's efforts on hosting the event.

"It is a great initiative by the government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji about Viksit Bharat and it was great to discuss how sports can be taken forward in the country," Bhutia said.

The event, held at Bharat Mandapam, brings together over 3,000 young leaders from across India for thematic discussions and creative competitions. (PTI)

Zinc Football Academy talent Mohammed Kaif joins top ISL club Hyderabad FC

UDAIPUR, Jan 11: Sixteen-year-old defender Mohammed Kaif, a product of Zinc Football Academy, has secured a five-year contract with 2021 Indian Super League champions Hyderabad FC. Born to former Santosh Trophy player Mohammed Sayeed, this transfer marks a significant milestone for the promising young talent from Makrana, Rajasthan.

Kaif became the first footballer from Rajasthan in over 40 years to represent India and has excelled on the international stage in both 2023 and 2024.

He played a key role in winning two SAFF Cup titles and participated in the AFC Asian Cup 2023 Qualifiers. Currently, Kaif is attending the India Under-20 training camp ahead of the Under-20 SAFF Cup in May 2025. His journey began at the AIFF 3-star rated Academy, where he was scouted at just 10 years old in 2018. His de-

velopment at the Academy culminated in an exceptional performance in the AIFF Under-17 Youth League.

As a centre-back and a fan of Spanish legend Sergio Ramos, Kaif has become an inspiration for countless rural and tribal players aspiring to make a mark in football. Dhruv Sood, CEO of Hyderabad FC, said: "We are excited to welcome Mohammed Kaif to Hyderabad FC. We've been tracking his progress for some time and are pleased he sees HFC as the perfect platform for his further development."

"Kaif has been integral to the India Under-17 national team, captaining the side at the international level. At Hyderabad FC, we aim to provide a platform for talented young players to fulfil their potential, and we're confident Kaif will grow as a player and become an important asset to our team." (PTI)

DURBAN, Jan 11: Mahalingam Venkatesan, affectionately known as 'Mali,' has defied numerous challenges, including a cricket ban and a setback in his career, to remain closely connected to the sport he loves.

At 69, the Tamil Nadu native now works as a public officer for the Joburg Super Kings in the SA20 tournament, having written his own remarkable story in the world of cricket.

Mali, now based in Durban, left India to be with the woman he loved and eventually married, all while staying committed to cricket. He has a rich cricketing history, having played alongside former Indian greats such as Kris Srikkanth, Gundappa Viswanath, Syed Kirmani, Roger Binny, and Bharath Reddy in Tamil Nadu.

A botched surgery ended his dream of representing Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy, but Mali went on to work for a national bank, relocate to South

Africa, open three restaurants, and is now works in the SA20.

"I am from Chennai and I played school cricket, varsity, TNCA, CK Nayudu Trophy, U-22 (and) Junior State (competitions). I was even in the Ranji Trophy probables, but I couldn't play because I had a bad incident — due to a wrong operation on my right knee," Mali told PTI.

Mali assisted Chennai Super Kings during the second edition of the IPL in South Africa, and when the country launched its own T20 league two years ago, he was once again called up by the franchise for the SA20.

"In 2009, when they had the IPL in South Africa, Mr N Srinivasan gave me the opportunity to assist them. (Now) after the start of SA20, they appointed me as a public officer for Joburg Super Kings," Mali said.

Rooted in Tamil Nadu, Mali's love story brought him to South Africa, where he started playing again, though his journey was



short-lived.

"I worked with State Bank of India from 1978 to 2000. After retirement from cricket, I was a member in charge of the State Bank team and then I moved to South Africa in the year 2000," he said.

"Why I came to South Africa, it is like a real love story. I met my wife in Chennai in 1983. In 1984, I wanted to come and



meet her in South Africa. I got a special permission from the Government of India and I landed in South Africa.

Mali said he also played cricket in South Africa, where he may have been the first non-native cricketer to do so in 1984. "I played for NCB (Natal Cricket Board), but there were two boards here because of the apartheid time. I played for the

non-white cricket (team). I was selected but they found out that I wasn't a local, I was from India. They banned me and I went back to India," he said.

"(It was) then (when) I met my girlfriend in Chennai. I came here, I convinced her family and in 1986 and we got married," he added.

Reflecting on his time in South Africa as a cricketer, Mali said, "During those times, the non-whites, the coloured, the blacks and Indians, they didn't have an opportunity to play."

"After the end of apartheid you can see that it became well-balanced. A lot of our black players or non-white players were given a chance and they (have) proved it also."

"You can see South Africa was in the finals of the T20 World Cup as well as the World Test Championship now," he added.

For Mali, being involved in the game at his age is all he could ask for. (PTI)

Gambhir, BCCI officials to meet to review Australia tour, selectors to convene to pick CT squad

MUMBAI, Jan 11: The future of leading batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma will be discussed threadbare in a meeting that head coach Gautam Gambhir and chief selector Ajit Agarkar is scheduled to hold with BCCI officials to review the recent tour to Australia here on Saturday.

The back-to-back series defeats against New Zealand (home) and Australia (away) and the diminishing returns with the bat have put Kohli and Rohit under scanner.

The PTI has learned that the powers that be will discuss in detail the future plan — whether to activate the transition switch from next month's Champions Trophy or wait for the cycle to end with the ICC marquee event.

Though it's likely that the senior batters will get another chance to redeem themselves at the ODI Champions Trophy, a format in which they have always excelled.

They may also take into consideration the fact that both Kohli and Rohit have played just three ODIs in 2024 after the 2023 World Cup at home, and that could be too light a sample size to make a final call on their 50-over career.

Both Kohli and Rohit endured different fortunes too in the series against Sri Lanka.

While Kohli amassed 24, 14 and 20 in Colombo, Rohit walked away with scores of 58, 64 and 35 against the Lankans.

But overall, Kohli has been a



champion performer in 50-overs, his staple format and a good outing in the Champions Trophy could bring him, and Rohit too, back into a good frame of mind. However, their Test future is different. The next assignment is an away five-match series against England, and the mandarins will certainly assess the drying runs from Kohli and Rohit in the traditional format.

In the most recent outing against Australia, Kohli, despite a hundred at Perth, could garner only 190 runs at an average of 23.75 while Rohit, who skipped the first Test

and opted out of the fifth match, made 31 runs at 6.2.

Those performances will certainly be mooted thoroughly while seeking Gambhir's views on their desire to continue playing the longest version of the sport.

Similarly, it is possible that the performance of the Gambhir-led coaching staff too could be assayed, and asked about their vision to handle the transition period without any more hiccups.

Apart from the review meeting, the selectors, led by Agarkar, will also convene on Saturday evening

to pick the Indian squad for the Champions Trophy.

India will play all its matches in the UAE and will open the campaign with a match against Bangladesh on February 20.

However, it is unlikely that the team will be announced on this day itself, as the selectors have time till January 12 to release the squad.

They will assess the fitness level of star pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who is recuperating from back spasms, and veteran fast bowler Mohammed Shami.

Shami, who has not played since

the ODI World Cup 2023 because of an ankle surgery, is likely to get a green signal from BCCI's Centre of Excellence physio.

Shami has played in the Ranji Trophy, Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and Vijay Hazare Trophy matches recently for Bengal to underline his increasing fitness levels and match readiness.

The other interesting point will be to see whether Yashasvi Jaiswal will get the nod after doing well in 19 Tests and 23 T20I since making his debut in mid 2023.

The selectors are also expected to discuss and pick the India squad for the five T20Is and three ODIs against England for the home series, beginning from January 22.

There could not be many surprises as the team that did duty in South Africa late last year could be picked up again for the T20Is.

Shami could be included in the ODIs depending on the fitness certificate from CoE, which is understood to be positive though it will be assessed deeply before taking a final decision.

Bumrah and fellow pacer Akash Deep, who will also be in CoE in Bengaluru for recovery from a back niggle, will miss the white ball series against England.

Jaiswal will certainly feature at least one of the squads though, along with Washington Sundar and Nitish Kumar Reddy, who impressed everyone with some gutsy outings Down Under. (PTI)

Sri Lanka beat New Zealand by 140 runs in the 3rd ODI but New Zealand win series 2-1



AUCKLAND, Jan 11: Asitha Fernando and Maheesh Theekshana shared six wickets as Sri Lanka bowled out New Zealand for 150 runs in 29.4 overs to win the third one-day international by 140 runs here Saturday.

Fernando took 3-26 and Theekshana 3-35 to jointly knock the top off the New Zealand innings as it chased 291 for victory. Eshan Fernando also contributed 3-35 as Sri Lanka completed a comprehensive victory.

New Zealand won the three-match series 2-1 in its last matches at home before the ICC Champions Trophy begins in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates next month.

Earlier, Pathum Nissanka made 66 in an innings of two parts as Sri Lanka compiled 290-8 after choosing to bat first. New Zealand then slumped to 21-5 inside seven overs as Fernando helped Sri Lanka unpick the New Zealand top order.

"It's a huge confidence boost for me and for the team as well because we haven't played well in the

first two games. It's a pleasure to play like this," Fernando said.

"We identified a few areas to be improved (after the first two games). Now we are going straight back to work to continue improving day by day."

Mark Chapman was the only New Zealand batter to stand against the chaos, making 81 at a run a ball. Chapman's 51-run partnership with Nathan Smith (17) for the eighth wicket was New Zealand's hope of making a game of it. The run rate never got away from New Zealand but it lost too many wickets early to seriously challenge Sri Lanka's total.

Nissanka reached 50 from 31 balls but almost immediately fell to the ground in pain from an apparent groin or hip strain.

He tried to bat on but was clearly impaired while running between wickets and was 50 not out when he was summoned from the field by Sri Lanka coach Sanath Jayasuriya to receive medical treatment. Matt Henry took 4-55 for New Zealand. (AP)

SGM: Saikia, Bhatia to be officially named as BCCI secretary and treasurer

MUMBAI, Jan 11: Devajit Saikia and Prabtej Singh Bhatia will be officially elected as the BCCI secretary and treasurer respectively during the Special General Meeting (SGM) here on Sunday.

Saikia and Prabtej were the only candidates in the fray for the vacant posts once BCCI electoral officer and former CEC of India, Achal Kumar Joti finalised the list on Tuesday.

Saikia has been working as the BCCI interim secretary since Jay Shah took over as the ICC chairman on December 1.

The BCCI constitution stipulates that any post lying vacant should be filled within 45 days by

calling a SGM, and Sunday's meeting is well within that period, holding on the 43rd day.

Bhatia filed the nomination for the treasurer's post after incumbent Ashish Shelar took oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government recently.

While the election of the two important office-bearers is the main point on the agenda, ICC chairman Shah will attend the SGM as a "special invitee."

Shah, the youngest to assume the ICC Chairman office, will be felicitated by the state units alongside the SGM, apart from discussing some routine points.

Shah had replaced Greg Barclay as ICC chief last month. (PTI)



Sports Minister Mandaviya inaugurates National Youth Festival 2025

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurated the Viksit Bharat Young Leader's Dialogue and the National Youth Festival here on Saturday.

The event, held at Bharat Mandapam, brings together over 3,000 young leaders from across India for thematic discussions and creative competitions.

Notable figures in attendance included Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Raksha Khadse, Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra, ISRO Chief S. Somnath, and journalist Palki Sharma Upadhyay.

In his address, Mandaviya highlighted the pivotal role of youth in shaping India's future.

"Today's event is organized by the youth and is for the youth," he said, urging participants to actively contribute to the nation's progress.

A major highlight of the festival will be the interaction between the Prime Minister and selected youth leaders on January 12, the event's concluding day. Of the 3,000 participants, 20 exceptional young leaders will have the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister over lunch and present their innovative ideas on issues like women's empowerment and other key challenges. (PTI)

ICC Cricket Committee looking to give leeway to bowlers on wides: Shaun Pollock

DURBAN, Jan 11: South African legend Shaun Pollock says the ICC Cricket Committee is working towards giving bowlers "bit more leeway on wides" as the current rule is "very strict on them", particularly when batters make last minute movement. Across ODIs and T20Is, batters make late movements across the crease to disturb bowlers' line and lengths and they end up giving wides.

"I'm working on something. I'm obviously part of the ICC Cricket Committee and we're looking to come up with a bit more leeway for the bowlers on wides. I think it's very strict on them," Pollock told PTI on the sidelines of SA20.

"If a batter jumps across (at the) last minute, it doesn't really work out for me. I think a bowler, at the start of his run-up, needs to know where he can bowl it.

"The current rule tends to suggest that if he moves and it's that point of delivery where the batter is, and that's according to where the wide will be called, I want a little bit of a change," added Pollock.

The 51-year-old said bowlers must know where they have to bowl while on top of their run-up.

"I want them to know exactly when they're running up why or how. How can a bowler be expected to change his game plan at the last second when he's bowling? He needs to have a clear idea where he can go," he said. "So it's in the pipeline, we're all discussing. We need to give a little bit back to the bowlers," he added. Pollock said the SA20 has gone from "strength to strength" like IPL has over the years. "It's just gone from strength to strength. Some of the activities at the ground as well, the Catch 2 Million competition this year has been added," he said.

"I know the young kids are taught, 'you've got to get to the

ground', because we need some money these days with the economy the way it is. But it's definitely gone from strength to strength.

"South African cricket needed this injection — there's no doubt about it. They needed something to create a bit of unbelievable interest in the game," he said.

The former all-rounder said South Africa should look to leverage on their players' experience in the subcontinent conditions during the upcoming Champions Trophy.

"You've got basically the similar players that were at that (ODI) World Cup (2023) where we got to the semifinal and lost to Australia," he said. "We've got a lot of IPL stars who play for South Africa. In those situations, everything looks good. The amount of IPL players, people like Klaasens, Millers, even de Kock, all those guys who spend so much time over there, getting an understanding for conditions, that can only help South Africa.

"They (have) got the ICC Test Championship now as well so it's been some good stuff and, hopefully, some younger individuals come up. We've seen it starting to develop in the Test arena," he added. Pollock said while it is understandable that T20 leagues around the world are "moneymakers", he would prefer players not turning down the national duties for franchise cricket.

"There's always cricketers (available) so you're going to be able to create leagues. It's the moneymaker for a lot of the cricket boards around the world," he said. "You can understand why these leagues are presenting themselves. If you can find windows for them, that's fine. But my biggest concern is where you've got international players who go away and play in these leagues and don't end up playing for their international teams." (PTI)

Maharashtra, Karnataka enter Vijay Hazare semifinals

VADODARA, Jan 11: Four-time champions Karnataka held their nerves to edge out hosts Baroda by five runs, while Maharashtra outplayed Punjab by 70 runs to enter the Vijay Hazare Trophy semifinals here on Saturday. Teenager Arshin Kulkarni struck a composed maiden List A century, while wicketkeeper-batter Nitin Naik hit an explosive unbeaten fifty to power Maharashtra to a handsome win over Punjab at Kotambi Stadium. Kulkarni made a 137-ball 107 in a century-plus partnership with Ankit Bawne (60; 85 balls) before Naik's belligerent knock of 52 not out (29b) at No. 7 lifted them to 275/6. Punjab never posed any threat to the total, losing wickets at regular intervals. Arshdeep Singh was the top-scorer with his 39-ball 49 batting at No. 9 but it was just a matter of time before the innings folded for 205 in 44.4 overs. The pace duo of Mukesh Choudhary (3/44 from 8 overs) and Pradeep Dalhe (2/31 from 9.4 overs) did the maximum damage for Maharashtra, while Rajneesh Gurbani, Kulkarni, Satyajit Bachhav and Azim Kazi bagged one wicket each in a complete show by Maharashtra. (PTI)

India eye another complete performance from youngsters to seal ODI series against Ireland

RAJKOT, Jan 11: Following a commanding performance by the youngsters in the opening match, India will eye another clinical display from them to seal the three-match series when they face Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday.

Despite fielding a relatively inexperienced side, Indian women enjoyed a perfect day in the first ODI, registering a six-wicket win to take a 1-0 series lead.

Captain Smriti Mandhana continued her fine form, laying the foundation with a forceful 41, while the efforts of Pratika Rawal and Tejal Hasabnis, who shared a 100-plus partnership to steer the chase, were crucial.

Their performances are a big boost for the team, especially with regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur missing from the lineup after she was rested for this series.

Pace spearhead Renuka Singh, the highest wicket-taker in the previous series against the West Indies, was also rested for this series.

In her absence, young Titas Sadhu stepped up, striking in her

first spell. Sayali Satghare also impressed, taking a wicket, while Saima Thakor bowled a tidy 10-over spell.

Spinner Priya Mishra had a notable outing with two quick wickets, and vice-captain Deepti Sharma also played her part.

Mandhana, who had previously captained India against New Zealand, managed the inexperienced squad in excellent manner, and the management might be pleased with the bench strength ahead of the home ODI World Cup later this year.

However, India's fielding was subpar in the first ODI.

They dropped Leah Paul twice, allowing Ireland to recover from a precarious 56 for 4 to go past the 200-run mark. The Indian bowlers will also look to execute their plans in a better way to keep Ireland under 200 and close out the match with much more ease.

For Ireland, captain Gaby Lewis played the lead act with a superb 92, but lacked support from the middle order. Paul, benefitting from her chances, also struck a half-century. Ireland will



need more intent from other batters to challenge India.

The biggest disappointment for Ireland was their bowling attack.