

WORLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chinese tech giants Tencent, CATL and others protest US listings as army-linked companies</li> <li>Indonesia, Japan agree to resume stalled talks on transfer of defence equipment</li> </ul>
NATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BJP committed to overall development of Delhi: Nadda</li> <li>Abuse me or call me Dawood, but help Delhi farmers: Chouhan to CM Atishi</li> </ul>

## Nine miners still trapped, one arrested

**Dima Hasao coal mine 'illegal': CM** ● Navy divers to be engaged in rescue of miners

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday that a person has been arrested after nine workers were trapped inside a coal mine in Dima Hasao district, which "appears to be illegal".

He also said a case was registered in connection with the incident that occurred on Monday in the Umrangso area.

Rescue operations have been continuing since Monday but no worker has been brought out of the quarry so far, a district official said.

"The police have registered an FIR under Umrangso PS Case No: 02/2025, citing Sections 3(5)/105 BNS, r/w Section 21(1) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, to investigate the incident. Prima facie, it appears to be an illegal mine. One Punish Nunisa has been arrested in connection with the case," the chief minister posted on "X".

Navy divers have been requisitioned to assist local authorities in rescuing the nine labourers trapped inside the coal mine as the water level inside the quarry has risen to nearly 100 feet, Sarma said.



The divers are flying in from Visakhapatnam and are expected to arrive soon, he said. "Navy deep divers have been requisitioned to assist in the rescue operation. The water level inside the mine has risen to nearly 100 feet, according to the assessment by the stationed team. The divers are flying in from Visakhapatnam and are expected to arrive soon," Sarma posted on "X".

A 35-member NDRF team, led by Commander H P S Kandari, is conducting rescue operations at the site.

Army personnel have been engaged to rescue the nine labourers and a relief task force

comprising specialists such as divers and sappers, equipped with essential tools, reached the site in Umrangso, a defence spokesperson said.

"Engineers task force with equipment, divers and medical teams from the Indian Army and the Assam Rifles have joined the rescue efforts," he said.

All efforts are underway in close coordination with the civil administration to rescue the trapped people, another official said.

The chief minister thanked the army for extending their help in the rescue operations.

"Much gratitude for this quick response. We are deploying all possible efforts to ensure the safe return of our miners," the chief minister posted on the microblogging site.

NDRF and SDRF personnel are also at the site to rescue the miners trapped inside the coal mine. Two water pumping machines were also put into use to flush out the water, another official said.

Since Monday, nine labourers have been trapped inside the mine at the Assam Coal Quarry, situated in the 3 Kilo area of Umrangso, after a sudden gush of water flooded

the site.

According to employees of the quarry, there were around 15 workers inside the mine, though the authorities did not confirm the number.

The chief minister listed the names of the trapped labourers - Ganga Bahadur Shreth, Hussain Ali, Jakir Hussain, Sarpa Barman, Mustafa Seikh, Khushi Mohan Rai, Sanjit Sarkar, Lijan Magar, and Sarat Goyary.

"Distressing news from Umrangso, where labourers are trapped in a coal mine. The exact number and status are yet unknown. The DC, SP and my colleague Kaushik Rai are rushing to the site. Praying to God for everyone's safety," Sarma had said in a post on X.

Eyewitness accounts and initial assessments suggest that the flooding occurred unexpectedly, leaving the workers unable to escape from the mine.

Rescue operations were launched immediately with teams consisting of local authorities, emergency responders and mining experts working to locate and rescue the trapped workers, the officials said. (PTI)

## HMPV cases

Centre asks states to increase surveillance for respiratory diseases

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** The Centre has advised states to step up surveillance for respiratory illnesses including ILI and SARI, and spread awareness about the prevention of transmission of the human metapneumovirus (HMPV) after five cases were detected in India.

Union health secretary Punya Salila Srivastava on Monday chaired a virtual meeting with states and union territories to take stock of respiratory illnesses and HMPV cases in the country and public health measures for their management, a health ministry statement said.

The meeting was attended by Health Research Department secretary Dr Rajiv Bahl, director general of Health Services Dr Atul Goel, experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, (IDSP), Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), National Institute of Virology (NIV), and State Surveillance Units of IDSP, a health ministry statement said.

The meeting was held amid reports of a surge in HMPV cases in China and on a day when five cases of HMPV were confirmed in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat. HMPV is a globally recognised respiratory virus. It is a viral pathogen that causes respiratory infections in people of all age groups.

During the meeting, it was reiterated that the data from IDSP does not indicate any unusual rise in influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illnesses (SARI) cases anywhere in the country, the statement said. This is also corroborated by the ICMR sentinel surveillance data, it said.

Union health secretary Srivastava emphasised that there is no cause for concern for the public as HMPV has been present globally since 2001, the statement said. She advised states to strengthen and review the ILI/SARI surveillance. The states (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Drugs worth over ₹ 11 crore seized in Assam

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Drugs worth over ₹ 11 crore have been seized in three separate operations from Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

Police seized 1.17 kg of suspected heroin worth ₹ 5.1 crore from the Dighar Fulertol area in Cachar district late on Monday. In another operation, they recovered 73.97 kg of ganja worth ₹ 38 lakh from Dhanehari.

The officers intercepted a bus coming from a neighbouring state at Dillai Tiniati and seized another (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Police bust trafficking racket in upper Assam

**TINSUKIA, Jan 7:** Nine people were arrested and two children rescued as a human trafficking racket was busted in upper Assam, police said on Tuesday.

The children were rescued from Naharlagun in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh where the traffickers had sold them, they said. The operation that led to unearthing the racket was led by Deputy Superintendent of Police of Tinsukia Nishita Jagtap and sub-inspector Riyaz Ali.

The gang would lure poor couples in the tea garden areas with money and take away their children who were later sold in other states, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Deendayal Port to become mega port in 3 years: Sonowal

**KANDLA (GUJ), Jan 7:** Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday said the Deendayal Port in Gujarat's Kutch district will become a mega port in the next three years with its cargo handling capacity reaching 300 million tonnes.

Sonowal, minister for ports, shipping and waterways, was addressing the audience at the Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) at Kandla after launching a host of projects. "We all should work together to make Kandla Port a mega port. Within three years, Kandla port will establish itself as a mega port. This means a cargo handling capacity of 300 million (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Excited to build on our commitment to making India AI-first' Microsoft to invest \$3 bn in AI, cloud expansion in India

**BENGALURU, Jan 7:** Microsoft will invest USD 3 billion (about ₹ 25,700 crore) to expand its cloud computing and artificial intelligence capabilities in India, its chief executive officer Satya Nadella said on Tuesday.

The tech giant will also train 10 million people in AI skills in India by 2030, Nadella said, addressing a conference attended by startup founders and executives from technology firms here.

Nadella is the latest in the list of tech tycoons to have visited India - the nation of 1.4 billion people that is emerging as an AI battlefield.

Chip maker Nvidia chief Jensen Huang, AMD's Lia Su, and Meta chief AI scientist Yann LeCun had in recent months visited India, home to millions of programmers and technology services providers like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and Wipro. Nadella said the USD 3 billion investment in India would be the "single-largest expansion" done in the country. "The diffusion rate of AI in India is exciting."



He, however, did not give a time frame for the spending. Microsoft provides its cloud computing services under the Azure brand name. It has over 60 Azure regions comprising more than 300 data centres. "In India, we are excited about all the regions that we have. We have Central

India, South India, West India, and South Central India. We also have the capacities that we built up with Jio. We have a lot of regional expansion happening," Nadella said. When Nadella last visited India in February 2024, he announced the company would provide 2 million people in the country with AI skilling opportunities by 2025, focused on training individuals in smaller cities and rural areas. The Microsoft chairman also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday in New Delhi. Nadella said the Prime Minister shared his vision on the artificial intelligence mission, India stack, and entrepreneurial aspirations in the country, among others.

He had posted a picture of the meeting on X, formerly Twitter, and said, "Excited to build on our commitment to making India AI-first". Prime Minister Modi responded, saying he is "glad to know about Microsoft's ambitious expansion and investment plans in India". Nadella said that after a few years, there will be discussion around correlation between (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 6.8-magnitude quake in Tibet kills 95 people Tremors felt in neighbouring Nepal



**BEIJING, Jan 7:** A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck near one of Tibet's holiest cities on Tuesday, killing at least 95 people and injuring 130 others with tremors also shaking buildings and forcing people to run to the streets in neighbouring Nepal.

According to regional disaster relief headquarters, the quake jolted Dingri County in Xigaze in Tibet Autonomous Region in China at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The US Geological Service, however, put

the quake's magnitude at 7.1.

At least 95 people have been confirmed dead and 130 others injured as of 3 p.m. Tuesday (local time), state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out rescue efforts to carry out relief and rescue operations in the affected areas.

Xi ordered utmost efforts to treat the injured and urged efforts to prevent secondary disasters, properly resettle affected residents, and handle the aftermath work effectively.

Following the quake, China Earthquake Administration launched a level-II emergency service response and sent a work team to the site to assist with disaster relief efforts.

Xizang Autonomous Region also issued a level-II emergency response to the quake.

Some 22,000 disaster relief items, including cotton tents, cotton coats, quilts and folding beds, together with special relief materials for high-altitude and frigid areas, have been dispatched by central authorities to the quake-hit area. Over 1,500 local firefighters and rescue workers have also been dispatched to the ground. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 2nd day of Gunotsav 2025 in KA eventful

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 7:** The second day of the first phase of Gunotsav 2025, aimed at assessing the quality of education across the state, commenced in Karbi Anglong (KA) on Tuesday. Karbi Anglong falls in the first phase of the assessment along with 11 other districts of Assam.

The external evaluation to test students' aptitude in learning was conducted, covering 1,292 primary, ME, and high government schools in the district.

The self-evaluation by teachers of the schools was conducted on the first day, i.e., on Monday. The education department has assigned ministers, MPs, MLAs, Chief Executive Members (CEMs), Executive Members (EMs), IAS, IPS, IFS, APS and AFS officers as ex-



ternal evaluators for the exercise.

The theme of Gunotsav this year is 'Ensuring Quality Education.' Taking part as an external evaluator was the minister for sports and youth welfare and welfare of minorities and development department, Nandita Garlosa. She

attended the morning assembly.

The students started the morning assembly by singing the national anthem 'Jana Gana.' The thought of the day was spoken by the selected students and other activities. Aftermath, the minister visited Town LP School, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Tyre makers investing ₹ 100 crore in NE and Bengal

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Tyre manufacturing companies are investing ₹ 100 crore in the Northeast and parts of West Bengal for skill development of growers and creating infrastructure for increasing the quality and production of natural rubber, their association said.

The initiative has been undertaken as part of Project Indian Natural Rubber Operations (INROAD), said Arnab Banerjee, the chairman of the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association (ATMA).

Banerjee, who is also the MD of CEAT Ltd, said INROAD is a first-of-its-kind project in the world under which the tyre industry is contributing directly towards the development of rubber plantations.

It is financially supported by ATMA members -- Apollo, CEAT,



JK and MRF, and implemented by the Rubber Board of India, he said.

In the last four years, an area of 1,25,272 hectares has been covered under new rubber plantations across 94 districts in the Northeast and West Bengal, he added. This

represents one of the highest rubber plantations ever achieved in the country in a such span of time, Banerjee said.

During this period, a record 5.3 crore planting materials were distributed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Assam offers unparalleled investment opportunities' Advantage Assam 2.0 roadshow in Delhi draws top industrialists

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma successfully conducted high-level industry interactions and diplomatic engagements in New Delhi as part of the prelude to Advantage Assam 2.0 - Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025.

The summit, scheduled for February 25-26, 2025, in Guwahati, aims to attract investments in sectors including semiconductors, aerospace and defence, food processing, tourism and renewable energy.

The Delhi program comprised a series of strategic meetings, industry roundtables and one-on-one interactions with key industrialists and stakeholders to explore investment opportunities in Assam.

Sarma led the CEO roundtable



with industry captains at the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi in the presence of Piyush Goyal, minister for commerce & industry. The session focused on inviting invest-

ments in Assam's priority sectors, with Sarma providing insights into the state's economic vision and policy framework.

"Assam offers unparalleled in-

vestment opportunities, driven by robust policy incentives, abundant natural resources, world class infrastructure and seamless connectivity to Southeast Asia. We invite industries to partner with us as we drive Assam's industrial growth and unlock new opportunities," CM Sarma stated during the interaction.

Many Industry stalwarts attended the investors round table and echoed the same sentiment as they took note of Assam's growing industrial eco system and the government's proactive approach and business friendly policies.

Sarma also chaired the Ambassadors' roundtables, engaging diplomats from the ASEAN, BIM-STEAC, European, Nordic and other nations. Discussions centred on expanding (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# GDP growth likely to slip to 4-year low of 6.4 pc in FY25: Govt data

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25, mainly on account of poor showing by the manufacturing and services sector, according to government data released on Tuesday.

The gross domestic product (GDP) rate of 6.4 per cent will be the lowest since the Covid year (2020-21) when the country witnessed a negative growth of 5.8 per cent. It was 9.7 per cent in 2021-22; 7 per cent in 2022-23; and 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal ended March 2024.

The first advance estimates of National Income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) is lower than the 6.6 per cent projected by the Reserve Bank in December 2024. It is also a tad lower than the finance ministry's initial projection of 6.5-7 per cent.

The advance estimates will be used in preparation for the Union Budget to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on February 1.

The economic growth slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period. It was 6.7 per cent in the first quarter (April-June).

The manufacturing sector output is expected to decelerate to 5.3 per cent from a high of 9.9 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal,



NSO said. The services sector, comprising trade, hotels, transport and communications, is estimated to expand at 5.8 per cent against 6.4 per cent in 2023-24.

On the other hand, the farm sector is estimated to record a growth of 3.8 per cent in the current fiscal, up from 1.4 per cent in 2023-24.

"Real GDP has been estimated to grow by 6.4 per cent in FY 2024-25 as compared to the growth rate of 8.2 per cent in Provisional Estimate (PE) of GDP for FY 2023-24," NSO said.

Nominal GDP is likely to grow at 9.7 per cent in 2024-25 against 9.6 per cent in 2023-24.

According to the data, nominal GDP (GDP at current prices) is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 324.11 lakh crore in 2024-25 compared to

₹ 295.36 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.7 per cent. The size of the economy, as per the current estimates, is USD 3.8 trillion (@₹ 85.7/USD) during 2024-25.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Iera opined that while the NSO's implicit H2 FY2025 projections seem reasonable, some of the sectoral numbers could report higher growth prints. "In our view, the GDP growth in FY2026 will be crucially influenced by global uncertainties as well as domestic uncertainties, amidst considerable base effects. Benefiting from an anticipated capex push in the upcoming Budget, we project the GDP growth at 6.5 per cent in FY2026," she said.

Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Econ-

omist, Crisil, said the decline in government capital expenditure, a key driver of post-pandemic recovery, during the second quarter is unlikely to be compensated for in the rest of the fiscal.

"The urban economy is grappling with the dual challenge of high inflation and slowing credit growth. The Reserve Bank of India's recent data indicates consumer confidence has moderated in urban areas, and growth in retail credit, which has a larger footprint in the urban economy, has slowed," he said.

Further, as per the NSO, the nominal Gross Value Added (GVA) is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 292.64 lakh crore in 2024-25 against ₹ 267.62 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.3 per cent.

Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) at constant prices has witnessed a growth rate of 7.3 per cent during 2024-25 over the growth rate of 4 per cent in the previous financial year.

Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE) at Constant Prices has rebounded to a growth rate of 4.1 per cent compared to the growth rate of 2.5 per cent in the previous fiscal. NSO also said the per capita income (at current prices) is estimated to increase by 8.7 per cent to ₹ 2,00,162 per annum. It was ₹ 1,84,205 in the preceding fiscal. (PTI)

## Bandhan Mutual Fund launches new index fund

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Bandhan Mutual Fund announced the launch of the Bandhan Nifty Alpha Low Volatility 30 Index Fund, bringing new possibilities for investors in 2025.

The index fund is an open-ended scheme combining two investment factors: Alpha and Low Volatility, selecting stocks that have generated alpha throughout history but maintained low volatility.

Highlighting the fund's proposition, Vishal Kapoor, CEO of Bandhan AMC, said, "Investors today need strategies that balance ambition with caution. While each investment factor tends to deliver long-term excess returns, these returns may not always be consistently positive over shorter time horizons. That's where our multi-factor approach makes a difference." Kapoor further explained why the new index fund will be the go-to choice for investors. He stated, "The Bandhan Nifty Alpha Low Volatility 30 Index Fund's strategy combines Alpha for growth potential with Low Volatility for relative stability, aiming to deliver robust risk-adjusted returns across varying market conditions. The Nifty Alpha Low Volatility 30 Index has historically outperformed both broad market indices and single-factor indices, achieving this outperformance at lower or similar volatility levels compared to broad market indices."

The strategy opted by the Bandhan Index fund aims to capture strong growth opportunities while providing relative stability in uncertain markets. By blending these two factors, the fund seeks to deliver consistent performance across market cycles, targeting upside potential and mitigating downside risks.

The New Fund Offer (NFO) opens on Wednesday (January 8, 2025), and closes on Monday (January 20, 2025). Investors can subscribe to the Bandhan Nifty Alpha Low Volatility 30 Index Fund through licensed mutual fund distributors, online platforms, or directly at <https://bandhanmutual.com/nfo/bandhan-nifty-alpha-low-volatility-30-index-fund/>. Designed to suit investors planning a dynamic portfolio with a high-risk appetite, it remains to be seen how well the investor community adopts this new index fund.

## Wagh Bakri Tea to invest ₹ 100 cr for setting up new manufacturing unit in Gujarat

**AHMEDABAD, Jan 7:** Ahmedabad-headquartered Wagh Bakri Tea Group will set up a new plant in Gujarat with an investment of over ₹ 100 crore to increase its raw material storage capacity and instant tea output, CEO Sanjay Singal said on Tuesday.

Singal, who joined Wagh Bakri as its CEO in August last year, said that the new unit will expand its instant tea and raw material warehouse capacities.

The new warehouse will be equipped with Automatic Stock Retrieval System (ASRS), he said.

"We are setting up a new manufacturing unit to basically meet our expanded demand, especially in the instant tea category, because convenience is a new driver for our consumers, and for that we are setting up additional capacity," he said. The new unit will come up at Dakor in Gujarat with an investment of over ₹ 100 crore, and will be ready by the third quarter of 2025, he said.

With the new plant, the com-

## Market benchmarks rebound after two-day decline as Reliance, ICICI Bank rally

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday after sliding for the past two sessions, driven by intense buying in blue-chip stocks like Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and L&T amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, a decline in IT stocks ahead of the earnings season and depreciating rupee against the greenback restricted the market rally, traders said.

In a range-bound trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 234.12 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 78,199.11. During the day, it jumped 487.75 points or 0.62 per cent to 78,452.74. The NSE Nifty gained 91.85 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,707.90. "Amid positive global cues indicating no major concerns regarding HMPV, the domestic market partially recovered from yesterday's sharp sell-off but traded within a range ahead

of the critical first advance estimates for India's FY25 GDP. This comes in the context of moderated growth expectations, as the RBI recently revised its growth projection downwards. "In the near term, the market is expected to remain cautious, awaiting signs of earnings recovery during the upcoming result season, while also dealing with ongoing FII selling, which is driven by the strengthening dollar, rising US bond yields, and reduced expectations of further rate cuts," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Asian Paints, Nestle India, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro and Adani Ports were among the biggest gainers. In contrast, Zomato, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank and In-

fossys were among the losers.

"Despite the respite, markets continue to face significant selling pressure during recovery attempts, indicating that bears remain in control," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.74 per cent, and the midcap index climbed 0.77 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, energy jumped 1.55 per cent, oil & gas surged 1.47 per cent, industrials (1.43 per cent), commodities (1.34 per cent), and services (1.19 per cent). On the other hand, IT and tech were the laggards. "This optimism reflected gains across Asian markets, buoyed by Wall Street's upbeat performance and expectations of a more tempered trade policy from the incoming Trump administration," Devarsh Vakil, Head - Prime Research, HDFC Securities, said. (PTI)

## Okaya EV gets new identity heading into 2025

HT Bureau

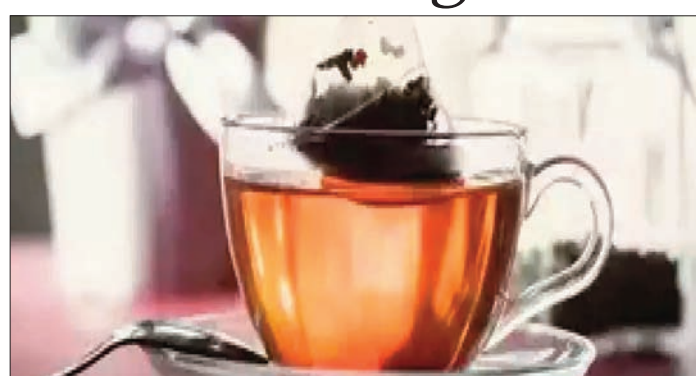
**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Okaya EV, a leading household name in the EV sector, has undergone a significant revamp in order to cater to the growing demands of India's electric mobility market.

The company unveiled its new brand identity, OPG Mobility on Tuesday. OPG Mobility will also leverage a wide dealer network across the country. The brand will encompass two sub-brands: Ferrato, dedicated to premium electric motorcycles and scooters, and OTTOPG, focused on passenger and cargo three-wheelers.

Commenting on the development, Anshul Gupta, managing director of OPG Mobility, said, "After years of leadership in the battery and electronics sector, we are excited to evolve from Okaya EV into OPG Mobility, a holistic provider of complete electric vehicle solutions." Gupta also highlighted the reason behind the rebranding, stating, "This rebranding isn't just about a new name, it's a strategic move to stay ahead in India's rapidly evolving EV market. We understand the need to connect with today's Indian consumers, and this new identity reflects our commitment to modern design, advanced technology, and a customer-first approach. Our new logo embodies our renewed energy and our desire

to engage with a younger, tech-savvy audience."

"The Bharat Mobility 2025 Expo is the perfect platform to unveil this new vision. We will launch our first product under the OPG Mobility brand and implement this visual transformation across our entire portfolio. This change will be reflected in every customer touchpoint, both virtual and physical, ensuring a consistent and engaging brand experience," Gupta further added. At the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, OPG Mobility will launch its first product under the new branding and showcase its improved full range of electric vehicles. This includes existing models with enhanced product efficiency, now featuring the OPG Mobility logo. The company's 40-year strong legacy in battery and electronics technology has positioned it as a key player in India's electric mobility sector, offering a diverse portfolio of high-speed and low-speed electric scooters, premium electric bikes, and passenger and cargo three-wheelers. With its refreshed identity, OPG Mobility aligns with the Indian government's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision, focusing on developing a new generation of made-in-India electric two-wheelers and three-wheelers. By 2025, OPG Mobility plans to ensure premium service access for every customer, from all major cities to tier-3 and tier-4 locations.



pany will increase its capacity to produce instant tea by five times from the current 3,000-4,000 packets every day. "With the new instant tea line, this will grow up to 20,000 packets per day," he said.

Further, its storage capacity will increase by 50 per cent to around 15-18 lakh chests, with each accommodating 14-20 kg, he said.

The company continues to launch new products every month and open new tea lounges in different cities. It also plans to increase

its focus on e-commerce, quick commerce, digitisation, artificial intelligence in manufacturing and big data, etc., Singal said. "We started in 2023-24 with around 34 tea lounges, and added 20 this year. We plan to add a couple of stores every quarter. We are not here to look at the crazy expansion of tea lounges. This business is an integral part of our vision for the tea category, so we would like to expand where we can give good experience and make tea interest-

ing, exciting for consumers," he said. Even when India's tea production dropped 8-12 per cent compared to last year, the company's volume growth has remained higher. "Our production has been higher than last year, with a double-digit growth compared to last year," he said, adding that fresh pricing will be based on next year's production.

"We assume that prices will rationalise, and we will see how we want to manage that. Having said that, the reason for price increases is that we will not compromise on the quality of a blend even for money," he said. He said that as per AC Nielsen, Wagh Bakri enjoys 9 per cent market share.

It is the largest selling premium tea brand, with roughly 60 million kg sales annually, out of which 12-15 per cent is exported, he said. "In volume-term, we are growing 4-5 times the growth of the category. Value growth will be around 10-12 per cent compared to last year," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Microsoft to invest \$3 bn in

GDP growth in any country and even at company level for their own growth on efficiency levels derived between energy consumed per token per dollar. "We are building world-class AI infrastructure. This is golden for systems when it comes to innovation," Nadella said. He said that the company is doing a lot of regional expansion in India.

"India is rapidly becoming a leader in AI innovation, unlocking new opportunities across the country. The investments in infrastructure and skilling we are announcing today reaffirm our commitment to making India AI-first, and will help ensure people and organisations across the country benefit broadly," Nadella said.

He said that Microsoft's mission to empower every person and organisation in India drives the company. "To that end, it is about being able to ensure that the human capital of this country is able to continue to scale and take advantage of the immense opportunity and potential the technology has. That's why we are very excited to announce today our commitment, which we have always had, to train 10 million people around AI skills by 2030," Nadella said.

Microsoft has been pouring billions of dollars into expanding its AI infrastructure and data centre network across the globe. It had last week unveiled plans to invest about USD 80 billion in AI data centres this year.

In his last visit, the Microsoft chairman highlighted the pivotal role of India's developer community in building cutting-edge products and solutions that solve challenges for the nation and can be deployed around the world. He then launched Microsoft's new skilling investment in India to empower people and organisations to thrive in the AI era. The investment will see Microsoft provide 2 million people in India with AI skilling opportunities by 2025 through its Advanta(I)ge India initiative to provide 2 million people in India with AI skilling opportunities by 2025. Nadella had also announced the expansion of the Code; Without Barriers programme to India for skilling and certification to 75,000 women developers in 2024. (PTI)

## Delhi to vote on February 5,

we will complete those elections before that," he said. "There are two more parliamentary constituencies -- Basirhat in West Bengal and Visavadar in Gujarat. In both the cases, there are election petitions pending and, according to rules, we cannot do by-elections till then," he added. Election petitions can be filed against the winning candidate in the respective state high courts within 45 days of the declaration of results. (PTI)

## Centre asks states to increase

were also advised to enhance information, education, and communication (IEC) and awareness among people regarding the prevention of transmission of the virus with simple measures such as washing hands often with soap and water; not touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding close contact with people exhibiting symptoms of the disease; and covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.

Srivastava reiterated that an increase in respiratory illnesses is usually seen during the winter months and that the country is well prepared for any potential surge in such cases, the statement said.

HMPV 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 patients recover on their own. During the meeting, it was informed that adequate diagnostic facilities are available with the ICMR-VRDL laboratories, the statement said. (PTI)

## 6.8-magnitude quake in Tibet

Xigaze also known as Shigaste is close to the border with India. Shigaste is considered one of the holiest cities of Tibet. It is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, a key figure of Tibetan Buddhism whose spiritual authority is second only to the Dalai Lama. The epicentre was located in Tsojo Township of Dingri County, which has a population of approximately 6,900 people within a 20-km radius. There are 27 villages within this area. Official data show Dingri County has a population of over 61,000 people.

The epicentre is located 90 km North-East of Lobutse in the Khumbu Himalayan range of North-East Nepal. The quake struck at a depth of 10 km, according to a report issued by the China Earthquake Networks Centre, state-run Xinhua reported.

In his message, President Xi said it is essential to strengthen earthquake monitoring and early warning, promptly allocate emergency rescue supplies, expedite the repair of damaged infrastructure, ensure that the basic needs of residents are met, and guarantee a safe and warm winter for all.

China refers to Tibet as Xizang, part of the Himalayan region. The Tibetan plateau is known to be prone to heavy earthquakes as it sits right over the place where the tectonic Eurasian and Indian plates meet, often colliding with huge force. Shigaste also suffered significant damage in the massive 8.1-magnitude quake that devastated Nepal in 2015. Eighteen people were killed and 55 injured in the Shigaste region when a massive 8.1-magnitude quake hit Nepal and the wider Himalayan in 2015.

Meanwhile, in Nepal, the strong earthquake forced people to run out of their houses. It was felt in Kavrepalanchok, Sindhupalanchok Dhading and Solukhumbu districts as well. Many people came out of their houses due to panic in Kathmandu. People witnessed buildings, trees and electric wires on the streets shaking for some time.

However, a Nepal Police spokesperson says that so far they have not received any information regarding any human casualty. An official at Shankhuwasabha District Administrative Office said a two-storey building made of stone was damaged in Kimathanka Rural Municipality of the district due to the earthquake.

As the epicentre lies in Tibet, stronger tremors were felt by people living in Northern Nepal, Nepal Police spokesperson Bishwo Adhikari said. At least half a dozen tremors with magnitude ranging from 4 to 5 were also recorded within a time span of an hour around 7 am, according to the USGS report. The tremor was strong enough to terrorise people in Nepal, who recalled the 2015 great earthquake that killed 9,000 people. (PTI)

## 2nd day of Gunotsav 2025

where she interacted with the students and went through the enrollment of the students and attendance of the students and teachers. She then moved a little away from the bustling Diphu town to Jordanlangso LP School, Rongnong'eh, Matipung.

She entered every classroom and interacted with the children on their learning. The minister conducted a reading test for the children to assess their learning skills. She also inspected the kitchen, where the mid-day meal is prepared and tested the food cooked for children.

Garlosa in one of the classrooms was surprised to see children sitting on the floor and keeping their books on plastic stools as the benches and desks were damaged. She asked the teachers to make the students talk in English during school hours so that children learn to speak and write in English as it is an English medium school. The Minister then returned to Binapani High School to continue the remaining evaluation activities. She sat with the staff and enquired about student enrollment, management, and teaching practices of the school to promote quality education.

Garlosa at the mid-day meal, where she sat with the students on the floor of the school veranda. The first phase of Gunotsav will cover 16,056 schools in 11 districts with 14,11,874 students. A total of 6,365 external evaluators are engaged.

## Drugs worth over ₹ 11 crore

1.22 kg of suspected heroin worth Rs 6 crore in Karbi Anglong district, Sarma said. "Drugs haul worth over Rs 11 crore. In three separate anti-narcotics operations carried out by units of @assampolice... Good job! #AssamAgainstDrugs," the chief minister posted on X. He, however, did not mention whether any arrests were made in connection with the operation. (PTI)

## Police bust trafficking racket

a police officer said. The two rescued children were sold for Rs 2 lakh, he said. Police suspect that the gang has been involved in more such cases and interrogation of the accused could lead to more rescues. (PTI)

## Deendayal Port to become mega port

tonnes annually...This will create new employment opportunities and help the local economy," he said. Talking to reporters after the event, Sonowal said Deendayal Port is the number one port in India in terms of cargo handling capacity at present.

"Since this port holds immense potential, we have decided to build a new port. A new mega port will come up in an area beyond the creek in Kandla. Moreover, DPA has started working on setting up a shipbuilding cluster here. These are the two major projects we are currently working on," the minister said.

During his visit to the DPA, the minister laid the foundation stone for two Centres of Excellence (CoE) dedicated to green hydrogen and green maritime fuels, an official release said.

Sonowal also inaugurated key development projects, including harbour mobile cranes for efficient cargo handling, telescopic ganway at oil jetty-8, a waste recycling plant for neighbouring Gandhidham town and a Kendriya Vidyalaya School Building.

During the visit, the Union minister also chaired a high-level B2B meeting with key stakeholders of green hydrogen. The meeting facilitated an open dialogue on opportunities for collaboration, technology adoption and investment in green hydrogen production, storage and logistics, it said. (PTI)

## Tyre makers investing

among people with land holdings of less than 1 acre, he said.

Banerjee said the objective of Project INROAD is not only enhancing the production of natural rubber but also its quality that fetches better prices for the growers. Under the project, training is being provided through the digital mode and also infrastructure such as model smokehouses and processing and grading centres are being built, he said.

The first such model smokehouse was inaugurated on Monday by Banerjee for a women's cooperative in Assam's Goalpara district. (PTI)

## Advantage Assam 2.0 roadshow

trade, connectivity, and bilateral investment in Assam's emerging sectors. "Assam serves as India's gateway to ASEAN and BIMSTEC, and we are committed to strengthening economic ties that benefit the entire region," Sarma highlighted.

A major thrust was placed on the electronics and semiconductor sector, with the state leveraging Tata Electronics' ₹27,000 crore OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Testing) project at Jagiroad as a cornerstone to catalyze growth in electronic system design and manufacturing (ESDM).

Through targeted investments, policy reforms, and strategic partnerships, Assam's leadership is committed to unlocking the full potential of these sectors, driving inclusive economic growth, and positioning the state as a premier investment destination in India and Southeast Asia.

"Our vision is to foster growth in sectors that drive innovation, create jobs, and transform Assam into an economic powerhouse," Sarma reiterated.



# Centenary celebration of Jamuguri HSS concludes

## Education makes a man complete: Minister Pijush Hazarika

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 7:** A four-day closing ceremony of the centenary celebration of Jamuguri HSS, concluded on Tuesday with Padma Hazarika, president of the celebration committee in the chair.



The closing and the 'open and book release session' of the four-day programme was held in the school premises.

Addressing the open session as a chief guest Pijush Hazarika state cabinet minister for Information, Public Relations, Printing etc said, "education makes a man complete. A state or nation can prosper only if every citizen of it is educated".

He appealed to all the students to be honest, sincere and dedicated towards their studies, family and for the nation.

He further added that each student should be accountable to their parents, teachers and to one whom they respect.

Earlier to this minister Hazarika released a research based Assamese book Brihatar Jamugurihat Anchalor Sanskritik Andolanar Kuprekha edited by Surajit Choudhury, Nitumani Bora and Bikash Bora.

Minister Hazarika announced a sum of ₹ 20 lakh for infrastructure development of the school.

The state cabinet minister also ventured the responsibility of publishing all the books relating to the closing ceremony of the centenary celebration.

The open session was attended by Ganesh Limbu, MLA Barchalla LAC, Dr Chinta Mani Sharma, principal of Biswanath College, Prabhat Das, inspector of school, Sonitpur, Janardan Bhuyan, former principal of the school besides

other dignitaries. Assamese singer Dikshu performed a musical concert as a part of cultural night of the closing session.

The first day programme began on January 4 with Dr Arupa Patangiya Kalita releasing the souvenir of Jamuguri HSS.

Addressing the session eminent writer Dr Patangiya said, "we must honour our mother tongue and put our efforts together in uplifting the Assamese medium schools. If we dishonour our mother tongue then it will become weak and we will lose our culture, heritage and self-identity".

The souvenir release function was held with Nitya Borah, former editor of Asomiya Pratidin in the chair.

The session was addressed by eminent science writer Dr Khiradhar Baruah who became nostalgic remembering his school days.

Earlier to this, the centenary celebration was formally inaugurated by Sootea MLA cum president of the centenary celebration committee Padma Hazarika by hoisting the flag.

The multi-community cultural procession was inaugurated by Pabitra Margherita, union minister of state.

Inaugurating the cultural procession, the union minister announced a financial grant of ₹ 8 crore for infrastructure development of the school.

The second day of the centenary celebration of Jamuguri HSS witnessed a handsome turn out of alumni.

The get-together was held with Purneswar Nath, Dr Pranjit Hazarika and Amarjyoti Borthakur in the chair.

The third day programme covered a panel discussion.

Dr Denedra Chandra Baruah, professor of the Energy department of Tezpur University addressed the session as a panelist.

The panel discussion held at Minati Devi Memorial Hall was chaired by Dr Ramesh Chandra Deka, VC, Cotton University.

The panel discussion was held on the topic 'NEP 2020 and Professional education'.

Another panelist Dr Pranjal Budagohain, assistant professor of Dibrugarh University said that knowledge gained from only from the textbooks and degrees gained from universities which don't have applicability is valueless.

"We must have professional skills and for that we have to acquire practical knowledge", he said.

He remarked that the NEP provides ample scope in this regard.

The event was attended by Sootea MLA cum president of the reception committee Padma Hazarika, former teachers, teachers from various educational institutions, students.

All the proceedings of the panel discussion were conducted by Basav Bhuyan, followed by a prize distribution ceremony.

# Pabitra Margherita inaugurates exhibition venue for Bodo Sahitya Sabha conference

## Events aim to celebrate and promote the rich heritage of the Bodo language and literature



**HT Correspondent**  
**KORAJHAR, Jan 7:** Union minister of state for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita inaugurated the exhibition venue for the 64th annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha held at the Dwimu Nwgr, Dimakuchi in Udalguri district on Monday amidst presence of the Assam Legislative Assembly speaker Biswajit Daimary, Bodo Sahitya Sabha

general secretary Nilkanta Goyary, and several dignitaries.

Notably, the 64th annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha will commence from January 9 with a four day colourful programme scheduled.

With respect to the programme, the reception committee and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha have jointly organised the exhibition for showcasing the multi cultural

event where nearly hundred stalls have been erected representing different departments of government of Bodoland Territorial Region, and government of Assam.

The conference will witness a variety of discussions, literary events, and cultural exchanges.

These events aim to celebrate and promote the rich heritage of the Bodo language and literature.

The conference will also witness delegations representing from neighbouring countries, and states including Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh etc.

Massive preparation and arrangements are gaining pace to host the annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

The conference has been planned to organise various colourful programmes covering over 500 bighas of land area which has been decorated with a beautiful attraction along the Dwimu Nwgr, Dimakuchi in Udalguri district.

Chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma will grace the open session of the conference as chief guest in the august presence of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, several cabinet ministers of the state government, and distinguished dignitaries.

# Dibrugarh DC promulgates order on animal slaughter

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 7:** The Jorhat district administration has made it compulsory for livestock to be sold only after it is slaughtered in a government approved or private licensed slaughterhouse and bears the health mark/stamp by a veterinary doctor stating that the animal is fit for human consumption and 'Passed' stamp from the slaughter house.

Unstamped meat shall be confiscated and destroyed and the license of the shop may be cancelled.

Regarding the animals to be slaughtered, the order stated that no livestock in feeble condition or which is excessively old, an animal, which is pregnant or with an unweaned young, a dead animal, dying animal or any carcass or part thereof, an animal showing symptoms of having been treated cruelly, over cruelly, overtrucking or by overdriving or by other acts, a dog or any animal not meant for slaughter, or an animal for which the slaughter house is not meant for, and any animal brought to the slaughter house in contravention of these by laws shall be summarily removed under order of the Veterinary officer.

The order further stated that it would be the duty of the manager/lessee of the slaughterhouse inter alia to arrange animals' ante-mortem and post mortem and keep a record of the animal slaughtered.

The directive said that no animal shall be slaughtered in a slaughterhouse in sight of other animals. Further, no animal shall be administered any chemical, drug or hormone before slaughter except drug for its treatment for any

specific disease.

It was stressed that every animal/carcass/internal organ/meat shall be subjected to veterinary inspection, which is called ante mortem (before slaughter) and post mortem (after slaughter) examination.

The animal fit for human consumption shall be passed or slaughtered and the meat fit for human consumption shall only be passed for marketing.

Regarding the ink to be used by the veterinary officer for the health mark stamp after finding the meat fit for human consumption should be of edible grade and non-poisonous, and all the instruments and marking articles shall be personal and when not in use, shall be kept in safe custody to be used only by the veterinary doctor/authorised veterinary doctor under lock and key.

Retail shops should be glass fronted, should not be near a saloon or cement selling stores, should be clean and hygienic, the retail shop owner should have a valid trade license and should not slaughter any animal intended for human consumption near the shop.

Retailers are directed to print the license number on a signboard in the shop.

# Final Photo Electoral Roll of the Special Summary Revision 2025 in Sonitpur

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Jan 7:** District Commissioner cum District Election Officer of Sonitpur Ankur Bharali published the Final Photo Electoral Roll of the Special Summary Revision 2025 of the district on Tuesday in the presence of DDC Lakhinandan Saharia, Election Officer, EROs and representatives of recognised political parties.

It is to be noted that the qualifying deadline for the Special Summary Revision of the Photo Electoral Roll for 2025 was established as January 1, 2025.

Accordingly, as of January 6, 2025 Sonitpur district have effectively registered 13,303 new voters and deleted 4,113 records of shifted/dead voters for a net gain in voter count of 9,190 throughout all five Legislative Assembly constituencies. In the context of 65-Dhekiajuli LAC: Total polling stations is 268, enrolled voters: 2,883, deleted voters: 877, net increased voters: 2,006, total voters: 2,25,658, for 66-Barchalla LAC: Total polling stations is 230, enrolled voters: 2,710, deleted voters: 564, net increased voters: 2,146, total voters: 1,93,152, for 67-Tezpur LAC: Total polling stations is 211, enrolled voters: 2,335, deleted voters: 824, net increased voters: 1,511, total voters: 1,78,196, for 68-Rangapar LAC: Total polling stations is 203, enrolled voters: 2,822, deleted voters: 1,047, net increased voters: 1,775, total voters 1,69,728 and for 69-Naduar LAC: Total polling stations is 239, enrolled voters: 2,553, deleted voters: 1,267, net increased voters: 1,752, total voters 2,02,645.

Accordingly in the context of Sonitpur district the total number of voters is 9,69,379, including 4,79,830 male voters, 4,89,526 female voters and 23 Third Gender voters who will be exercising their franchise in a total of 1151 polling stations in the district.

Voters can check their names from the final voter list available online in CEO website <https://ceoassam.nic.in/> and District website <https://sonitpur.assam.gov.in/>.

Additionally, voters can also check their name by EPIC number through <https://electoralsearch.eci.gov.in/> and Voter Helpline app.

# Soil Health Card Advisory meeting held

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 7:** A Soil Health Card Advisory meeting was held on Tuesday in Hogolakota Village in Langsomepi Block and Rajpur Village in Howraghat Block.

The meeting was held to discuss and explain to the farmers the uses and benefits of having the soil tested and obtaining the soil health cards.

The problems that can be caused due to deficiencies of elements in the soil and how these problems can be tackled after testing were also discussed.

The farmers will know how much fertilizer they need to apply to the soil. The (DNO) District Nodal Officer of Soil Health Card Bandana Saikia led the team.

She was accompanied by Assistant Soil Chemist, Soil Testing Lab, Ankita Das; Diphu, AEA (Agriculture Extension Assistant), Nirmal Chiangmai and Bikrom Singh Engti and Octopus Agency Worker, Mirjeng Ronghang.

Mirjeng Ronghang, the Octopus Agency worker was the resource person for the Soil Health Card and explained the various benefits of having a Soil Health Card to the farmers, providing awareness, guidance and promise of consistent help and support in this regard.

Around 50 farmers were present in both the locations.

# Foundation Day celebrated

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, Jan 7:** Howraghat Tin Ali Regional Kachari Samaj celebrated its 74th foundation day in Howraghat Tin Ali, Karbi Anglong district on Tuesday. Howraghat Tin Ali Regional Kachari Samaj president Hari Narzary hoisted the organisation's flag in the morning. Later, a meeting was held which was chaired by the Secretary Biren Swargiari. The program was attended by social worker Kamal Basumatari; former BLT welfare council organising secretary Maheshwar Basumatari; Sarkari Gaonbura, Dhruv Brahma and Buddhi Ramchiari, journalist Dharmendra Khaklari and others.

# Initial Training Camp of RSS held

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAON, Jan 7:** A three day long Initial Training Camp (ITC) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) concluded recently at Jagirood college ground.

The training camp started on January 4. The Samaroh of three day long Initial Training Camp (ITC) was held with a total of 200 trained Swayamsevaks who performed different activities.

Earlier the camp kicked off with the hoisting of the RSS flag and praying at the portraits of 'Bharat Maata' by Morigaon Zila Sangha Chalak, Kushram Hazarika.

Thereafter, Morigaon Zila Prasarak, Bikash Sarma moderated the programme.

Pranta Prasarak, Bharat Kumar led the activities performed by the trained Swayamsevaks in the ground.

At the end of the Samaroh, Dhaj (Flag) was folded by the Zila Prasarak.

# Governor chairs meeting with functionaries of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Sports University

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, chaired a meeting to take stock of the activities and other development works of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Sports University at Chabua in Dibrugarh district, on Tuesday.

athletic talents, the Governor asked the VC and other functionaries of the university to render their services so that the university can live up to the mandate it was established, the statement said.

The Governor said that sports is a vital sector which is receiving tremendous attention from the Central and State governments.

He reiterated the importance of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Sports University in empowering the youth of Assam and the entire Northeast region. Governor Acharya exhorted all stakeholders to work collectively to overcome all challenges and expedite the completion of this institution, which holds immense potential to shape the future of the region's youth, the statement said.

Vice Chancellor Prof J P Verma, district commissioner Bikram Kairi, and senior officials from the Public Works Department (PWD) and other key functionaries of the varsity were present at the meeting.

According to an official statement, vice chancellor Prof Verma gave a presentation, detailing the university's academic framework, course curriculum, teaching and administrative staff strength and position etc. He also brought several issues concerning the functioning of the university to the Governor's attention. Governor Acharya took note of different aspects of the university including the construction activities.

He further asked the PWD officials to expeditiously complete the construction work so that the university can start functioning with all its facilities ready for the students.

Since the university has the possibility in nurturing sportsmanship and

# CEM Ronghang participates in Gunotsav

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Jan 7:** Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang participated in the Gunotsav, 2025, as an external evaluator, in Chirikangnep English School on Tuesday. During his visit the CEM interacted with the students and teachers and also conducted writing and reading tests for students to assess their learning.



Ronghang, appreciating the dedication of the teachers and the enthusiasm displayed by the students, said, "It was good to see the dedication of the teachers and the enthusiasm of the students." He lauded the collective efforts of everyone involved in fostering a positive and encouraging learning environment at the school.

Commending the school's progress, Ronghang added, "Kudos to everyone involved in creating a positive learning environment. I look forward to seeing the continued growth of the school."

The visit is part of the state-wide Gunotsav program, an initiative to evaluate and improve the quality of education in schools across Assam.

CEM Ronghang's presence added significance to the event, inspiring the staff and students to strive for excellence. Gunotsav, a flagship programme of the Assam government, continues to play a crucial role in enhancing the state's education system by focusing on holistic development and strengthening school infrastructure.

Ex-MLA Derhagra Mochahary remembered in Tamulpur

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 7:** A memorial lecture on the contribution and dedicated life to the service and welfare of the Bodo community of late Derhagra Mochahary, former MLA of Tamulpur LAC, was held at his Tamulpur residence in Tamulpur district on Tuesday. Notably, Mochahary who was regarded as a renowned social worker as well as a selfless and tireless public service in the greater Tamulpur area and Bodo community at large passed away in September last year (2024) after a prolonged illness.

# 2nd wild elephant radio collared successfully in Baksa Forest Division

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** A female elephant, aged about 30 years, was successfully radio-collared in Daranga Reserve Forest, located at the foothills of Bhutan Himalayas, under Kumarikata Range of Baksa Forest Division, under Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) of Assam with active support from district administration and police of adjacent Tamulpur district, said an official statement on Tuesday.



It is a collaborative project of Assam Forest Department with the premier biodiversity conservation organization Aaranyak ([www.aaranyak.org](http://www.aaranyak.org)) to track the movement and habitat use pattern of elephants in the Manas Landscape, it said.

The radio collaring operation was conducted under the leadership of Dr C. Ramesh, field director of Manas Tiger Reserve while the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Baksa Pradip Bhuyan supervised the operation.

The elephant was tranquillised by a team of expert veterinarians with the help of

forest officials and biologists working at ground zero. The logistics and the on-ground execution of the operation were efficiently managed by Hiten Kumar Baishya, deputy head of Aaranyak's Elephant Conservation and Research Division (ERCD).

The operation, which was supported by the SBI Foundation and Prof Curtis Griffin of the University of Massachusetts, USA, was facilitated by Aaranyak.

The Baksa Forest Division team's support and proactive assistance from the civil and police administrations of the Tamulpur district enabled the successful execution of this operation.

will contribute to the long-term management of human-elephant conflict in the landscape," said Hiten Baishya.

"The basic objective of radio collaring of wild elephants is to determine the elephant occupancy within an area or range. This helps us to better manage human-elephant conflict and facilitate elephant conservation," said Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, the head of ERCD, Aaranyak.

This marks the second radio collaring of wild elephants in Baksa Forest Division.

The first collaring was carried out on a tusker on November 18, 2024.

The collaring team consisted of veterinarians Dr Prabhat Basumatary, Dr Bhaskar Choudhary and Dr Debabrata Phukan; elephant expert Kaushik Barua; technical expert Priyo Kanta Borbora from Assam State Zoo, Sunil Teron; Aaranyak's biologists Abhijit Boruah, Anushka Saikia and Aaranyak's team members Dibakar Nayak, Dipankar Haloi, Rangjalu Basumatary, Didom Basumatary and Rupam Goyari.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Reality leaves a lot to the imagination  
—John Lennon

## Trouble brewing in UP coalition

It is not well between BJP and coalition partners in Uttar Pradesh where Apna Dal and Nishad Party presidents expressed dissatisfaction on public platforms at the functioning of the Yogi Adityanath government. Significantly, Apna Dal (Sonelal Patel) leader and cabinet minister Ashish Patel publicly alleged threat to his life from STF (Special Task Force) of UP Police. While addressing the party workers, Ashish Patel minister for technical education said as a part of the larger conspiracy, allegations of corruption were levelled against him and the department. Ashish Patel said the allegation of not implementing the reservation policy while promotion of 100 teachers and other corruption charges were levelled deliberately to derail the social justice work being pursued by his party and the department. Apna Dal UP President said that allegations were levelled against him only while the names of other officers including Principle secretary education were left out. He further said that the study of the list of those who got promotion would reveal that justice was done to those persons from OBC category who had been deprived earlier.

Regarding the charges of corruption, Ashish Patel said he along with his wife Union Minister and national president of Apna Dal we're willing to face any inquiry into their assets acquired by them after joining the politics. Meanwhile elder sister of Anupriya Patel and leader of rival faction (Apna Dal kameravadi) MLA Pallavi Patel in alliance with Akhilesh Yadav repeated her charges against her brother in law Ashish Patel for not implementing reservation policy while giving promotion to 100 teachers in technical education department. Pallavi Patel also met UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath to seek STF inquiry into the charges of corruption against Minister Patel. Union Minister Anupriya Patel and her husband and UP Minister Ashish Patel met BJP national president JP Nadda and sought his intervention into the alleged allegation and harassment being meted out to them in UP.

Another coalition partner is also not happy with the prevailing situation in UP. Cabinet Minister Sanjay Nishad also came out publicly in support of Apna Dal leader and Minister Ashish Patel. He told media that there were certain elements in UP who were hell bent to create confusion. He also alleged that the state bureaucracy should be blamed for the alleged harassment of coalition partners. Earlier Sanjay Nishad had blamed BJP for not giving respect to coalition partners. He said that defeat of BJP was due to such arrogant behaviour in Lok Sabha elections. He further said that if no corrective measures were taken early, it would be difficult for BJP in 2027 assembly polls. Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav taking a dig on the situation said that tussle between coalition partners was result of on-going confrontation between BJP leaders in Delhi and in Lucknow. Not only coalition partners but BJP MLAs are also very upset with the protection to arrogant bureaucrats by the government.

# India's 'Neighborhood First' testament fails Bangladesh

Ancient India's visionary strategist Chanakya gave six-fold policy deals on war and peace with the neighboring states, how a king should assess his power, and what actions he needed to take to deal with the states.

Nearly 2316 years ago, the Indian philosopher, economist, jurist, and royal advisor professed diplomatic principles that still have relevance in modern diplomacy.

Chanakya who lived around 300 BCE was a key figure in the establishment of the glorious Mauryan Empire and is known for writing Arthashastra, an ancient Indian treatise on politics and economics.

Unfortunately, the South Block in New Delhi is manned by chosen blue-eyed civil officers who inherited the legacy of the British Raj instead of the marvel of Chanakya's diplomacy.

South Block in New Delhi houses the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and the Ministry of Defense.

India had invested heavily in her continued hegemony among the neighbors, which has adopted a much trumped-up policy of 'Neighborhood First'.

Earlier Delhi pursued the 'Look East Policy' to yield positive results in the region and Bangladesh and several South Asian countries were partners in progress and economic development.

Not to be misunderstood for the 'Neighborhood First' policy, but the Hindutava (an ideology or movement seeking to establish Hinduism and Hindu culture as dominant in India) pursued by the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has irked most South Asian nations.

Presently India's relationships with neighbors are blowing hot and cold. Some countries have developed love and hate with India after arch-enemy China made a dent in the region with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) mega projects, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh. Now those countries are on the fresh list of disapproval by the helms of affairs in Delhi's South Block.

Bangladesh on the diplomatic front is the opening batsman in a bid to bring to life the weakened SAARC (South Asian Association



for Regional Cooperation). Bangladesh is expecting the SAARC foreign secretary-level meeting will be held soon, which has been halted for the last 10 years. The SAARC summit has also stalled for 10 years, because of the India-Pakistan conflicts.

"SAARC appears dead but it should not be buried," Touhid Hossain, a Bangladesh Adviser for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarked. The regional co-operation was extremely important for improving trade and economy and reducing poverty in the South Asian region, the adviser said.

Yunus told the New Age, "India is not responding seriously. Indians explain that they have problems with Pakistan." The bone of contention between Bangladesh and India is centered around Hasina, who is living in exile near Delhi.

Bangladesh has formally asked India to extradite deposed Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the MEA spokesperson refused to make any statement on Dhaka's request when Indian journalists asked for a comment.

Now it seems that Delhi will remain silent on the issue of extradition. Both countries signed a treaty in 2013 and amended it in 2016. The treaty was signed to deport northeast India's separatist leaders harbored in Bangladesh.

Similarly, two fugitive military officers indicted for the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the independence hero were hiding in India. Yunus told editor Kabir that if India does not offi-

cially respond to the extradition of Hasina, Dhaka will make a follow-up request after a month with Delhi.

Dhaka has repeatedly requested Delhi to ensure that Hasina remains quiet and refrain from making fiery political speeches over the phone to her loyalists, which often emerges in social media.

Most of the central leaders of Hasina's Awami League have fled to India through clandestine routes. Many have taken refuge in Australia, Canada, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States and other destinations.

Those who couldn't escape have been arrested. They were accused of the deaths of students and protesters. The political prisoners are languishing in prison without bail for the last four months.

Last week, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain and Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman in separate media engagements have extended an olive branch to restore the bilateral relations with India.

General Waker, who is described by senior officers as a professional soldier in an interview with editor Matiar Rahman of Prothom Alo, the largest Bangla newspaper said that India is an important neighbor.

"We are dependent on India in many ways. And India is getting facilities from us too. A large number of their people are work-

ing in Bangladesh, formally and informally...So India has a lot of interest in Bangladesh's stability," he observed.

"This is a give-and-take relationship...We have to maintain good relations based on equality. The people in no way should feel India is dominating over us, which goes against our interests," the COAS.

Waker is incidentally the husband of Sheikh Hasina's cousin and last June was made COAS. He was a hard nut in negotiating with Hasina to quit and flee to India on 5 August last year.

On the other hand, the Foreign Advisor on the eve of New Year suggested that Bangladesh maintain "balanced relations" with India, China, and the United States, as all three nations hold "strategic importance" for the country.

Relations between Bangladesh and India have to be built on the basis of sovereignty, mutual interest, and dignity as the dimension and equation of Bangladesh's relation with India have changed after 5 August, noted Hossain.

On the other hand, Indian news media NDTV, CNN-IBN News18, Times Now, Republic TV and several other media outlets have been amplifying fake stories that General Waker has ceased power from Hasina. The Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus is a façade (stooge) and the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami is dominating the Interim Government.

Prof Yunus in an interview with the New Age editor Nurul Kabir expressed his frustration over Indian media spreading concocted stories on Bangladesh and even described the Interim Government as an Islamist regime.

The Indian media along with the central leaders, as well as the state Chief Ministers of BJP have demonized Bangladesh for revenge attacks upon the 13 million Hindus and held Yunus responsible for the atrocities in the country.

"When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called me and alleged that the religious minority community was being persecuted here in Bangladesh. I told him that the narrative was an exaggerated one," Yunus said in an interview with the anti-establishment newspaper.

Hossain said that the role played by Indian media was not at all conducive to establishing normal relations between the two countries.

Indian media, academicians, and political stalwarts are forgetting that the territory that is now Bangladesh was thrice partitioned. The British Raj partitioned in 1905 and 1947 to create Pakistan based on a Muslim-majority region in India. The third partition was in 1971, when it finally bifurcated from Pakistan after rejecting the Two-Nation theory, said political historian Mohiuddin Ahmad.

India must accept the political reality that Hasina has gone for now and must condemn the wanton deaths of more than a thousand students and protesters during the July-August so-called Monsoon Revolution, said Ahmad.

Historian Mohiuddin Ahmad concluded that unless Delhi recognizes the bloody student revolution that ousted the autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina and gives hope on extradition, bilateral relations will continue to limp, which will severely affect regional cooperation (SAARC).

(The author is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh. A media rights defender with the Reporters Without Borders (@RSF\_inter). Recipient of Ashoka Fellowship and Hellman-Hammett Award. He could be reached at saaleem-samad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saaleemasad)

## Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025 and Odisha's vision for a Viksit Bharat

By: Dipak Kurmi

As the first rays of the sun touch the historic city of Bhubaneswar on January 8, 2025, the air will hum with anticipation. The capital of Odisha, a city steeped in history and a beacon of India's cultural and economic renaissance, will host the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention—a grand celebration of heritage, innovation, and collaboration. This flagship event, organized to honor the indelible contributions of the Indian diaspora, is set to draw over 3,000 delegates from across the globe. Their presence symbolizes not just a reunion of shared heritage but also a powerful alliance for India's journey towards becoming a Viksit Bharat—a developed India.

At the heart of the convention is the theme, "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat," a poignant reminder of the role played by the global Indian community in shaping India's growth narrative. The Indian diaspora, with its unparalleled achievements and deep connections to its homeland, has long been a catalyst for transformation. From their estimated USD 120 billion in remittances in 2023, projected to grow to USD 129 billion in 2025, to their innovative ventures and cultural ambassadorship, they stand as pillars of India's progress. Their contributions transcend economic metrics, extending to entrepreneurial spirit, knowledge transfer, and social impact that weave a global narrative of shared growth.

The event's significance is further elevated by the dignitaries who will grace the occasion. The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, will inaugurate the convention on January 9, reaffirming his vision for a self-reliant and globally integrated India. The Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, will preside over the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards on January 10, honoring exemplary members of the diaspora for their contributions to India and the world. Adding to this illustrious gathering is Christine Carla Kagaloo, President of Trinidad and Tobago, whose presence underscores the enduring cultural and historical ties between India and the Caribbean.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025 is not merely an event; it is a bridge connecting India's past, present, and future. This year, its venue in Bhubaneswar lends itself to a unique narrative. Odisha, with its rich tapestry of history and culture, offers a perfect backdrop to celebrate the diaspora's role in modernizing India while preserving its ancient ethos. Delegates will be taken on an immersive journey



through Odisha's treasures, from the spiritual serenity of the Puri Jagannath Temple to the historical depth of the Dhauili Ashokan relics. These experiences, coupled with Odisha's 482-kilometer coastline and strategic position as India's gateway to Southeast Asia, highlight the state's immense potential for tourism, trade, and development.

The convention's program is designed not just to honor achievements but also to inspire collaboration. Entrepreneurs and SMEs from Odisha will have opportunities to connect with their global counterparts, creating synergies in innovation and business. Aspiring business leaders will gain insights from seasoned entrepreneurs of Indian origin, fostering mentorship and guidance that transcend borders. Through these dialogues, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas aims to move beyond celebration, building a framework for sustainable partnerships that endure long after the event concludes.

A highlight of the convention is the Odisha-themed pavilion, "Glorious Odisha: From Ancient to Modern," which offers a vivid glimpse into the state's transformation. Spanning 400 square meters, the pavilion brings together tradition and technology through 3D replicas of the Konark Sun Temple and Chilika Lake, alongside exhibits showcasing Odisha's advancements in steel, aluminum, and IT. Visitors will be mesmerized by displays of traditional crafts like Pat-tachitra and applique work, set against the backdrop of Odisha's industrial progress. This unique blend of heritage and modernity is not just an exhibit but a story of resilience and reinvention that echoes India's own journey.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025 also

aligns with broader national and regional policies. The event resonates with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Purvodaya Mission,' which aims to drive economic growth in Eastern India, and the 'Act East Policy,' which seeks to strengthen ties with Southeast Asia. Odisha's coastline and emerging port infrastructure make it a pivotal player in these initiatives, offering untapped opportunities for investments in tourism, green energy, and port-based industries. By hosting the PBD convention, Odisha signals its readiness to embrace global partnerships and position itself as a hub for innovation and collaboration.

As the curtains fall on January 10, the legacy of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will endure, not as a fleeting celebration but as a call to action. It will be a reminder of the diaspora's power to bridge worlds—culturally, economically, and intellectually. The event urges delegates and stakeholders to move beyond rhetoric, forging tangible outcomes that propel India closer to its vision of a developed nation. It is a moment to reflect on how India and its diaspora can together craft a narrative of shared prosperity and global leadership.

In this journey, Bhubaneswar stands as both host and harbinger—a city that embodies the confluence of ancient wisdom and modern aspiration. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025, through its celebration of heritage, innovation, and collaboration, promises to set a precedent for how nations can engage their diaspora in shaping a future that honors the past while embracing progress. It is more than an event; it is a movement, a vision, and a testament to the enduring bond between India and its global family. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

## HMPV: Preparing for the unexpected

By: Satvrat Borah

The recent rise of the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in China has brought attention to a virus that is not new but is now being widely discussed. HMPV, first identified in 2001, causes respiratory infections. Although it is not as severe or widespread as COVID-19, its increasing cases in China have raised concerns about its potential to spread to other countries, including India and beyond. People are questioning if HMPV might lead to a global crisis like COVID-19, potentially causing lockdowns and disruptions to daily life again.

HMPV primarily spreads through respiratory droplets, close contact with infected individuals, or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the face. Symptoms are usually mild, including fever, cough, nasal congestion, and shortness of breath. However, in vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems, the infection can become more severe, leading to complications like bronchitis or pneumonia.

In China, the number of HMPV cases has surged, particularly in northern regions. Hospitals have reported an influx of patients with respiratory symptoms, most of them children under the age of 14. This has caused concern among medical professionals, as the symptoms of HMPV can sometimes mimic other respiratory viruses, making diagnosis challenging. While the virus is not new, the current spike has brought it into the spotlight, prompting many to compare it to the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health officials in China have assured the public that HMPV is not as threatening as COVID-19. According to available data, HMPV infections represent only a small percentage of respiratory illnesses in comparison to influenza or COVID-19. Still, the sudden rise in cases has created anxiety, especially as the world is still recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. People are worried about the possibility of another virus spreading globally, leading to disruptions in everyday life.

India has also reported isolated

cases of HMPV, although the numbers remain low. Health experts in India are keeping a close watch on the situation in China and monitoring for any signs of the virus spreading. The Indian government has issued guidelines to the public, advising them to practice good hygiene, avoid crowded places, and seek medical attention if they experience severe respiratory symptoms. These measures are similar to those taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, but experts emphasize that the risk of a global outbreak from HMPV is currently low.

Globally, countries are paying close attention to the developments in China. While HMPV is not new and has been a known cause of respiratory infections for over two decades, the renewed focus on it has highlighted the need for better awareness and preparedness. In many places, public health systems are still dealing with the aftereffects of COVID-19, which has made people more cautious about any potential threat from infectious diseases.

The fear of another pandemic has led some to wonder if we might face lockdowns again. Lockdowns were one of the most impactful measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing significant economic and social disruptions. However, health experts believe that HMPV is unlikely to require such drastic measures. Unlike COVID-19, which spread rapidly and caused severe illness in many, HMPV has a much lower transmission rate and generally causes milder symptoms. This makes it less likely to overwhelm healthcare systems or lead to widespread restrictions.

The focus now is on prevention and early detection. Good hygiene practices, such as washing hands frequently, wearing masks in crowded areas, and avoiding close contact with people showing symptoms, can help reduce the spread of HMPV. These measures are not new; they were widely promoted during the COVID-19 pandemic and remain effective for many respiratory viruses. Governments and healthcare organizations are also working on increasing public awareness about the virus, its symptoms, and ways to stay safe.

Currently, there is no specific treatment or vaccine for HMPV.

Management of the virus focuses on relieving symptoms. For most people, rest, hydration, and over-the-counter medications are sufficient. In more severe cases, hospitalization may be needed to provide oxygen therapy or other supportive care. Research is ongoing to develop a vaccine for HMPV, and scientists are optimistic about making progress in the near future.

Despite the rising cases in China, the overall risk of HMPV causing a global crisis like COVID-19 is considered low. The virus has been around for many years, and while it can cause severe illness in certain groups, it does not have the same potential for rapid, widespread transmission as COVID-19. Experts are confident that with proper precautions and public health measures, the impact of HMPV can be minimized.

It is natural for people to feel anxious about the possibility of facing another pandemic. The memories of lockdowns, travel restrictions, and economic challenges are still fresh. However, it is important to stay informed and rely on credible sources of information. Panic and misinformation can cause unnecessary fear and may lead to harmful behaviors. Instead, people should focus on staying healthy, following public health guidelines, and seeking medical advice when needed.

As the situation unfolds, governments and health organizations around the world will continue to monitor HMPV and take appropriate action. Lessons learned from COVID-19 have prepared us to respond more effectively to potential health threats. Enhanced surveillance, better communication, and increased awareness among the public are key to managing any outbreak.

While the rise in HMPV cases in China has caused concern, it is unlikely to lead to a global crisis like COVID-19. The virus is not new, and its spread is being closely monitored by health authorities. By following preventive measures and staying informed, we can reduce the risk of HMPV becoming a major health threat. It is essential to remain vigilant but not alarmed, as the world continues to recover and build resilience against future challenges.



## Mapping women's leadership in cities in India

By: Sunaina Kumar & Ambar Kumar Ghosh

In recent decades, India has witnessed the remarkable emergence of women as crucial drivers for participatory democracy. Women's participation as voters has impressively increased over the years in every election at national and state levels. Alongside women emerging as influential voters, their representation in local structures of governance, also called local self-government, is one of the highest across countries in the world. India is among the early adopters of gender quotas at the local government level, with very high participation by women in rural and urban areas. With the adoption of the Women's Reservation Bill in 2023 for national and state legislative assemblies, it is timely to assess the impact of gender quotas on India's urban self-governance institutions over the past three decades.

### Women's leadership in urban governance

India's rapid economic growth has accelerated urbanisation with nearly half the population expected to reside in urban areas by 2035. With increasing urbanisation and worsening climate change, more women are expected to migrate to urban areas. Women and men use urban spaces differently and have different priorities when accessing urban services and infrastructure such as housing, transport, water and sanitation, health, and environmental resources, livelihoods, and economic opportunities. Research shows that most cities in the world fail to meet the basic needs of women, hindering their social and economic prospects, and thus widening gender gaps.

Indian cities, with challenges of inclusivity and equity, need to make concerted efforts to address the needs emanating from these demographic shifts. The increasing challenges in urban governance warrant more inclusive representation in administration to respond more effectively to evolving public needs. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, adopted in 1993, reserved one-third of electoral seats for women in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) or municipalities. In the 30 years since then, 20 states have progressively raised women's representation to 50 percent in both rural and urban local bodies.

### Mapping the impact

Research has revealed that a sizeable number of women have served as mayors, which is the highest office in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, 11 out of 20 mayors in various municipalities elected in 2022 were women. An assessment of work done by women mayors shows that they have positively impacted aspects of urban governance, such as sanitation, water, cleanliness, healthcare, safety, and mobility. From the first female mayor of Madras in 1957, Tara Cherion, who is credited for slum management initiatives and introducing mid-day meals in corporation schools, to more recent instances, such as that of Ajitha Vijayan, a former Anganwadi worker, who became mayor in



2018, and improved the water distribution network in Kanimanagal, a region severely impacted by water scarcity and drought. Some of these women administrators belonged to politically influential families when they were elected, reinforcing the importance of social networks in gaining access to local political institutions. But in many other cases, women candidates with humble origins and limited prior exposure to politics, have been successful in winning electoral contests on their own.

Some of the state-based studies throw valuable insights into women's representation in local bodies and how many women manage to break stereotypes once elected to power. A study on ULBs in Rajasthan revealed that for women members of local bodies to shoulder administrative responsibilities effectively, having supportive families is important. Lack of experience and confidence is a persisting challenge faced by women leaders in ULBs, but many have demonstrated that they have the interest and capacity to learn on the job. A report on ULBs in Assam found that women experienced a tangible shift in their mindset, becoming more positive and self-reliant after winning seats. A study by the Jaipur Municipal Corporation revealed that women contributed to reducing gender prejudices both socially and in the municipality. Similarly, a report on the Kolkata Municipal Corporation showed that women councillors excelled in programme implementation and advancing community services and interests. Their performance often led to their re-election, even when their wards became open seats.

### Challenges to women in ULBs

Elected women representatives in ULBs face different barriers from those that confront their male counterparts. A major section of women who are elected to ULBs have no prior experience in politics and administration. As most party structures, especially at the local level, are still male-dominated, women's voices in decision-making structures remain limited. The persistently uneven distribution of unpaid care work between men and women due to prevailing gender norms impacts the work of women councillors and mayors who are also bound to household activities.

The capacity of women to exert influ-

ence is impacted by restrictive gender norms. Women councillors report facing social stigma and restrictions when they occupy positions of power. They are not considered to be assertive, knowledgeable, and able to lead well by large sections of society. The increasing influence of money and muscle power required to contest any election in India, combined with the aggression and misogyny faced by women candidates hinders their participation in politics. Reserved seat rotation every five years, aimed at inclusivity, limits women's ability to build on their experience. Elected men often pursue multiple terms, while women are dissuaded from contesting unreserved seats by parties or male household members.

### Strengthening women's leadership in cities

Studies have shown that, as representatives, women in ULBs lead to inclusive and positive outcomes by prioritising the needs of women and children and their communities. Women constituents find it easier to approach women councillors and demand resources like water and sanitation, pre-school education, and preventive health care.

A few key initiatives would go a long way in strengthening women's leadership in cities. First, a scaling up is required of capacity-building and training programmes for women addressing new challenges in urban governance like climate change resilience, environment and technology. There should be strict monitoring of the quality of these programmes. Second, establishing institutional mechanisms to ensure that women can discharge their functions without interference from male representatives, is much-needed. Awareness and sensitisation campaigns need to be conducted to help change conservative perceptions about women's participation in urban politics. Third, implementing institutional reforms that ensure political parties encourage more women to participate in local politics and provide access to skills and networks for innovative fundraising for women. As women's participation in local governance demonstrates its positive impact on policy outcomes, more concrete steps to strengthen women's leadership in cities must be prioritised. (Courtesy: ORF)

## How long do menopause symptoms last?

By: Jenna Fletcher

The menopause transition usually lasts around 7 years, but symptoms may not be present all the time. However, how long menopause symptoms last can vary, and for some people they can last much longer.

According to the National Institute on Aging, the transition can take up to 14 years for some individuals.

Menopause is part of sexual maturation and is not a disease or condition, although people may experience many symptoms of menopause.

Doctors define menopause as occurring 1 year after a person's last period. Every individual experiences menopause differently, and the symptoms may vary in duration.

### Duration

Studies show that people typically experience hot flashes for an average of 4.5 years following their last period and 7.4 years in total. However, they may last for more than 10 years.

The extended duration of these symptoms results from the body rebalancing and reducing levels of estrogen and progesterone as the ovaries slowly lose function.

### When does menopause start?

Though menopause clinically occurs 1 year after the end of a person's last period, they may begin experiencing symptoms earlier.

Approximately 8 in 10 people have menopause symptoms before and after the end of their periods. Doctors refer to the year between the last period and menopause as perimenopause.

Most people in the U.S. experience menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. However, this age range varies.

The onset of menopause can also follow surgery that reduces ovarian function or hormones, such as a hysterectomy, where a surgeon removes the uterus, or surgery or other treatments for cancer. In these circumstances, symptoms may begin rapidly as an adverse effect of these procedures.

### Symptoms

The symptoms of menopause usually start when estrogen levels begin to drop. Symptoms may include:

- Irregular menstruation: As estrogen levels drop, the menstrual cycle may change. A person may miss periods or experience more time between periods. Menstrual flow may also change.

- Vaginal dryness: Decreases in estrogen levels can cause a reduction in vaginal lubrication. As lubrication decreases, the vaginal tissues also become thinner. This can lead to pain during intercourse and vaginal inflammation.

- Decreased fertility: As estrogen levels drop in perimenopause, preg-

nancy might become more difficult. When a person reaches menopause, their ovaries no longer release eggs, meaning that pregnancy is not possible.

- Weight gain: The metabolism tends to slow during menopause, which may cause sudden weight changes.

- Hot flashes: Fluctuations in hormone levels might lead to hot flashes or an abrupt feeling of heat and flushing. These flashes may be mild, occurring primarily in the upper body, or they may radiate throughout the body.

- Night sweats: Hot flashes during sleep cause night sweats, which may prompt such intense sweating that they wake a person up.

- Sleep disturbances: Menopause often makes it hard to sleep. Many find that sleep disturbances occur more often around the time of menopause. The disturbances may be related to night sweats.

- Low mood: Some experience mood changes during menopause. These may be due to hormonal fluctuations, but life circumstances that tend to occur around menopause can also contribute.

- Attention problems: Many people find they have difficulty concentrating and focusing during menopause and might experience memory lapses.

- Thinning skin and hair: Extreme fluctuations in hormone levels might cause the skin to become thinner. Some people may experience hair loss.

- Urinary frequency and incontinence: Around menopause, people may experience an increase in the frequency of passing urine due to weakening of the pelvic floor muscles.

### Treatment options

Menopause does not require medical treatment, as it is not a medical condition, but many seek relief from its uncomfortable symptoms.

**Hormone replacement therapy** Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help relieve menopause-related hot flashes and other general symptoms. However, HRT does carry a small risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

Due to this, doctors often prescribe the lowest dose of estrogen possible to relieve symptoms.

Aside from relieving hot flashes, HRT can help prevent bone loss and osteoporosis.

### Other treatments

Many other treatments are available that alleviate symptoms and prevent issues related to aging.

**Other options include:**

- Medications to treat hot flashes: Low-dose antidepressants and some anti-seizure medications may help decrease hot flashes. Antidepressant medications may also assist with the emotional changes that occur during

menopause.

- Vaginal estrogen: Estrogen is available for direct application to the vagina in the form of a cream, tablet, or inserted ring. This can help relieve dryness and discomfort during intercourse.

- Medications to prevent osteoporosis: Some doctors prescribe medications to prevent the loss of bone density that can occur during perimenopause and menopause.

### When to contact a doctor

At the onset of perimenopause, a person may wish to schedule regular doctor visits for preventive health-care.

Around perimenopause, doctors may recommend certain health screenings that sometimes include a colonoscopy, mammogram, and blood tests.

An individual should not hesitate to seek a doctor's care and advice to deal with disruptive menopausal symptoms. If vaginal bleeding occurs after menopause, a person should also seek medical attention.

### Outlook after menopause

The risk of some conditions increases after menopause, including:

- Cardiovascular disease: As estrogen levels decline, the risk of heart disease rises.

- Osteoporosis: Osteoporosis is a condition that causes bones to weaken, increasing the risk of fractures. For the first years after menopause, people lose bone density very rapidly. This increases the risk of osteoporosis and breaks.

- Certain cancers: The risk of breast and ovarian cancer rises after menopause. The reasons vary but may be due to hormonal changes related to menopause and its treatments or natural aging.

Most people continue to enjoy a healthy life throughout menopause, however. They can further ensure this by maintaining a balanced and nutritious diet, exercising, and regularly checking in with a doctor.

### Summary

Menopause symptoms typically last for around 4 years after a person's last period. However, the frequency, severity, and duration of symptoms vary.

Common symptoms include hot flashes, low mood, and weight changes.

Menopause symptoms typically resolve independently with time, but some people may seek treatment if the symptoms affect daily life. Hormone replacement therapy is a common treatment option for menopause symptoms but carries the risk of complications.

Going through menopause is a natural occurrence and is not a condition itself. Anyone worrying about menopause or experiencing debilitating symptoms should contact a doctor. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

## Winter makeup tips for dry skin

By: Shahnaz Husain

As the winter chill sets in, women often find themselves grappling with the challenges of dry and flaky skin. Dry skin is a major concern throughout the year, and the winters make matters more challenging.

Low humidity during winters, strips moisture from the skin, leaving it feeling parched and vulnerable. Indoor heating and hot water baths can further dry out your skin, while harsh winds cause irritation and sensitivity. It leads to dry patches or a rough texture, often accompanied by redness and irritation and your skin may start to show signs of dullness.

Winter skincare is all about hydration. Invest in nourishing products that keep your skin moisturised and shield it from the harsh elements.

The right makeup products, techniques and tools for dry skin in winter can enhance your skin's natural texture and give you a fresh, radiant finish.

### 1. Cleanse gently

Cleansing your face is a crucial step in your winter makeup routine. The cold air makes your skin delicate, yearning for a gentle touch.

You can begin by using cream-based skincare cleanser to remove impurities from the skin, without stripping your skin off natural oils. It will help to slough off all kinds of dirt and dead skin cells that may have built upon the surface of your skin.

Poorly cleansed skin doesn't allow makeup products to settle and blend in properly. Hence, you should prioritise cleansing in your winter makeup routine.

Start with a nourishing face wash because it suits all skin types. This will help remove impurities without stripping your skin of essential moisture. Follow up with a hydrating serum. It will provide your skin with an extra

layer of moisture, making it a perfect base for makeup.

Use a hydrating cleanser twice a day to wipe off all dirt, oil, or makeup. For best results, use a mild scrub twice a week to slough off dead skin cells and unclog pores.

### 2. Hydrate your skin:

Winter air tends to be dry, leading to dehydration of the skin. Before applying any makeup, ensure that your skin is well-hydrated by using a nourishing cleansing balm and hydrating moisturiser suitable for your skin type. Incorporate serums, moisturizers, and face mists into your routine with hydrating ingredients like hyaluronic acid or glycerin. A moisturising serum containing hyaluronic acid may be used after using a mild cleanser. To get a smooth surface for makeup, seal in moisture with a thick moisturiser that is high in ceramides. Apply moisturizer right after you cleanse to lock in the moisture left on your skin.

Cleansing balms contain hydrating ingredients such as peptides and shea butter. These ingredients work to lock in moisture as they cleanse, preventing your skin from feeling stripped or tight. Drink plenty of water, soup, and juice, to maintain internal hydration, supporting your skin from within.

Using a hydrating primer is essential for dry skin in winter. It creates a barrier between your skin and makeup, preventing moisture loss. But make sure you apply it before your foundation. When you have dry skin, avoid ingredients such as salicylic acid, parabens, and alcohol. These ingredients can tend to dry out the skin.

### 3. Exfoliate Your Skin

If you want healthy, smooth skin, exfoliation needs to be a part of your skincare routine to slough off dull skin. Increasing your exfoliation routine during the winter months will help your skincare products absorb deeper and work even harder—making them way more effective. Exfoliation also boosts blood circulation, facilitates

collagen production and speeds up cell turnover, leaving your skin feeling fresher, clearer and brighter. However over-exfoliation can strip away your skin's natural oils and cause irritation. You really shouldn't be exceeding exfoliation twice per week using a gentle product like lactic acid to avoid over-drying or irritation. Regular exfoliation can help smooth the skin, though you'll want to take care to choose the right exfoliation method. If you have sensitive or dry skin, use a gentle chemical exfoliator to avoid irritation or redness. For people with acne-prone or oily skin, it is best to opt for physical exfoliators that unclog your pores and cut through oil on your skin. However, avoid abrasive physical exfoliators.

Opt to exfoliate in the evenings because you are removing the top layer of skin, you are leaving your face immediately more vulnerable.

### 4. Lip Care

Your lips seek attention: chapped lips are a common winter problem. Even the most perfect appearance might be ruined by cracked lips.

Use creamy lipsticks with hydrating formulas that helps keep your lips moisturized all day long. Be sure to apply a lip primer before adding colours to your pout.

Use lipstick that has natural ingredients and a nourishing formula for the lips. A natural lipstick will keep your lips moist and prevent chapping. Stay away from long-wearing matte finish lipsticks that very likely will dry your lips out and settle in the cracks of your lips.

Instead, opt for a nutritious lip mask and leave it on all night. Apply a moisturising lip balm underneath your lipstick during the day. Select lipsticks with a satiny, creamy texture to maintain the suppleness and softness of your pout. Also, start exfoliating your lips gently using a lip scrub at least once a week.

## Can UNCCD COP16 Riyadh give women their rightful place in matters regarding desertification?

By: Sushmita Sengupta, Swati Bhatia

Will policy decisions help women get a decision-making role to combat desertification in a climate-risk world? That question is up for deliberation at the ongoing 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

A consensus was reached at the UNCCD COP15 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire that the Gender Caucus was an effective platform to strengthen and accelerate gender conversation, policy, programme and agenda and hence the Convention's initiative to effectively implement the Gender Action Plan (GAP) at international and country level.

The Gender Caucus was established and convened at UNCCD COP14 in New Delhi in 2019, comprising of Parties, selected UN agencies and civil society organisation partners, to provide expert guidance on how to focus strategies on gender issues in drought, land degradation and desertification.

It was the adoption of the GAP at UNCCD COP13 in China's Ordos in 2017 that acknowledged a specific role for women in land restoration and sustainable land management, the importance of gender equality as a guiding principle in all policies and decisions associated to the fulfilment of the objectives of the Convention.

In 2022, a study commissioned by UNCCD and titled The differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought on women and men delved into why desertification is not gender-neutral.

"Women are major actors in the global efforts to reduce and reverse land degradation. They restore land, they protect land, they cherish, nourish and care for the land, while also caring for others," Ibrahim Thiaw, under-secretary-general and executive secretary of UNCCD, explained in the study.

The study brought forth the issues faced by women in land rights, access to resources, education, knowledge, training and skill and participation in decision-making processes.

A study in Sri Lanka highlighted that only three per cent women held positions of leadership in the agriculture sector due to lack of land ownership, neglect of specific gen-



der needs in irrigation, migration of male relatives in the family, and women having less power and voice than men.

The analysis also cited that in Afghanistan, while 70 per cent of men reported being consulted about their needs, nearly 70 per cent of women had not been consulted.

It also showed that there is increased burden on women during times of disasters.

For instance, food security affects women in times of drought and land degradation as they tend to eat less or skip meals, leading to other after-effects.

Carrying water for long distances exposes them to musculoskeletal disorders and related disabilities.

Drought-related migration may make women overburdened and incapable of taking decisions on drought-related agricultural improvements.

Women workers are also susceptible to more abuse and exploitation. Female farmers, entrepreneurs and women's organisations are under-represented in major land restoration initiatives, programmes and policy processes.

At COP16 Riyadh, host Saudi Arabia has showcased its progress so far with regard to issues of women and desertification.

The country is pushing its way to bring

women to take key decisions to combat the effects of drought. "Only in 2018 did we get the permission to drive in Riyadh, but rural women were found to drive in the deep deserts to meet their needs much before," said Princess Mashael, co-founder of Saudi Arabia based non-profit Aeon Collective.

She added that these women have a good understanding of deserts as they are closely connected to the ecosystem.

The National Observatory for women under the Princess Norah University of Riyadh is developing an index to measure women participation in climate issues.

"This is a very welcome step," added Maimoonah Al Khalil, secretary general, Family Affairs Council of Riyadh. Al Khalil was once part of this index and opines that this index is good for any country to calculate such a contribution. Currently, the researchers are collecting real time data.

Women had been the centre of government programmes like sustainable agricultural rural development program (Reef), where they were 63 per cent of the beneficiaries, said Al Khalil.

The Reef programme under the Saudi ministry of environment, water and agriculture has contributed to increasing the number of women participating in rural activities. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)



### France marks 10 years since deadly Charlie Hebdo attacks

PARIS, Jan 7: A decade after gunmen stormed the offices of satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in a deadly assault that shook France to its core, the nation is pausing Tuesday to honour the victims and grapple with the evolving challenges of free expression and terrorism.

President Emmanuel Macron and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo are leading solemn tributes at the site of the attack, where 12 people, including some of France's most beloved cartoonists, were killed on January 7, 2015.

The massacre, carried out by two brothers claiming allegiance to al-Qaida, marked the start of a grim new era for France, with a wave of extremist violence pushing the country to reassess its security priorities and commitment to free speech.

Speaking on the anniversary, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau painted a stark picture of France's current security landscape.

"France has rearmed considerably, but the threat is still there," he warned in an interview with RTL, referencing both external dangers and a troubling rise in homegrown radicalisation.

"The nature of the threat has changed," Retailleau explained. "It is now primarily endogenous — young individuals radicalised through social media. Last year alone, our services foiled nine attacks, the highest number since 2017."

Retailleau cited recent attacks at public gatherings in Germany and New Orleans as grim reminders of why France must maintain a "very high level of caution."

The attack on Charlie Hebdo, carried out in retaliation for the newspaper's irreverent caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, ignited fierce global debates about the limits of free expression.

In the days that followed, millions marched in solidarity, brandishing pens and signs declaring, "I am Charlie" — a rallying cry for press freedom and defiance against extremism.

But 10 years on, the unity of that moment has splintered. French commentators say younger generations are increasingly critical of satire they see as divisive or insensitive, particularly toward marginalised communities. Charlie Hebdo itself remains unapologetic. Its 10th-anniversary edition features a cover cartoon of a reader perched on an AK-47, captioned "Indestructible." In an editorial, the magazine's director, Laurent Sourisseau, known as "Riss," defended the power of satire. "If you want to laugh, it means you want to live," he wrote. (AP)

### Louisiana person is the 1st US bird flu death, health officials say

NEW YORK, Jan 7: The first US bird flu death has been reported — a person in Louisiana who had been hospitalised with severe respiratory symptoms. Louisiana health officials announced the death on Monday.

Health officials have said the person was older than 65, had underlying medical problems and had been in contact with sick and dead birds in a backyard flock. They also said a genetic analysis had suggested the bird flu virus had mutated inside the patient, which could have led to the more severe illness.

They have disclosed few other details about the person. Since March, 66 confirmed bird flu infections have been reported in the US, but previous illnesses have been mild and most have been detected among farmworkers exposed to sick poultry or dairy cows. In two cases — and adult in Missouri and a child in California — health officials have not determined how they caught it.

The origin of the Louisiana person's infection was not considered a mystery. But it was the first human case in the U.S. linked to exposure to backyard birds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Louisiana officials say they are not aware of any other cases in their state, and US officials have said they do not have any evidence that the virus is spreading from person to person.

The H5N1 bird flu has been spreading widely among wild birds, poultry, cows and other animals. Its growing presence in the environment increases the chances that people will be exposed, and potentially catch it, officials have said.

## Chinese tech giants Tencent, CATL and others protest US listings as army-linked companies

HONG KONG, Jan 7: The US Defence Department has added dozens of Chinese companies, including games and technology company Tencent, artificial intelligence firm SenseTime and the world's biggest battery maker CATL, to a list of companies it says have ties to China's military, prompting some to protest and say they will seek to have the decision reversed.



The US has in recent years sought to restrict sharing of advanced technology, including semiconductors and artificial intelligence, deeming it to be a threat to national security. The Defence Department updates its list of "Chinese Military Companies," or CMC list, annually. With the latest revision it includes 134 companies.

The National Defence Authorization Act of 2024 bans the Department of Defence from dealing with the designated companies beginning in June 2026.

Tencent's Hong Kong-traded shares fell 7.3 per cent on Tuesday and the company said it would "initiate a reconsideration process to correct this mistake," seek talks with the Defence Department and

if need be take legal measures to get it removed from the list. Tencent is the world's largest video gaming company and operates Chinese messaging platform WeChat.

"As the company is neither a Chinese military company nor a military-civil fusion contributor to the Chinese defence industrial base, it believes that its inclusion in the CMC List is a mistake," Tencent said in an announcement to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. "Unlike other lists maintained by the US Government for sanctions or export control measures, inclusion in the CMC List re-

lates only to US defence procurement, which does not affect the business of the Group," it said. Battery maker CATL said in a statement posted on its website that the company "has never engaged in any military-related business or activities" and said the designation would not have adverse impact on its operations.

Like Tencent, CATL maintains that its inclusion to the list was a "mistake" and that it would proactively engage with the DoD to "address the false designation" and take legal action if necessary to protect company and stakeholder interest. CATL's stock fell 2.84 per

cent in Shenzhen. AI company SenseTime said in a statement that the decision to include it on the list had "no factual basis."

"We firmly disagree with it," SenseTime's statement read, adding that the decision has "no material impact on our global operations."

"SenseTime remains firmly committed to working collaboratively with the relevant stakeholders to address this matter, and to safeguarding the interests of the company and our shareholders," the company said.

During a daily news briefing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Guo Jiakun urged the US to "immediately correct its wrong practices, and lift the illegal unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction on Chinese companies."

"China consistently and firmly opposes the US overstretching the concept of national security, creating discriminatory lists under various pretexts, and unwarrantedly suppressing Chinese companies, hindering China's high-quality development," Guo said. (AP)

## Indonesia, Japan agree to resume stalled talks on transfer of defence equipment



JAKARTA, Jan 7: Indonesia's government said it agreed with Japan on Tuesday to resume talks on the joint development of naval vessels that have stalled in recent years.

Visiting Japanese Defence Minister Gen. Nakatani discussed ways to deepen a defense partnership with his Indonesian counterpart, Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, in a meeting Tuesday and agreed to continue negotiations on joint development of naval ships and other military equipment and on technology transfer, Defence Ministry spokesperson Brig. Gen. Frega Wenas said.

"In principle, both defence ministers welcomed cooperation on promoting military equipment," Wenas said. "Of course, it needs to be explored further where the joint development would occur and whether it would involve ships or other defence equipment."

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.

Japanese media said Nakatani, who arrived in Jakarta on Sunday for an Indonesia-Japan defence ministerial meeting, would present a proposal for joint development of destroyers that stalled in recent years.

The Japanese government is envisioning frigates based on its Monogami class design, in which President Prabowo Subianto earlier showed interest when he was defence minister. The ships can be operated by a crew of about 90, half the number of conventional destroyers.

### Taiwan holds military drills as concerns rise over possible defence budget cut

Hsinchu (TAIWAN), Jan 7: Taiwan began three days of military drills on Tuesday as concerns rose over potential cuts to the defence budget due to legislative wrangling between the island's two major political parties.

The drills began in the north with tank maneuvering at a base in Hsinchu featuring outmoded CM-11 tanks, which are gradually being replaced by newly purchased Abrams M1A2T from the US.

The replacement marks a huge upgrade despite some complaints over the weight of the new tanks and their likely effectiveness at preventing a possible Chinese landing.

Troops arrived on armoured personnel carriers, while Apache and S-70 helicopters whirled overhead, providing reconnaissance and covering fire.

With the equipment Taiwan currently operates, the communication officer is on the ground to coordinate airborne attacks, said Army Captain Chuang Yuan-cheng of the

542 Armored Brigade in Hsinchu county just south of the capital of Taipei. That allows them to guide the helicopters so that "ground fire and airborne fire are synchronised," Chuang said.

On Wednesday, the army will show off its Patriot III anti-missile system aimed at countering one of China's most potent weapons against the island of 23 million.

And on Thursday, anti-submarine exercises will be held off of Taiwan's largest port of Kaohsiung, considered China's best conduit for resupplying its troops should it establish a beachhead in the heavily defended region.

The annual drills are held in the run-up to the Lunar New Year holiday to reassure the population of Taiwan's ability to meet China's threats and to boost recruitment. Taiwan has a backlog of orders from the US for about USD 20 billion in weapons systems, while it upgrades its M-16 fighters and develops its own submarines. (AP)

### UAE agrees to rollover USD 2 billion payment in Jan: PM Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said the UAE has agreed to rollover the payment of USD 2 billion that Pakistan was due to pay this month.

Addressing the cabinet meeting, the prime minister mentioned that United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohamed bin Zayed conveyed this decision to him during a one-on-one meeting in Rahim Yar Khan over the weekend.

The UAE president was on a private visit to Rahim Yar Khan, a city in Punjab province, but also met Sharif on the occasion.

"He happily informed me that USD 2 billion owed by Pakistan in January was being extended by the UAE. He proposed it himself and immediately issued [directives as well]," Sharif said. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have gone up from USD 2.7 billion to USD 11.7 billion in the last two years and while external public debt stood at USD 100 billion two years ago, it currently stands in the same position, according to a report.

Though the prime minister didn't give the period of extension, the rollover of such a loan is often for one year. Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia regularly extend bilateral payments to help Pakistan tackle its balance of payment challenges.

The Prime Minister also told the cabinet that his meeting with the UAE President focused on strengthening bilateral relations and promoting investment, adding that the UAE leader expressed his commitment to investing in Pakistan.

Earlier in December, Saudi Arabia had extended USD 3 billion debt repayment period for Pakistan for another year after the cash-strapped nation could not pay the debt, the country's central bank had said when the term of the deposit was maturing on December 5.

### Over 22,000 bureaucrats in Pakistan possess dual nationality: Report

The State Bank of Pakistan stated that Saudi Arabia had placed the USD 3 billion deposit initially for one year in 2021 and subsequently rolled it over in 2022 and 2023.

It was one of the debt extensions, which Pakistan would need till the end of June 2025 to avoid at least USD 13 billion more repayments to Saudi Arabia, China and the UAE, the officials had said then.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, the prime minister expressed satisfaction over stability in the economy, emphasising that with continued diligence and hard work, the country will be taken forward on the path of progress.

He, however, noted that reducing power tariff is crucial for the development of industries and agriculture.

Pakistan struggles to increase revenue collection as per the deal made with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 2024 to get a USD 7 billion loan package.

Pakistan has set a Rs 12.913 trillion target for the fiscal year 2024-25, a 40 per cent increase from the tax collected in the previous fiscal year. The FBR fell short of Rs 96 billion in the first quarter (July-September) of the year as it collected Rs 2,556 billion against Rs 2,652 billion.

PM Sharif also described the increase in textile exports as encouraging. "We should focus on export-led growth and efforts be made for increasing exports from non-traditional sources as well," he said.

Sharif also said in his cabinet address that the President of Indonesia is expected to visit Pakistan this month. He emphasised that Pakistan has brotherly ties with Indonesia and an agenda is being prepared for discussions with the visiting dignitary.

He mentioned that Pakistan could export halal meat and rice to Indonesia. (PTI)



ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: In a surprising development, a National Assembly (NA) panel was informed that over 22,000 bureaucrats in Pakistan possess dual nationality, raising concerns about national security. As the NA's standing committee on Interior met on Monday with Raja Khuram Nawaz in the chair, members sounded alarm over the practice and called for stringent measures to restrict the practice, especially for bureaucrats, judges and members of the parliamentarians, according to The Express Tribune newspaper.

The meeting was deliberating on the proposed legislation that would grant Pakistani passports to citizens of countries with which Islamabad has dual nationality agreements.

During the meeting, it was also revealed that 22,000 bureaucrats hold dual citizenship. Committee member Abdul Qadir Patel expressed surprise that while members of the National Assembly and judges were prohibited from holding dual citizenship, bureaucrats were not. He proposed that the bill should include a provision to ensure that individuals with dual nationality should not be appointed as bureaucrats.

Patel also challenged the argument that politicians are not given dual citizenship due to the need to safeguard state secrets.

Agha Rafiullah of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) demanded detailed statistics on Pakistani citizens holding dual nationality, including how many have renounced their foreign citizenship and whether NADRA, the official registration body, possessed data on which countries these individuals were affiliated with.

The committee member also raised concerns about the relaxation of dual nationality rules, citing the example of the chairman of NAB (National Accountability Bureau), the top anti-corruption body, reported the paper.

Pakistan allows dual nationality with certain countries like the US, but it is forbidden for those in the armed forces, parliamentarians and judges of superior court. Concerns have been expressed often for bureaucrats with dual nationalities holding high positions. Still, no step has been taken as they are powerful people with the right connections. (PTI)

### New Orleans attack came as FBI was facing political heat, bracing for transition

WASHINGTON, Jan 7: Joining law enforcement officials to update the public in the hours after a man killed 14 people and injured dozens of others in New Orleans, Louisiana's junior Republican senator, John Kennedy, implored the FBI to "catch these people" — and then added one more eyebrow-raising request of the federal government. "After we get to the bottom of this," he said, "they need to tell the American people the truth."

The comment appeared to allude at least in part to an FBI official's erroneous assertion hours earlier that the Bourbon Street rampage was "not a terrorist event," a misstep the FBI tried to clean up with a follow-up statement that said the bureau was indeed investigating the Islamic State group-inspired attack as "an act of terrorism."

But more broadly, the suggestion that federal officials might obscure the truth of the investigation, and Kennedy's warning that he would "raise fresh hell" if they did, reflected the uneasy position the FBI had already found itself in by the time of last week's attack: buffeted by suspicion and public criticism from lawmakers, especially allies of President-elect Donald Trump, and bracing for a leadership change expected to produce dramatic up-

heaval at the nation's premier federal law enforcement agency.

"When the rubber meets the road, what really matters is that even in spite of all of this noise — and that's all it is, is noise — the bureau goes about doing its job on a day-to-day basis," said Frank Montoya Jr., a retired FBI counterintelligence executive.

The attack by Shamsud-Din Jabbar that killed 14 took place in the waning days of the Biden administration and just over two weeks before FBI Director Christopher Wray plans to resign his position to make way for Trump's pick, Kash Patel.

It follows a turbulent stretch in which the bureau has faced an escalating threat of international and domestic terrorism and has also been at the centre of politically explosive national security investigations involving both Trump and President Joe Biden that have put the FBI and Justice Department on the defensive and their decision-making under scrutiny.

The attack, the deadliest assault on US soil in years inspired by the Islamic State group, is certain to make counterterrorism and national security core topics of discussion at Patel's yet-to-be-scheduled confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

A former Justice Department national security prosecutor, Patel has appeared repeatedly on podcasts before he was selected as director, where he's spoken of his belief that the FBI needed a major overhaul. But he's been less specific about how as director he would protect the homeland.

One area he has discussed is significant reforms on how agents and analysts make use of Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act eavesdropping powers in national security investigations. He has spoken also of a desire to break out the FBI's "intel shops" from the rest of its crime-fighting activities.

A person familiar with Patel's positions who has sat in on his meetings with senators and who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations said Patel wants to ensure "there's better intel-sharing across agencies" but is not calling for the elimination of spy powers.

The FBI has long characterised protecting the homeland from terrorist attack as its top priority, and Wray has been proactive in sounding the alarm about a rising threat inspired in part by the turmoil in the Middle East following the October 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas on Israel. (AP)

### Seattle police officer who fatally struck Jaahnavi Kandula fired from department

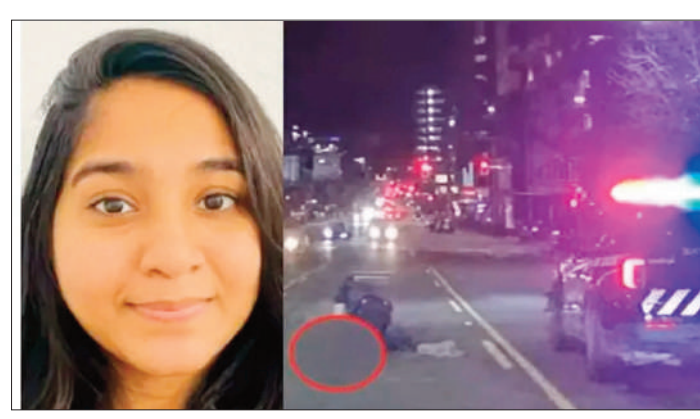
SEATTLE/NEW YORK, Jan 7: In a significant development, a Seattle police officer who killed Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula in January 2023 when the patrol vehicle he was driving struck her, has been fired from the police department, officials said. Kandula, 23, from Andhra Pradesh, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Kevin Dave when she was crossing a street in Seattle on January 23, 2023. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 km/h) on the way to a report of a drug overdose call.

Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle.

According to a report in The Seattle Times on Monday, Interim Seattle Police Chief Sue Rahr said that she had fired Dave from the Seattle Police Department.

The report, citing an email sent by Rahr to employees, said she fired Dave on Monday after the Seattle Office of Police Accountability found he had violated four department policies.

"I believe the officer did not intend to hurt anyone that night and that he was trying to get to a possible overdose victim as quickly as possible," Rahr said.



"However, I cannot accept the tragic consequences of his dangerous driving. His positive intent does not mitigate the poor decision that caused the loss of human life and brought discredit to the Seattle Police Department," according to the Seattle Times report.

It added that the policies Dave failed to follow "include using emergency lights for an emergency response and being responsible for safely operating a patrol vehicle", according to the copy of Rahr's email.

The development comes months after another Seattle police officer Daniel Auderer was fired following his insensitive comments and



laughter after Kandula's death.

The Consulate General of India in Seattle had been working consistently with authorities and law enforcement officials to ensure justice in the case, with Auderer's firing and now the action against Dave bringing a sense of closure and justice for Kandula's family.

The Consulate had been in regular touch with Kandula's family representatives and had said that it would continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Jaahnavi and her family.

In a February 2024 post on X, the Indian Consulate in Seattle said that "On the recently released investigation report of the King

County Prosecution Attorney on the unfortunate death of Jaahnavi Kandula. Consulate has been in regular touch with the designated family representatives and will continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Kandula and her family.

"We have also raised the matter strongly with local authorities, including Seattle Police for appropriate redress. The case has now been referred to the Seattle City Attorney's office for review. We await completion of Seattle Police's administrative investigation and will continue to monitor progress on the case."

Rahr was appointed as interim chief in May 2024 and in July last year, she had announced Auderer's firing. However, decision about Dave's action came in only now.

In bodycam footage released by the Seattle Police Department, Auderer was heard laughing after the deadly crash and had remarked "Uh, I think she went up on the hood, hit the windshield, and then when he hit the brakes, flew off the car...But she is dead."

After making these comments, Auderer "laughed hard for four seconds," the department's disciplinary Action Report said. (PTI)



# Manipur's new Guv visits Churachandpur

## Kuki leaders urged to work with admin to bring back peace

**CHURACHANDPUR/ IMPHAL, Jan 7:** Manipur's new Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Tuesday visited the Churachandpur district, where Kukis live, and urged community leaders to work collaboratively with the administration in peacebuilding efforts.

Bhalla, the former Union home secretary, reached the district around 9:40 am. He inaugurated an IT centre at the Churachandpur College and interacted with students.

He heard their grievances and the problems they were facing as a result of the crisis in the state.

Maintaining that the students were the future of the country and he did not want them to suffer, Bhalla said the government was making all efforts to bring back normalcy.

Thereafter, he went to the deputy commissioner's office where he held meetings with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)



such as the Kuki Zo Council and ITLF, among others.

"Governor appealed the leaders of the CSOs to work collaboratively with the administration in peacebuilding efforts," a statement issued by the Raj Bhavan in Imphal said.

The Kuki-Zo Council, which is

the apex body of the community, submitted a memorandum to the governor, stressing the "need for maintaining the sanctity of the Buffer Zones", the need for re-demarcation of district police jurisdiction and deployment of "neutral central security forces".

It said the governor insisted that

peace must come first and then "solution".

"Whereas the Council strongly asserted that political talk should be expedited with the SoO group and a Separate Administration - Union Territory with legislature for the Kuki-Zo people be granted under Article 239 (A) of the Indian Constitution for peace to prevail," it said in a statement.

"Hon'ble Governor promised that the Central government will maintain neutrality in maintaining law and order. In this regard the Council assured that law and order situation will remain secured only if the sanctity of 'Buffer Zone' is respected," it added.

The Zomi Students' Federation also submitted a memorandum to the governor, apprising him about the issues being faced by the students, the issues of the Churachandpur Medical College, and the need for setting up a central government office in the district.

Later, Bhalla visited the Sadbhavana Mandap relief camp in Tui-bong and interacted with those living there. He also distributed relief materials.

On his way back to Imphal, the governor visited the Chingnu Thangjing Guest House relief camp in Moirang in Bishnupur district, and interacted with people of the Meitei community who have taken shelter there. He also distributed relief materials among them.

Over 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023.

Further, Bhalla interacted with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) residing at various relief camps in Churachandpur and Bishnupur.

The Governor patiently heard the grievances faced by the IDPs and assured them to extend support to them. (NNN/PTI)

# Mizoram forms committee to monitor spread of HMPV



**AIZAWL, Jan 7:** The Mizoram government has formed a committee to monitor the spread of human metapneumovirus (HMPV) and assess the situation, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The committee was set up following a meeting which was chaired by health minister Lalrinpui on Monday, it said.

The meeting also constituted rapid response teams at both the state and district levels to deal with the infection. The meeting, attended by important health officials, also reviewed the situation in the country as well as the state, it said.

The integrated disease surveillance programme (IDSP) of the state health department has been keeping a close watch on the spread of the respiratory virus after its outbreak in China and the detection of some cases in India, a senior official said.

IDSP state nodal officer Dr Rengpuia told reporters that IDSP has been in touch with the Union Ministry of health and family welfare regarding the outbreak.

Meanwhile, the IDSP issued a public notice informing the public that HMPV is a respiratory disease, which is not new but has appeared globally in previous years.

The health department is closely monitoring the situation through the IDSP and there have been no recent reports of a surge in influenza-like illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in the state, it said.

Clinical tests of various respiratory viruses under several laboratories of ICMR also indicated that there is no surge in positive cases of adenovirus, HMPV, RSV and others in the country, the IDSP said.

The HMPV test can be done at the state's lone Zoram Medical College (ZMC), it said.

The IDSP emphasised that there was no need to panic, as the health department and surveillance network are diligently monitoring the situation.

All state-run hospitals and private medical facilities are instructed to give daily reports on all ILI and SARI-related cases, it said.

Besides, Social Awareness and Action Plan to Neutralise Pneumonia (SAANS) campaign is currently being launched across the state, it said.

The health department also urged the general public to report any suspected cases of ILI and SARI to the nearest hospitals and sub-centres. (PTI)

# Govt door open for talks with HNLC in Meghalaya



**SHILLONG, Jan 7:** Meghalaya chief secretary DP Wahlang on Tuesday said the government is still opening its doors for talks with the proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC).

His statement came after almost a year that the HNLC had pulled out of the tripartite peace talks held with the Centre and State government alleging that its five core demands, which include general amnesty, were not addressed and fulfilled.

Speaking to reporters, Wahlang said that talks will resume again when all parties reach a point of convergence.

"At that point of time, we were keen to continue with the discussion but unfortunately, there were some points, where tricky points as far as they are concerned and as

far as we are concerned and we could not meet at a point of convergence as far as those issues are concerned," he said.

"Therefore, we requested that they can go back to the place where they came from and have a proper discussion first and when there is complete clarity and when we arrive at that point of convergence then we can resume the talks. So, they went back and they have had meetings among themselves but they have not come to us to resume the talks. So, we are waiting. Our doors are open, that is the most important thing," Wahlang added.

The chief secretary then said "there are some items, which are non-negotiable and there are some items, which are negotiable during the first round of peace talks". (NNN)

# Health experts review preparedness amid reports of HMPV

**SHILLONG, Jan 7:** Meghalaya Health Experts Committee of the department of health and family welfare, Meghalaya, convened a meeting today under the chairmanship of the principal secretary to discuss reports on Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV).

The committee assessed the current threat and reviewed the preparedness of the state health machinery in response to the virus.

The committee said that HMPV is not a new virus, it has been circulating among the population for many years and it was discovered in 2001.

Issuing advisory to the public, the committee said the public is encouraged to follow basic hygiene practices, such as frequent handwashing and wearing masks in case they have any flu-like symptoms, to reduce the risk of respiratory infections.

Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) will continue to closely monitor the situation and is dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of the public during this season.

The health system of Meghalaya is well equipped and strengthened to tackle any outbreak situations, it said. (NNN)

# Jan 8 as Black Day in Tripura

## Pradyot expresses his unwavering support

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Jan 7:** The Tripura Students' Federation (TSF), an indigenous student body and member of the North East Students' Organisation (NESO), has announced plans to observe January 8 as Black Day in remembrance of the 2019 firing that claimed three lives during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The tragic incident occurred in Madhabbari, Khumulwng, around 20 kilometers from Agartala, where clashes between police and demonstrators opposing the then Citizenship Amendment Bill

(CAB) resulted in the deaths of three TSF supporters.

In a statement, TSF general secretary Hamalu Jamatia said, "The Tripura Students' Federation (TSF) extends a heartfelt invitation to join us in observing Black Day on January 8, 2025, to honor the lives lost during the peaceful protest against CAB, now the CAA.

"This day is a solemn reminder of the courage and sacrifice of those who stood firm to protect the rights and dignity of the indigenous people of Tripura. By observing Black Day, we reaffirm our commitment to preserving our cultural identity and upholding dem-

ocratic values," he added.

The TSF has also invited Tpra Motha founder and royal scion, Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, to participate in the event.

In response, Pradyot expressed his unwavering support, despite being abroad. "I am not in India, but I fully support TSF in observing Black Day on January 8. We shall never forget what happened that day. It is equally significant to remember that even the statue of Maharaja Bir Bikram was struck by a bullet during the violence. My full support and sympathy are with TSF. We will never forget," Pradyot said.

# Nagaland govt to appeal to Centre to revoke PAP regime



**KOHEMA, Jan 7:** The Nagaland government has decided to appeal to the Centre to exclude the northeastern state from the purview of the Protected Area Permit (PAP), a minister said on Tuesday.

During a cabinet meeting held in the chief minister's residential complex here on Monday, the decision was taken to request the Union Ministry of home affairs to revoke the PAP regime in Nagaland, state Environment Minister C L John told PTI. A foreigner is required to obtain a Protected Area Permit to visit certain areas of India, including parts of the northeastern region.

"During the cabinet meeting, a thorough deliberation was made over the PAP regime. The council of ministers observed that the state peacefully celebrated the Hornbill festival from December 1 to 10 last year with more than 2,000 foreigners attending the event. The cabinet decided to appeal to the Centre to revoke the PAP system in Nagaland," the state minister said.

Altogether 2,05,968 visitors, including 2,527 foreigners, thronged Naga heritage village Kisama, the venue for the Hornbill festival, around 12 kms south of the state capital.

The PAP, which had been in place for foreigners since the 1960s as a security measure due to the region's sensitive nature and geopolitical concerns, was revoked in December 2021. This gave foreigners easier access to Nagaland and other northeastern states without the need for such permits.

After three years of revocation, the MHA reimposed the PAP regime in Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in December last year. (PTI)

# Former Tripura minister alleges negligence by private Hospital

## HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Jan 7:** The Tripura Human Rights Commission (THRC) has issued a notice to ILS Hospital in Agartala, seeking its response to allegations of negligence raised by former minister Gopal Chandra Das. The Commission took suo motu cognizance of the issue following reports in local newspapers.

According to the reports, Gopal Chandra Das alleged negligence in the treatment of his wife, Saraswati Deb (Das), who was undergoing care for kidney-related ailments. A surgery had been performed on her at ILS Hospital on September 14, 2023, by nephrologist Dr Samaresh Paul and surgeon Dr Kanak Narayan Bhattacharjee. After a few dialysis sessions, she was discharged from the hospital.

The issue arose on December 23, 2023, when the permanent catheter (cath) line used for dialysis at GBP Hospital was found to be non-functional. Gopal Chandra Das took his wife back to ILS Hospital to address the

issue. The hospital allegedly charged ₹ 5.510 for cleaning the cath line, but after admitting Saraswati Deb, they reportedly discharged her without performing the required procedure. Consequently, she had to return to GBP Hospital, where it was confirmed that the cath line had not been cleaned by ILS Hospital despite the payment.

The THRC noted that the allegations suggest a prima facie case of human rights violation. In its order, the Commission stated, "The allegations reported in the news appear to involve neglect on the part of ILS Hospital. Therefore, the Commission has directed the hospital authorities to provide a written explanation regarding the claims. Additionally, notice has been issued to Gopal Chandra Das to record his statement in connection with the allegations." The Commission has also instructed that the hospital be served with copies of the relevant news articles and the order. Notices have been sent to both ILS Hospital and Gopal Chandra Das, demanding their responses to the claims.

# ₹ 13 crore for post-flood relief in Tripura

## HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Jan 7:** The Tripura government has ramped up its post-flood recovery efforts by sanctioning an additional ₹13 crore from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, as announced by Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Dr. Saha shared, "An additional ₹ 13 crore

essential support.

The August floods caused widespread destruction across multiple districts, severely impacting infrastructure, housing, and livelihoods.

With this enhanced financial support, the state government plans to accelerate restoration efforts and bolster assistance for those affected.

# Arunachal Guv shares ways to woo investors to state

## Asks officials to highlight developments

**ITANAGAR, Jan 7:**

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (retd) K T Parnaik on Tuesday advised officers of the information and public relations (IPR) department to explore new ways of contributing towards inclusive development in the northeastern state. Interacting with the officers at Raj Bhavan here, the governor dwelt at length on the areas where considerable progress has been made, including infrastructure, telecommunication, horticulture and tourism.

Parnaik said a large number of projects and programmes have been successfully implemented in the state, which needs to be highlighted.

"The developmental stories will create a positive environment and facilitate investments from outside, which would bring prosperity and more progress in the state," he said.

Parnaik urged the officers to focus on the success stories of individuals, who have bene-



fited from government programmes and schemes.

"It will encourage eligible beneficiaries, particularly the youth and entrepreneurs to avail benefits from the welfare schemes and programmes of the state and central government," the governor said.

He said with innovative audio-visual presentations, the department can open the gate of Arunachal Pradesh tourism to more people.

"With innovation and the use of AI, the presentations can attract people's attention and coerce them to visit

share success stories in fields such as infrastructure, tourism, and entrepreneurship.

Parnaik highlighted the significance of participating in the national event, calling it a rare privilege.

The governor also stressed the importance of adopting 'nation first' ethos, which aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat (developed India).

"The youth of today will lead the country when we celebrate the centenary of independence in 2047. It is up to you to contribute to the nation's growth and focus on areas that you wish to develop," he said.

C Dangmei, district youth officer of Nehru Yuva Sangathan, said that out of 15,000 applicants, 57 youth from various backgrounds across the state were chosen in categories such as folk dance, song, painting, story writing, poetry, entrepreneurship and social work. (PTI)

**AFFIDAVIT**

I Kartik Teli, S/o Satyaram Teli, Vill: Kajechara Gaon, Po & Ps : Dokmoka, Dist : Karbi Anglong (Assam). My actual name is Kartik Teli. Some documents has my name wrongly recorded as Jagannath Sahu. The given observation has been filed in an affidavit.

No. e. DME/P-Med/2024/553247/6

### EDUCATIONAL NOTICE

**2<sup>ND</sup> ROUND COUNSELLING FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR ADMISSION INTO 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR DIPLOMA IN PARA-MEDICAL COURSES IN THE INSTITUTES OF PARA-MEDICAL SCIENCES ATTACHED TO THE GOVT. MEDICAL COLLEGES OF ASSAM FOR THE SESSION 2024**

This is for general information to all candidates who appeared in the Paramedical Entrance Examination, 2024 conducted by the Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences for admission into 1<sup>st</sup> year Diploma in Para-Medical courses in the Institutes of Para-Medical Sciences attached to the Medical Colleges of Assam for the session 2024, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> round counselling for selection of candidates of the said courses will be held from 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 as per programme given below.

Candidates must bring with them all original testimonials i.e. Admit Card of Paramedical Entrance Examination -2024, Marks sheets of HSSLC or equivalent examination, Admit Card of HSLC or equivalent examination, Pass Certificates of Class X and Class XII examination, Permanent Resident Certificate, Caste certificate (wherever applicable), NCL certificate for OBC/MOBC category candidates, Unemployed Family certificate, EWS certificate (wherever applicable) and other relevant documents. They are also requested to submit a set of photo copies of the said documents and recent passport size photo at the time of counselling. For Char Area candidates the certificates must be issued by Char Area Development Authority and countersigned by concerned DC/SDO.

All candidates should appear personally for counselling on the scheduled dates and time, failing of which he/she will forfeit his/her claim for the seat. In case of any matter of controversy, the decision of the Selection Board shall be final and binding.

**Date of Counselling: 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

(A) All candidates who secured scored upto **48 and above** in Paramedical Entrance Examination -2024.

**Date of Counselling: 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

(B) All candidates who secured scored from **47 to 41** of Paramedical Entrance Examination -2024.

**Date of Counselling: 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

(C) All candidates who secured scored from **40 to 34** of Paramedical Entrance Examination -2024.

(After filling-up of all un-reserved seats in the Institute of Para-Medical Sciences attached to the Medical Colleges of Assam, the remaining candidates belonging to reserved categories will be accommodated in their respective categories in order of merit.)

**Date of Counselling: 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2025**

(D) Candidates under OBC/MOBC-NCL, SC, ST(P) & ST(H) who secured scored from **33 to 31** of Paramedical Entrance Examination -2024.

Venue of Counselling : Office of the Director of Medical Education, Assam  
Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati - 22.

Time of Counselling : At 10:00 AM (each day of counselling).

Candidates must bring with them a duly filled in 'Counselling Form' which is available in this Directorate official website [www.dme.assam.gov.in](http://www.dme.assam.gov.in). Candidates are directed to visit the official website of this Directorate, [www.dme.assam.gov.in](http://www.dme.assam.gov.in) regularly for updates.

Sd/-

Janasanyog /D/11475/24/8-Jan-25

Director of Medical Education, Assam



## Abuse me or call me Dawood, but help Delhi farmers: Chouhan to CM Atishi



**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday urged Delhi Chief Minister Atishi to implement central government farmer welfare schemes in the national capital, saying he was willing to weather personal attacks if it benefits Delhi's farming community.

"Abuse me or call me Dawood, it does not make any difference to me, but implement the farmer welfare schemes of the Government of India for the farmers of Delhi, give them the benefit of the schemes," Chouhan said in a meeting with a group of Delhi-based farmers here.

He requested the Delhi CM to submit proposals immediately and take central funds for implementation of the central schemes.

Chouhan's reference to Dawood Ibrahim, the notorious gangster, appeared to be a response to previous criticisms from Delhi's leadership.

"I don't mind if you abuse me, but give the benefits of the schemes to the farmers... It is not in my nature to abuse anyone. With folded hands request you to implement the schemes," he said.

Several central government schemes meant for farmer welfare have faced implementation hurdles in Delhi, the minister said, adding that he had written to Delhi CM flagging this issue recently.

"I am saying with great pain that the farmers of Delhi are not getting the benefit of many schemes of the central government. Farmers are not getting the benefit of subsidy being provided by the Centre," he said.

The implementation of central government agricultural schemes in Delhi has been a point of contention between the Centre and the Delhi government. Several farmers at the meeting highlighted their ex-

clusion from crucial programmes available in neighbouring states.

Captain Kanwarlal Dagar, former national president, Bharatiya Kisan Union, said, "The farmer of Delhi, once considered the king of India, has become the most backward in the country, despite three master plans implemented over the last 40-50 years."

Unlike farmers in neighbouring states, Delhi's agricultural community is excluded from crucial central government programmes such as the soil health scheme and crop insurance initiatives, said Satyawan Sehrawat, a farmer from Darya Pur Kalam village in north-west Delhi.

They are also unable to access the substantial subsidies available for drip irrigation systems that farmers in adjacent states enjoy, he said, adding that while other states have implemented solar schemes to support agriculture, Delhi lacks such provisions.

The infrastructure and support system for Delhi's farmers is also notably limited, with only one Krishi Vigyan Kendra serving the entire region, whereas other states have multiple centres, Sehrawat said, adding that this single centre requires additional funding to adequately serve the farming community.

Another farmer Narendra Yadav said, "The village lacks roads, causing difficulties in transporting vegetables to the station. Farmers use bicycles or tractors, but in the last 10 days the MCD has snatched our tractors and demanded Rs 18 per kg."

The meeting was part of Chouhan's weekly Tuesday farmer consultations. The minister has met with more than 15 farmer organisations from different states to discuss agricultural issues and potential solutions. (PTI)

## Will support Congress-led UDF in opposing Kerala Forest Act amendments: Anvar

**MALAPPURAM (KERALA), Jan 7:** Independent MLA P V Anvar on Tuesday alleged the amendments proposed by the left government in Kerala to the state's Forest Act were "dangerous" and "anti-people" and said he would stand with the Congress-led UDF in opposing it.

He later visited UDF leader and IUML supremo Panakkad Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal at his residence here to discuss the issue.

After meeting Thangal, Anvar told reporters that the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM) supremo assured him of his support on the issue.

He said that he also requested the IUML leadership to oppose the amendments to the Forest Act.

"I will be meeting the Congress leaders, including Leader of Opposition in the state assembly, others in the UDF and heads of all religious communities. The aim is also to defeat Pinarayi Vijayan and the LDF. I am interested in associating with the UDF, especially on this issue," the MLA said.

After the meeting with Anvar, Thangal said that UDF was not opposed to the issue raised by the MLA. "The state government needs to rethink the proposed amendments to the Forest Act," he said.

The issue of Anvar's association with the UDF will be among the things the front has to discuss, he added.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly V D Sathesnan said the issue related to inclusion of Anvar in the front should be left to the alliance.

"The UDF leadership will decide on what has to be done regarding that. My personal preferences or interests regarding it have no relevance," he told reporters in Thiruvananthapuram.

Earlier in the day, at a press conference here, Anvar requested the UDF to oppose the Forest Act amendment Bill and focus on working for the tribals and those living in the hilly areas of the state, saying that it would help the opposition to come back to power.

The MLA said that if the UDF leadership stands with him on the issue, he will back them completely. At the same time, he also said that it was up to the opposition to decide whether they want to include him in their front.

# BJP committed to overall development of Delhi: Nadda

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** BJP president J P Nadda on Tuesday welcomed the announcement of the Delhi Assembly poll schedule and appealed to people to elect a government that will contribute to their progress and make the capital a developed city.

The BJP is committed to the overall development of Delhi with the resolve of 'ant'yodaya', the welfare of people at the bottom of the pyramid, Nadda said in a series of posts on X.

The Election Commission announced that assembly polls in Delhi will be held on February 5 and the counting of votes will take place on February 8.

"I welcome the announcement of the Delhi Assembly elections today by the Election Commission of India. I appeal to the people here to elect a government that will contribute to their progress and to making a developed Delhi," Nadda said.

"I urge the people of Delhi to choose a government that focuses on improving the standard of living, combating corruption, reducing pollution and providing quality services to make everyday life easier," he said.



Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP is committed to the overall development of Delhi with the resolve of 'ant'yodaya'. The BJP government has been continuously working towards the comprehensive development of Delhi and will further its efforts

to turn the dream of a 'Viksit Delhi' into a reality, he added.

"Elections are the biggest festival of democracy. They are a medium to keep the country and the state advancing on the path of development and good governance," Nadda said. (PTI)

## Formula E race case: Telangana HC finds prima facie irregularities, refuses to quash FIR against KTR

**HYDERABAD, Jan 7:** In a setback to BRS Working President K T Rama Rao, the Telangana High Court on Tuesday refused to quash the FIR against him in connection with the Formula E race issue, removing the protection against the arrest given to him.

On December 31, 2024, the HC had reserved its orders on the petition filed by the former minister after hearing the arguments made by the state government as well as the defence in the case registered by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) which alleged that Rama Rao authorised payments to the tune of ₹ 55 crore, most of it in forex, to Formula E Organisation without necessary approvals.

High Court Judge Justice K Lakshman in his order said the allegations indicate that Rama Rao without any approval from the State Cabinet or the finance department directed the HMDA (Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority) to pay huge sums of money to a foreign company.

"Whether the petitioner directed the said payments with a dishonest intention to cause gain to himself or third parties is required to be investigated. The allegations when read together make out a prima facie case of wrongdoing and mis-

appropriation of funds of the HMDA," the order said.

The investigating agency should have a reasonable opportunity to investigate and collect evidence. Therefore, the court cannot "haste and thwart" the investigation in the present case, it opined.

The court had earlier restricted ACB from arresting Rama Rao, son of BRS president and former Telangana chief minister K Chandrababhan Rao, until the orders were pronounced and the present order removed that protection.

After the court's order, Rama Rao, however, expressed confidence that truth would triumph in the end and he would come back stronger.

Attacking the Congress government, he said its actions would not cow him down. "Mark my words, our comeback will be stronger than this setback. Your lies won't shatter me. Your words won't diminish me. Your actions won't obscure my vision. This cacophony won't silence me! Today's obstacles will give way to tomorrow's triumph," he said in a post on 'X'.

Rama Rao said he respects the judiciary and has an unwavering belief that justice will prevail.

Following the High Court's verdict, Rama Rao held discussions with BRS leaders and legal advi-

sors. Senior BRS leader T Harish Rao alleged this is a false case foisted by A Revanth Reddy government as part of "diversion politics".

The state government has been facing severe opposition from the public with respect to the implementation of farmers financial assistance scheme 'Rythu Bandhu', he claimed.

He said they have been discussing with legal experts on the future course of action. "We know that these kind of false cases will be foisted against our leaders. We are prepared to face them," Harish Rao said.

He further said the High Court in its order stated that the investigation can be conducted in the case, but it did not say there is corruption. However, he added they would cooperate with the investigation.

When contacted, a senior member of Rama Rao's legal team told PTI they are yet to receive the High Court order copy, based on which they will take a call about whether to approach the Supreme Court and also as per his client's decision.

During the arguments, Advocate General A Sudarshan Reddy pointed out that payments were made to Formula E Organisation

without following business rules and necessary approvals while the defence advocates argued that there was no criminality in the case.

The AG also argued that the case cannot be quashed at the FIR stage when the investigation is going on. The ACB had last week served a notice to the BRS MLA to appear before it on January 6, but as he left the agency's office without appearing before the officials on Monday, he was again issued fresh notice for appearance on January 9.

The ACB on December 19 registered a case against Rama Rao, also known as KTR, over alleged payments, some of it in foreign currency without approvals, to conduct the race in 2023 during the previous regime.

The case was registered under relevant sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act and IPC dealing with criminal misappropriation, criminal breach of trust and criminal conspiracy that allegedly resulted in loss to the government exchequer to the tune of about ₹ 55 crore.

Though the race was supposed to be held in February 2024 as well, it was cancelled after the Congress government assumed office in December 2023. (PTI)

## AAP, BJP, Congress exude confidence about Delhi polls victory

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Leaders of the three principal contenders for the Delhi Assembly exuded confidence about winning next month's polls, the dates for which were announced on Tuesday.

Polling for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar announced.

All India Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba said, "I appeal to the people to participate in large numbers in this festival of democracy. Your single vote can play a crucial role in solving the issues you face."

Lamba is the Congress candidate against Chief Minister Atishi from the Kalkaji seat.

The BJP's North West Delhi MP Yogender Chandolia also expressed confidence about his party's victory.

"We have been waiting for this moment for a long time. After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally, BJP workers are determined and ready to fight the elections. We are preparing to wash away the stain of all these years," he said.

The BJP MP was referring to Modi's January 5 rally in Rohini during which he had hit out at the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP, which he again attacked with the "aapda (dis-

aster)" jibe, and said, "Only one voice is reverberating in Delhi -- 'Aapda nahi sahenge, badal kar rahenge (will not tolerate disaster, will bring change)'."

Slamming the Delhi government, Chandolia asserted that it would be held accountable for its performance during the past decade.

"The Delhi government will have to answer for what it has done in the past 10 years," he said. He also said AAP leaders' recent announcements were a result of their realisation that they had not done enough. "The residents of Delhi are demanding answers for the false promises they made." (PTI)

## Road blockades in Latur district to protest sarpanch Deshmukh's murder

**LATUR (MAHA), Jan 7:** A local organisation on Tuesday staged 'Chakka Jam' or road blockades in Maharashtra's Latur district to protest the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh. The protest was held at five places in Latur city, and at Mahalanga, Chakur Nitpur, Bargaon Kale, Budhoda, Ausa, Ahmadpur and Mahapur in the district.

The 'Sarvapakshiya Nagrik Manch' (all-party citizens forum) had called for blockade from 10 am to 4 pm, but the agitation was called off by 1 pm in the city due to the police's intervention.

Deshmukh, sarpanch of Masajog in neighbouring Beed district, was abducted and brutally murdered on December 9.

## 'Daraarvadi', 'Hridayheen': Akhilesh coins new sobriquets to target BJP

**LUCKNOW, Jan 7:** Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday coined two new sobriquets -- "Daraarvadi" (divisive) and "Hridayheen" (heartless) -- to target the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking to reporters at the party office here, Yadav said, "These BJP people in power are not in favour of brotherhood. It is a 'Daraarvadi' party. Human life does not hold any value for them, because they only want to use it to derive political benefits."

"If you see BJP's work, you will notice how 'Hridayheen' it is. It doesn't have sympathy towards anyone. Many incidents are occurring in Uttar Pradesh despite the BJP's tall claims of running a zero-tolerance government," Yadav said.

Claiming that there are two sides to the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party (SP) chief said, "One is injustice towards PDA, and the second is corruption, with both surpassing each other from time to time. To hide the imbalance, the BJP hatched a conspiracy to orchestrate violence in Sambhal. It was also done to hide the loot during the recent by-polls at Kundarki and Meerapur."

"PDA" is an acronym coined by Yadav for 'picchde, Dalit, alp-sankhyak' (backwards, Dalits and minorities).

Yadav also claimed that the leader of opposition in state Assembly, Mata Prasad Pandey, wanted to visit Sambhal and speak to the people there, but the BJP government imposed prohibitory orders.

"However, when they (SP delegation) went for a second time, the same administration allowed them. It is not clear what the government wanted to hide," he said.

Violence erupted in Sambhal during a survey on November 24 last year, as protesters gathered near the Shahi Jama Masjid and clashed with the security personnel, leaving four dead and several injured.

"The government used its officials to trigger the violence in Sambhal. Otherwise, what was the urgency to conduct the survey," the SP chief asked.

"You cannot conduct such surveys under the Places of Worship Act. Yet the government and its officials went ahead with it. People fell to administration's bullets in Sambhal, it was not a riot," Yadav claimed. (PTI)

# BJP will add to existing welfare schemes in Delhi, deliver benefits to women: Jay Panda

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Senior BJP leader Baijayant Jay Panda on Tuesday said his party, if elected to power in Delhi, will add to the existing welfare schemes and deliver benefits to women like it has in other states, as he slammed the AAP as a party of "frauds".

The BJP's in-charge for the Delhi Assembly polls told PTI that his party is targeting to win over 50 per cent of the votes in the national capital, pointing out that its vote share in assembly elections has been steadily catching up with that in the Lok Sabha polls.

A day after Delhi Chief Minister Atishi turned emotional while reacting to the BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri's personal jibe linked to her family, Panda said his party always advises its members to speak in public after due consideration even as he asked the AAP leader to respond to "political questions".

Bidhuri is contesting against Atishi from the Kalkaji Assembly segment.

Panda claimed that "her family staunchly supported Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru."

He added, "She has still not distanced herself from this. Her own party insults women. The former



chief minister (Arvind Kejriwal) who was in jail has openly described as a temporary CM. This is an insult."

The BJP has accused her father of mobilising support for Guru who was later hanged. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has in turn charged the BJP with adopting diversionary tactics.

Assembly polls in Delhi will be held on February 5 and the votes will be counted on February 8, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar announced earlier on Tuesday.

With the AAP's campaign riding on its government's welfare

difference will be that we will deliver to people as we have in other states, and we will do it corruption-free."

Citing financial assistance provided to women in BJP-ruled states like Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, he asserted, "In Delhi, of course, we will provide facilities to women. AAP cheats people. They are frauds."

If the AAP government was sincere, it would have begun providing financial assistance to women, he said, noting that the party has not delivered on its similar promise in Punjab.

"They (AAP govt) know they are not in a position to do it. They have run Delhi into the ground. For the first time, Delhi (budget) is in deficit," he said, accusing "aapda government" of scams worth rupees thousands of crores in the Delhi Jal Board and liquor trade while doing no infrastructure development in the national capital.

"The capital of India does not look like the capital of an emerging, growing, aspiring and influential nation. Delhi needs a conflict-free government that will work together with the Centre for its development. "Delhites deserve a city which is

representative of this new India, be it proper road, clean water, proper infra and a health facility available to everyone and not these fake mohalla clinics," he said.

Panda claimed that be it the poor living in jhuggi-jhopri clusters or the middle class, people are fed up with the "false" promises of the AAP. "They have decided to give a chance to the BJP," he asserted.

Asked about Kejriwal's jibe at the BJP for not having a chief ministerial face, he said it was reflective of the AAP leader's desperation as the former chief minister has no real answers to questions on the "sheesh mahal", condition of roads and water availability.

The BJP, the Lok Sabha MP noted, has mostly fought on collective leadership in state elections and won them more often than not.

On the charge that the BJP's first list of 29 candidates figured many candidates who joined it from different parties, he said the "vast majority of them have been with the BJP for a long time."

Under Modi, the BJP has grown and as a result, many people from different walks of life who started their career in other parties want to join it, he added. (PTI)



# Will detoxify myself, go to Himalayas: CEC Rajiv Kumar on post-retirement plans

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday revealed his intention to "detoxify" himself and spend several months in solitude in the Himalayas post his retirement next month.

Responding to a question while addressing a presser to announce the Delhi Assembly elections, he shared his post-retirement plans with an introspective touch.

"I will detoxify myself for the next four-five months, go to the deep Himalayas, be away from the glare of all of you. I need some 'ekant' (solitude) and 'swadhya' (self-study)," Kumar, who is set to retire on February 18, said.

In October last year, Kumar was rescued from the remote Ralam village in Uttarkhand's Pithoragarh district following an emergency helicopter landing due to inclement weather and left stranded at over 12,000 feet.

Kumar, a 1984-batch IAS officer from the Bihar/Jharkhand cadre, also shared a personal aspi-



Known for incorporating poetry into his addresses, Kumar used evocative couplets to underscore his messages. Addressing some parties' tendency to question the Election Commission's integrity, he recited: "Aarop aur ilzamat ka daur chale koi gila nah; jhoth ke gubaroon ko bulandi mile, koi shikwa nah; har parinaam me praman dete hain par wo bina saboot shaq ki nai duniya raunka karte hain."

This poetic plea was a call to eschew baseless accusations and appreciate the transparent work of the Election Commission.

During the announcement of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, CEC Kumar had quipped, "It is not proper to blame the EC for unfulfilled desires when one has not done their job properly."

Kumar took over as the 25th CEC on May 15, 2022, after serving as Election Commissioner since September 2020. During his tenure, he oversaw landmark elections, including the 16th Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections in 2022 and assembly elections in 11 states.

Before his appointment as CEC, Kumar held several key positions, including finance secretary and chairman of the Public Enterprises Selection Board. As finance secretary, he spearheaded significant reforms, such as bank mergers, recapitalization of public sector banks, and the crackdown on shell companies. (PTI)

# SC refuses to hear Maneka Gandhi's plea against 45-day cap for filing election petition

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a plea of former union minister Maneka Gandhi against the 45-day limitation imposed for filing an election petition under the law saying court cannot legislate and open floodgates.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Gandhi, withdrew the plea which sought a revisit of the 1973 Hukumdev Narain Yadav judgement directing election pleas to strictly adhere to the time-lines and procedures under the Representation of the People Act.

Luthra said the law should be revisited in the context of a person who suppressed material facts of four criminal cases.

He submitted his client was not seeking the court to legislate, but only saying the 1973 verdict was bad in law and needed a revisit.

The bench said the petitioner couldn't make the submission that a particular judgement was bad in law in a writ petition and could only do it in a civil appeal, where the verdict was relied upon.

"If we start interfering with the prescribed limit, then look at the consequences. It will defeat the very purpose of legislation," the bench told Luthra.

The top court had told Gandhi

prescribing 45-day time limit was a matter of policy and it had to see the legislative intent for fixing such a limit. "This was perhaps done so that there is no uncertainty on the election of the returned candidate," the top court had said.

Gandhi challenged the August 14 2024 order of the Allahabad High Court dismissing her election petition against Nishad's election observing it was time-barred.

The high court's Lucknow bench held the petition was filed after the 45-day deadline and it couldn't be heard on merit.

She contended Nishad deprived the voters of their right to know his full criminal history and the delay in filing the petition should be condoned.

Gandhi argued 12 criminal cases were pending against Nishad but he disclosed only eight in his affidavit.

"The election petition being time-barred by Section 81 read with Section 86 of the Representation of People Act 1951 and Order VII Rule 11(d) of the Code of Civil Procedure is liable to be dismissed," held the high court. (PTI)

# Maharashtra govt makes FASTag mandatory at all toll plazas from April 1

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** The Maharashtra cabinet on Tuesday decided to make toll collection through FASTag mandatory from April 1 and announced revisions in the Rules of Business to streamline administrative processes.

The cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis approved the public works department's proposal that toll collection at toll plazas across the state will be done exclusively through FASTag from April 1.

It also approved amendments to the Public-Private Partnership Policy 2014 to facilitate this change.

FASTag is India's electronic toll collection chip for national highways.

The move is expected to bring efficiency and transparency to toll collection and reduce vehicle congestion at toll plazas. It will save time and fuel for commuters, a government statement said.

It also stated that vehicles without FASTag or those entering the dedicated lanes without proper tags will have to pay double the toll fee.

At present, tolls are being collected at 13 road projects under the public works department and nine projects managed by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation. The decision will apply to these and all future toll projects in the state, the statement said.

In another decision, the cabinet approved the revised Maharashtra Government Rules of Business to make administrative functioning smoother and more efficient.

According to the government statement, the revisions include

provisions related to matters to be presented before the cabinet, cases requiring the approval of the chief minister or the governor, and the procedures for meetings of the cabinet and council of ministers.

The first such rules were framed in 1975, and this is the third major revision.

After the governor's approval, the revised rules will be published in the official gazette. These changes are aimed at enhancing transparency, efficiency, and public-centric governance, ultimately benefiting the citizens of the state, the statement said. The revised rules contain 48 regulations, four schedules, and one annexure, divided into nine sections.

It said that the schedules detail the names of administrative departments, cases to be presented before the cabinet, matters requiring the chief minister's or governor's approval, and procedures for legislative proposals. The annexure explains the working methods of the cabinet and the council of ministers.

As per the statement, a study group of departmental secretaries recommended these revisions based on a comparative study of the rules of the Government of India and other states.

Provisions have also been included to ensure orders are issued at a minimum of undersecretary level and to streamline the process for presenting legislative bills, it said.

These changes are expected to simplify and expedite the decision-making process, leading to more effective governance in the state, the statement said. (PTI)

# Mamata calls for all-round surveillance to thwart any trouble from Bangladesh during Gangasagar Mela

**SAGAR ISLAND (WB), Jan 7:** In the wake of the ongoing crisis in Bangladesh, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday called for all-round surveillance on land, air and water to thwart any attempt from across the border to cause trouble during the ensuing Gangasagar Mela.

She said adequate police forces led by senior IPS officers have been deployed in Sagar Island and approaching roads from Kolkata.

Speaking at a programme from where she inaugurated several state-run programmes, Banerjee said, "We must ensure there is no trouble during the annual fair. Tight vigil has to be ensured. I have told the navy about it. The coast guard should also be informed. We have to ensure there is no trouble from that side (Bangladesh). There should be all-

round surveillance on land, air and water."

"A total of 10 ministers will be deployed. Of them, four to five ministers will be in Sagar Island, while others will be at important locations such as Kachuberia and Lot number 8. IG and DIG-rank officers will be deployed. West Bengal and Kolkata police forces have been asked to ensure good coordination to maintain strict surveillance," she said.

Banerjee said that although the Centre has been bearing the expenses of Kumbh Mela, it has not given anything for Gangasagar Mela, demanding it should be declared as a "national fair". "We are hopeful that like Kumbh Mela, one day Gangasagar Mela will be declared a national fair. After approaching the Centre several times and not getting any

response, we have decided to construct a bridge over Muriganga River to connect Sagar Island with the mainland," she added.

"The entire expense of Kumbh Mela is borne by the central government but they do not give a single penny for Gangasagar Mela," she said. Banerjee said her government's motto was to make Gangasagar Mela eco-friendly.

The CM, who was on a two-day trip to Sagar Island to oversee the preparations for the ensuing Gangasagar Mela, inaugurated 30 state-run schemes and laid the foundation of 19 other initiatives.

Lakhs of Hindu pilgrims gather in Sagar Island from different parts of the country as well as abroad to take a holy dip at the confluence of Ganga and the Bay of Bengal on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti'. (PTI)

# Deletions impossible without due process: CEC refutes claims of electoral roll manipulation

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday dismissed allegations of manipulation in electoral roll, saying no deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard.

Kumar also detailed the comprehensive process governing the maintenance of electoral roll. For additions, names are included only after thorough foot-and-field verification by booth-level officers (BLOs), he said. "Regular meetings are held with the representatives of political parties, who have the right to appoint booth-level agents (BLAs).

rooted in transparency and accountability. Deletion of names is not possible without adhering to strict protocols, and every party has the right to raise objections at various stages."

Kumar also detailed the comprehensive process governing the maintenance of electoral roll.

For additions, names are included only after thorough foot-and-field verification by booth-level officers (BLOs), he said. "Regular meetings are held with the representatives of political parties, who have the right to appoint booth-level agents (BLAs).

Weekly lists of claims and objections are shared, and both draft and final rolls are published on the Election Commission's website. Polling station rationalisation is also carried out with the consultation of all the stakeholders," the CEC said.

On deletions, Kumar clarified that they are processed only through Form 7 or Form B, following strict guidelines.

Mandatory field verification is conducted by the BLOs, and in cases where deletions exceed 2 per cent of a polling station's voter list, cross-verification is done. (PTI)

# Rise above politics, make India developed country by 2047: Vice Prez Dhankhar



**DHARMASTHALA (KARNATAKA) Jan 7:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday called upon the people to rise above the politics of disruption and help the country reach its objective of a developed India by 2047. "It is not a dream anymore, but it is our objective," he added.

Dhankhar was launching the country's largest 'queue complex' at Sri Manjunatha Temple here. The facility is known as 'Shri Saanidhya'.

While delivering his speech at the launch event, Dhankhar said: "We must neutralise the anti-India forces that are trying to make us weak by divisions and misinformation. We must stop them from tarnishing the great name of our country and all that it has gained towards achieving inclusivity, welfare and strengthening our democracy."

Dhankhar, accompanied by his wife Sudesh, took a darshan of the presiding deity of the temple town Lord Manjunatha Swamy (a roopa of Shiva) along with D Veerendra Heggade, Dharmadhikari of Shri Kshetra Dharmasthala before the event.

He also took a tour of the 'Shri Saanidhya', the new queue complex, and appreciated the commitment of the temple trust in providing the devotees with state-of-the-art infrastructure. (PTI)

# Theatre stampede: Allu Arjun visits injured boy in hospital

**HYDERABAD, Jan 7:** Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun on Tuesday visited the boy, who is undergoing treatment at a private hospital here after suffering serious injury in a stampede at the premiere of his latest film, 'Pushpa 2'.

Arjun spent about 10 minutes there enquiring about the health condition of the boy Sritej, sources said. During the actor's visit to the hospital, producer and Telangana Film Development Corporation (FDC) chairman Venkata Ramana Reddy, popularly known as Dil Raju, was also present. Police made heavy security arrangements at the hospital to prevent any untoward incidents during the actor's visit.

Earlier, Arjun was scheduled to visit the hospital on January 5 but the plan was cancelled. The actor is named as accused No 11 in the

case filed after a woman died and her eight-year-old son sustained serious injuries in the stampede on December 4.

The SHO of Ramgopalpet Police Station had issued a notice to Arjun regarding his proposed visit to the hospital and advised him to keep it confidential so that public order could be maintained in and around the hospital.

The SHO said police would make necessary arrangements for his visit. A medical bulletin released by the hospital on Tuesday said Sritej is maintaining his vital parameters well without any extraneous support. He has remained afebrile (not having fever) for last few days, his antibiotics have been stopped, it said. He continues to tolerate nasogastric feeds well and is receiving supportive therapies, it added. (PTI)

# Women's empowerment initiative pioneered in Barmer extended to cover Rajasthan

**JAIPUR, Jan 7:** An initiative for women's empowerment with a 360-degree broad-based approach that was launched in Barmer in November will now be extended to cover the entirety of Rajasthan.

'Maru Udaan' was started by Barmer collector Tina Dabi for empowering women. The initiative will be rolled out across the state on January 9.

The 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' initiative will cover a range of activities and sessions such as on mental and physical health, skills training, personal finance management, entrepreneurship from home, self-defence, cybercrime and driving courses. It will include training work-

shops for millet cookies, environment conservation, and water and waste management. Health camps in vulnerable pockets will also be held.

The activities will be organised at the district and the Panchayat Samiti level.

"Keeping in mind the programme's utility and effectiveness, it will be implemented in all districts from January 9 under the name 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan'," Neetu Rajeshwar, the women empowerment department commissioner, said in an order.

The medical and health, industries, police, transport, agriculture and horticulture, and the education departments will participate in the programme.

The expenditure for programmes and activities to be organised under 'Rajasthan Maru Udaan' can be used from the budget of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana. Financial assistance can also be taken by onboarding CSR partners.

As part of 'Maru Udaan' in Barmer, 12 block- and one district-level dialogue was organised across all panchayat headquarters.

"More than 3,000 women participated. The programme began on November 12 and the final block-level dialogue took place on November 28, with the district-level event concluding on November 29 at Barmer's town hall," Dabi told PTI. (PTI)

# For the first time, Andaman's 'primitive' Jarawa tribe members feature in voter list

**PORT BLAIR, Jan 7:** In a historic step, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has enrolled and distributed voter ID cards to 19 members of the Jarawa community, earlier known as ferocious and reclusive, a senior official said on Tuesday.

Chief Secretary Chandra Bhushan Kumar himself handed over voter ID cards to the members of the Jarawa tribe, also one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, at their settlement in Jirkatang in South Andaman district.

"We adopted a comprehensive measure to uphold the unique identity of the Jarawa community and safeguard their privacy," South Andaman District Election Officer Arjun Sharma told PTI.

Their enrolment process was designed in such a way that intrusion



into their daily lives is minimal, but their understanding of rights as citizens of India is maximum, Sharma said.

"This is a landmark achievement in India's democratic evolution,

symbolising the country's commitment to ensuring inclusivity and equity for all citizens. In a careful balance between inclusivity and cultural preservation, we ensured that no aspect of the process would

compromise the dignity of the Jarawa people," he said.

A key role in this achievement was played by the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), which facilitated the process by building awareness among the Jarawa community about the electoral process in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner, officials said.

The AAJVS used methods tailored to the tribe's traditional way of understanding, explaining the significance of elections and their role in shaping governance, without disrupting their distinct cultural fabric.

The Jarawas are one of the indigenous tribes of the Andaman Islands, known for their semi-nomadic lifestyle, reliance on forest resources, and deep connection to their natural environment.

Historically, the Jarawas remained isolated from outside contact, preserving their unique cultural practices and traditions. They inhabit the western coasts of South and Middle Andaman Islands, a region rich in biodiversity that supports their traditional way of life.

The first significant friendly contact with the Jarawas occurred in April 1996, marking a turning point in their interaction with the outside world. This event was initiated when Enmei, a 21-year-old Jarawa tribesman, suffered a serious fracture in his left ankle.

"The administration provided him with medical treatment, and after his recovery, he was safely returned to his settlement. This incident was pivotal in fostering mutual trust and respect between the Jarawas and the administration," Sharma said. (PTI)

**INTERLOCKING OF MANNED ENGINEERING LC GATES**  
**E-Tender Notice No. Sr. DEE/ LMG/28 of 2024-25 Dated: 31-12-2024.** E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No. EL/LM/24-25/35. Name of work:** Interlocking of 08 nos of manned Engineering LC gates with provision of ELB and emergency sliding boom in Badarpur Jn.-Agartala section & Interlocking of 09 nos of manned Engineering LC gates with provision of ELB and emergency sliding boom in Guwahati-Furkating Jn. & Chaparmukh Jn.-Senchoa Jn.-Amoni section of Lumding division (Electrical General service). **Tender Value:** ₹72,51,892.64/-, **Earnest Money:** ₹1,45,000/-, **Date & Time of closing of Tender:** 11.00 hrs. on 24-01-2025 & opening at 11.30 hrs. of 24-01-2025. The complete information of the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 11.00 hrs. of 24-01-2025 in the website [www.treps.gov.in](http://www.treps.gov.in)  
**Sr. DEE/G&Chg/Lumding**  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
*Serving Customers With A Smile*



# Florence Pugh won't do movies like 'Midsommar' again: Felt like I abused myself



**LOS ANGELES, Jan 7:** Hollywood star Florence Pugh says she has decided to stay clear of projects like Ari Aster's "Midsommar", even though she is proud of her performance in the folk horror film. During her appearance on the "Reign with Josh Smith" podcast, Pugh said there are some roles which have had a lasting impact on and "Midsommar" was one where she suffered from self-inflicted abuse.

"There have been some roles where I've given too much and I've been broken for a long while afterwards. Like when I did 'Midsommar', I definitely felt

like I abused myself in the places that I got myself to go," the 29-year-old actor said. At the same time, Pugh doesn't "regret" doing the film.

"I'm really proud of what I did, and I'm proud of what came out of me... But, yeah, there's definitely things that you have to respect about yourself," she added. "Midsommar", which was Aster's second feature film after 2018's "Hereditary", had received critical praise for its eerie daylight horror and unsettling atmosphere after its debut in 2019.

The movie followed a group of friends who travel to Sweden to attend a rare

midsummer festival in a remote commune. What begins as a seemingly idyllic retreat soon turns into a disturbing and unsettling experience as they realise the community's pagan rituals are far more sinister than they appear.

Pugh, also known for her work in films like "Little Women" and "Black Widow", praised Aster for his attempts to keep a lighter environment on the set.

"Once you laugh at one thing, he (Aster) will try to make you laugh at all the other things. He'll keep going and everybody will be crying in fits of laughter." (PTI)

## Spring Fest 2025: IIT Kharagpur hosts one of Asia's iconic cultural festivals

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Spring Fest is the annual social and cultural fest of the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

With an online reach of over 2 million, Spring Fest is one of Asia's largest cultural fests organized entirely by students. Enthusiastic participants from more than 800 major colleges of India throng to Kharagpur for this 3-day celebration of fun and frolic.

Spring Fest 2025 celebrated its 65th edition on January 26-28, last year. Spring Fest successfully executed

"HitchHike," the nationwide preliminary round for its diverse array of artistic events encompassing Dance, Drama, Music, Fashion, etc. This exhilarating event unfolded across ten vibrant Indian cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Visakhapatnam, Lucknow, Jaipur, and Chandigarh.

Spring Fest extends heartfelt gratitude to all the judges for their precious time. Fueled by the enthusiasm of participants and the dedicated organizing team, the atmosphere was charged with palpable excitement and enjoyment for the viewers.

Spring Fest is all set to move toward the elimination round after the magnificent conduction of Prelims for Dance, Drama, Music, Fashion, and Literary events in another six cities, namely Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Patna, Ranchi, Guwahati, and Raipur. All interested students or cultural academies can participate in the eliminations by visiting the website [eliminations.springfest.in](http://eliminations.springfest.in) and registering early for their desired events.

The Battle of Bands, a premier rock band competition, Wildfire, is coming soon to spread its magic in five major cities, namely Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata, and Shillong, with prize money worth 1.5 lakhs.

All those bands wanting to showcase their talent and make a name in the history of Spring Fest can register on [wildfire.springfest.in](http://wildfire.springfest.in). Spring Fest hosts a wide array of events spanning 13 different genres, featuring over 130 competitions where the finest talents in India compete for a total cash prize of approximately INR 35 lakhs.

This year, once again, a plethora of new events have been introduced to stimulate the senses and unearth hidden

talents. These events serve as a platform for the very best, offering an opportunity for participants to relish the experience of a lifetime.

Each year, Spring Fest also takes on a meaningful social initiative; in the previous year, it initiated "Prabal: Fighting Stronger, One Cell at a Time" to address and tackle the social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by communities, fulfilling unspoken needs. Star nights have always been an integral part of the Spring Fest charm.

Artists like Shaan, Sunidhi Chauhan, Vishal-Shekhar, King, Nucleya, Farhan Akhtar, Amit Trivedi, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Salim-Sulaiman, KK, Prateek Kuhad, Nikhil D'Souza, The Raghu Dixit Project, Agnee, Indian Ocean, Pineapple Express, Parikrama, Euphoria, Pentagram, The Local Train, and many more have delivered monumental performances, inclusive of a vibrant set of international shows like those of Dead by April, Monuments, and Tesseract at Spring Fest in past years.

With a history of rich culture, Spring Fest promises to be a grand extravaganza - a festival one would not want to miss.

## ZENDAYA, TOM HOLLAND ARE ENGAGED: FAMILY SOURCES

**LOS ANGELES, Jan 7:** "Spider-Man" co-stars Tom Holland and Zendaya are engaged.

The news comes after Zendaya stepped out for the 2025 Golden Globe Awards on Sunday flashing a massive diamond ring on her left-hand ring finger to the shutterbugs. Holland, however, gave the ceremony a miss.

A family source confirmed to People magazine that Holland and Zendaya, both 28, got engaged during the Christmas and New

Year's holidays.

Another source told the publication that "everyone close to them knew an engagement was happening", adding Holland had been keen to propose to Zendaya "for a while".

"He's always been crazy about her. He always knew she was the one. They have something very special," the source added. Holland and Zendaya, however, are in no hurry to get married.

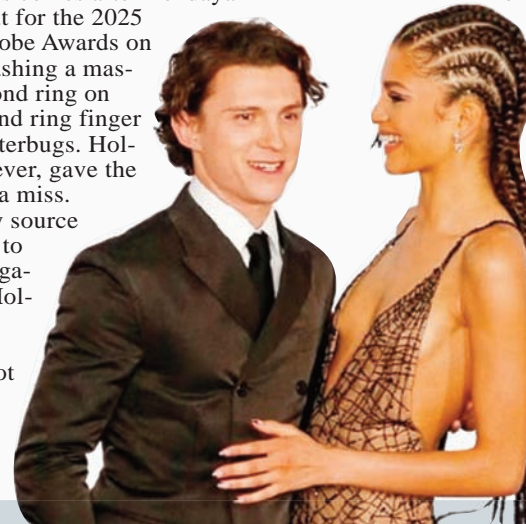
"They will just enjoy things for now and won't rush

a wedding. They are both busy with work projects. Tom's always had this sweet way of letting the world know that Zendaya is his. Now, it's official — she really is."

The actors will return for the currently untitled fourth "Spider-Man" film that will start filming in summer. They met on the sets of 2017's "Spider-Man: Homecoming", which starred Holland as the titular superhero/ Peter Parker and Zendaya as his classmate and love interest, MJ.

Holland and Zendaya, both 28, reprised their characters in 2019's "Spider-Man: Far from Home" and "Spider-Man: No Way Home" (2021).

They are also set to star in Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey". (PTI)



## Wamiqa Gabbi joins Adivi Sesh in 'Goodachari 2'

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Actor Wamiqa Gabbi has become the latest addition to the star cast of the upcoming Telugu action spy thriller "Goodachari 2".

Headlined by Adivi Sesh, the film is directed by debutant filmmaker Vinay Kumar Siriginneedi.

"Goodachari 2", a sequel to the 2018 film "Goodachari", also stars Emraan Hashmi.

Gabbi, who has been a part of the projects like "Godha", "Khufiya" and "Jubilee", shared the announcement on her Instagram handle on Tuesday along with the poster from the film.

"SPY. ACTION. ADVENTURE. With #G2. Super happy and excited to share the news about my next. Teaming up with my fantastic co-actor @adivisesh is gonna be kick ass. "Also, Can't wait to meet #Emraan sir on sets! Watch out for THE THUNDER GLIMPSE from #G2, this month end. It's a MONSTER. #Goodachari2," she wrote in the caption.

Gabbi was last seen in action thriller "Baby John". (PTI)



# Anurag Kashyap's 'Kennedy', Kangana's 'Emergency', Sonu Sood's 'Fateh' part of Zee Studios 2025 slate

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Production banner Zee Studios has announced its line-up for 2025, which includes films such as Anurag Kashyap's globally acclaimed "Kennedy", "Emer-

eral multilingual releases in Ram Charan and Kiara Advani's Tamil-Hindi movie "Game Changer" and "Majaka", a Telugu film which marks Sundep Kishan's 30th film.

crime — will be released in cinemas on January 10.

"Game Changer", directed by Shankar, will also hit the screens on January 10.

Ranaut's much-awaited directorial "Emergency", which delves into the emergency that was imposed by Indira Gandhi for 21 months from 1975 to 1977 and its aftermath, is scheduled to be released on January 17. It will be followed by action thriller "Deva", starring Shahid Kapoor, coming out on January 31.

"As Zee Studios gears up for these ambitious releases, the studio reaffirms its mission to innovate and lead in the entertainment sector. With a strategic blend of compelling stories and regional diversity, the FY25 lineup is poised to set new benchmarks in Indian cinema," according to a press release.

Also part of Zee Studios 2025

slate are Hindi films like "Loveyappa" (February 7), Khushi Kapoor and Junaid Khan's romantic drama: "Dhadak 2" — a sequel to the 2018 love saga of the same name — featuring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Tripti Dimri (February 28); and historic tale "Phule", starring Pratik Gandhi and Pa-trelekhaa, is up for release on April 11. Both Telugu film "Beauty" and Tamil film "Kingston" are releasing on March 7. "Nilai Varun", a Tamil movie, is also scheduled to be released in March.

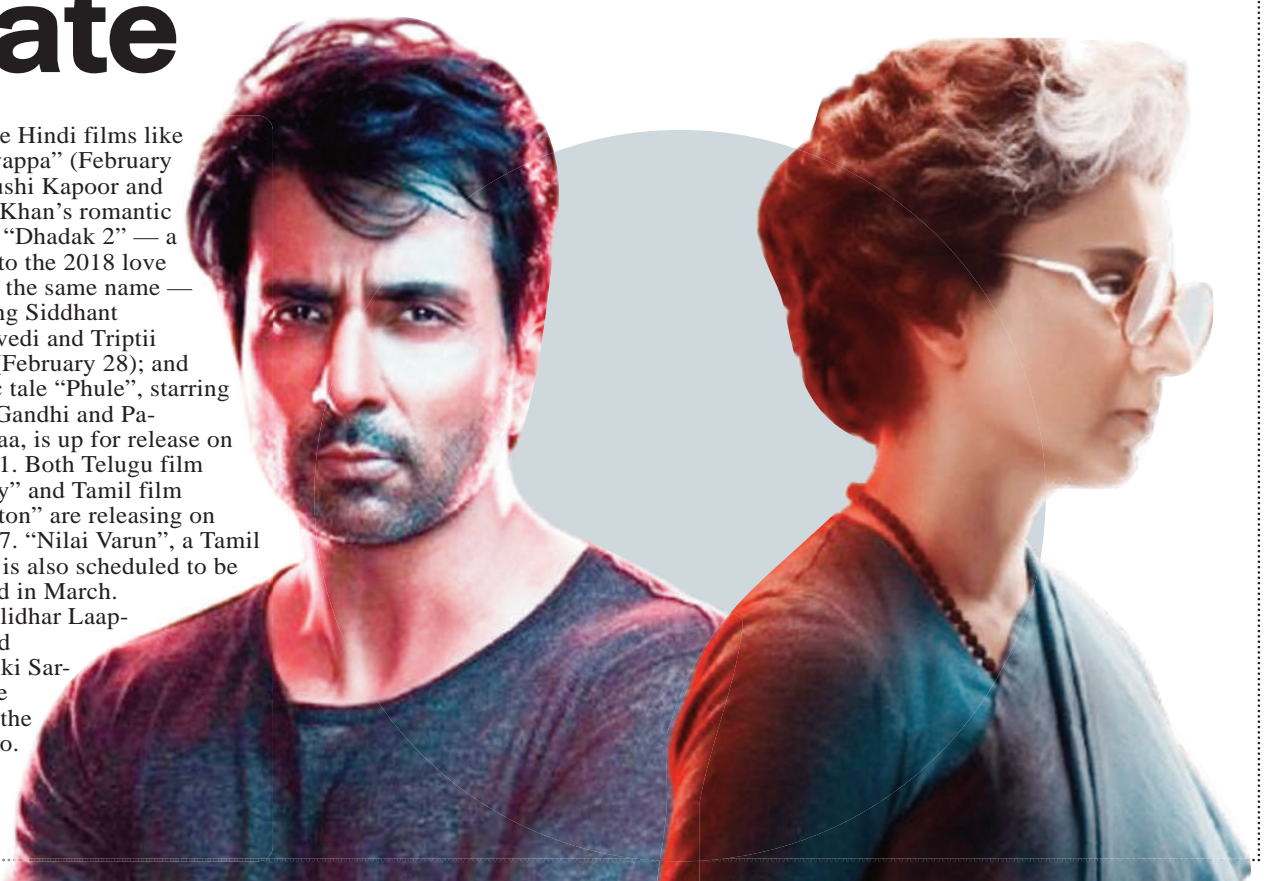
"Kaalidhar Laap-ata" and "Shaunki Sardar" are part of the slate too. (PTI)



gency", starring and directed by Kangana Ranaut, and "Fateh", which marks the directorial debut of actor-philanthropist Sonu Sood.

After having a successful 2024, the studio is set for sev-

While Zee Studios is yet to reveal the release date of "Kennedy", a Mumbai-set police noir which had its world premiere at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, "Fateh" — which explores the theme of cyber-





# Leao, Pulisic inspire AC Milan comeback in 3-2 win over Inter in Italian Super Cup final



**RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA), Jan 7:** It took exactly one week on the job for Sergio Conceicao to earn his first trophy as AC Milan's coach — with two comeback wins no less.

Milan came back from two goals down to beat city rival Inter Milan 3-2 and win the Italian Super Cup on Monday.

Rafael Leao came off the bench and played a part in all three of Milan's goals from Theo Hernandez, Christian Pulisic and Tammy

Abraham. Conceicao was hired to replace the fired Paulo Fonseca last Monday and also led the Rossoneri to a comeback win over Juventus in the semifinals.

So what changed with Conceicao?

"We played with confidence, courage and hunger," Abraham said. "We're a strong team."

Added Pulisic, "He told us we need to have more hunger and that that's more important than tactics."

After the semifinals, Conceicao was asked if he embraced his players.

"I'm not so nice and I'm not someone who hugs," he said. "I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to win."

But after the final, Conceicao was seen dancing with his players and smoking a cigar in the changing room.

It was Milan's first trophy since winning Serie A in 2022; and eighth Super Cup title but first

since 2016.

Lautaro Martinez and Mehdi Taremi put Inter ahead with goals on either side of halftime.

Leao then earned a foul that resulted in a free kick which Hernandez curled in around Inter's wall.

Then Pulisic finished off a counterattack by shooting through Augusto's legs on a play that began with Leao.

For the third goal, Leao provided a through ball for Pulisic,

who crossed to Abraham, who tapped into an empty net in stoppage time. The final was moments away from going to a penalty shootout, since there was not going to be any extra time according to the competition rules.

"It's also our fault that Fonseca was fired," said Hernandez, who like Leao often clashed with Fonseca. "We didn't have much time to work together (with Conceicao) but it's gone well in that short span."

It was the fifth time in the last seven years that the competition was played in Saudi Arabia, and the second year of an expanded four-team format.

A throw-in led to Inter's opener as Taremi fed the ball inside the area to Lautaro, who cut back before shooting through Hernandez's legs on Inter's only real chance of the half.

Taremi, who was playing in place of the injured Marcus Thuram, finished off a counterattack right after the break.

Milan plays its first Serie A match under Conceicao against Cagliari on Saturday. The Rossoneri are in eighth place with only seven wins in 17 matches but will return to league action with much more confidence.

Inter lost for only the third time this season across all competitions, and for the second time to Milan, which won the Serie A derby 2-1 in September. The Nerazzurri's other loss was to Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League.

"Inter stopped playing when it was 2-0," Lautaro said. "You pay for that in games like these. We knew that Milan's best weapon is their counterattacks." (AP)

## England urged to boycott Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan by UK politicians



**LONDON, Jan 7:** England should refuse to play the Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan next month according to a letter signed by more than 160 U.K. politicians.

The politicians want the England and Wales Cricket Board to take a stand against the Taliban regime's assault on women's rights and boycott the men's one-day international against Afghanistan in Lahore, Pakistan, on Feb. 26.

Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in contravention of International Cricket Council rules.

Because Afghanistan's men are still allowed to compete by the ICC, a strongly worded letter has emerged from the U.K. parliament pleading for the ECB to make its own moral objection. Penned by Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi and signed by a cross-party group from the House of Commons and House of Lords including Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn, it raises the "insidious dystopia" unfolding in Afghanistan.

The statement, addressed to ECB chief executive Richard Gould, concludes: "We strongly urge the England men's team players and officials to speak out against the horrific treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban."

"We also urge the ECB to con-

sider a boycott of the upcoming match against Afghanistan... to send a clear signal that such grotesque abuses will not be tolerated.

"We must stand against sex apartheid and we implore the ECB to deliver a firm message of solidarity and hope to Afghan women and girls that their suffering has not been overlooked."

Gould issued a swift response, reaffirming ECB principles while suggesting it favoured a uniform approach from all member nations rather than acting alone. "The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime," he said.

"The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket matches against Afghanistan."

"A coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members. "We understand the concerns raised by those who believe that a boycott of men's cricket could inadvertently support the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedoms and isolate Afghan society. It's crucial to recognise the importance of cricket as a source of hope and positivity for many Afghans, including those displaced from the country." (AP)

## Forest wins at Wolves and closes gap on Premier League leader Liverpool

**WOLVERHAMPTON (ENGLAND), Jan 7:** Nottingham Forest beat Wolverhampton Wanderers 3-0 away from home and moved within six points of Premier League leader Liverpool on Monday.

First-half goals from Morgan Gibbs-White and Chris Wood and an injury-time third from Taiwo Awoniyi sent Forest to a sixth straight league win. Nuno Espirito Santo's men are tied on points with Arsenal, which is above them on goal difference.

The game took place on the 50th anniversary of Brian Clough's appointment at the City Ground and the old maestro would have been thrilled to see his team get off to the perfect start with a goal after six minutes.

Former Wolves midfielder Gibbs-White combined on the counterattack with Anthony Elanga before stroking the ball into the bottom corner from 14 meters.

Both sides looked to play football and Wolves came into the game. However, Norwegian striker Jorgen Strand Larsen rued missing a couple of clear chances and he was punished two minutes before halftime when Wood doubled the visitor's lead. The big New Zealander put away Callum Hudson-Odoi's cut back to grab his 12th goal of the season and his eighth in 13 league appearances against Wolves.

Forest dominated the second half and Wood's late replacement Awoniyi made it 3-0 in stoppage time.

The result set up a mouth-watering fixture between first and third next week, when Forest hosts Liverpool on Jan. 14.

It also brought Forest's European dreams a tiny bit closer. Wood said the squad's focus was keeping up the rich form that would make that happen for the first time since the 1990s.

"It is about consistency and doing what we have been doing extremely well already this season," Wood said. "We're not giving up halfway through the season, we need to keep doing what we've been doing in the first 19 matches."

The defeat was the first for recently appointed Wolves coach Vitor Pereira and left it fourth from bottom. (AP)

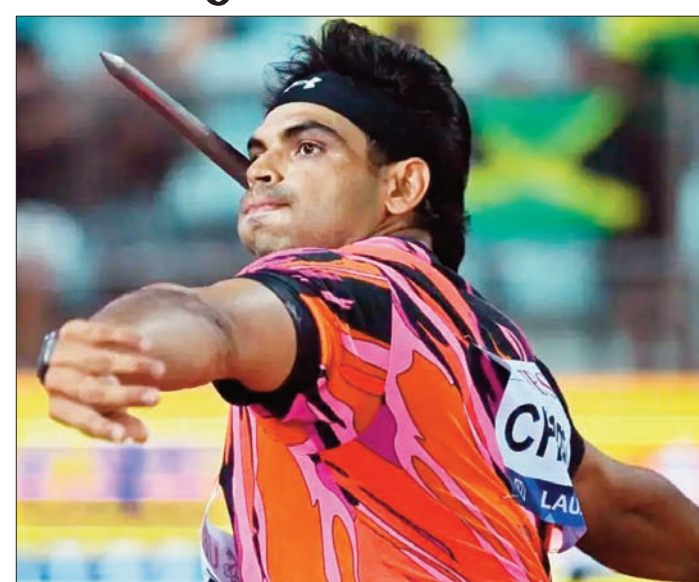
## India to host top javelin competition with Neeraj and best in world

**CHANDIGARH, Jan 7:** Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra will headline a star-studded global javelin competition which India will host most likely in September, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) announced on Tuesday.

This event is in addition to a slew of competitions India has expressed its interest to host, including the marquee 2029 World Championships.

Outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla confirmed that India has expressed interest to host the 2029 World Championships, as well as the 2027 World Relays. The AFI has already submitted its expression of interest to host the 2028 World Junior Championships when the international body chief Sebastian Coe visited the country in November last.

"There will be a top javelin competition in India in which the top-10 javelin throwers in the world will compete. This will be an invitation tournament to be held later this



year," Sumariwalla, whose 12-year tenure as AFI chief ended on Tuesday, said on the first day of the AFI Annual General Meeting (AGM). "Neeraj Chopra will be there. He is part of the team that is organising the event, along with JSW, a foreign

firm and the AFI are together creating this competition. This is being done as there is so much interest in javelin with August 7 -- when Chopra won the Tokyo Olympics gold -- being observed as National Javelin Day."

Sumariwalla later told PTI

that the event is most likely to be held in September.

Just before the start of the AGM, 2002 Asian Games shot put gold medallist Bahadur Singh Sagoo was elected unopposed as the new AFI chief.

Talking about the big global events India is hoping to host in the next four years, Sumariwalla said, "Bids are open at the moment for (2028) World Junior Championships, 2029 World Championships, World Relays (2027) and India is going to bid for all of them. We have put in our expression of interest and so the process has started."

"We might also do a World Half Marathon," he said.

India is hosting a World Athletics Continental Tour bronze-level event in Bhubaneswar on August 10. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the international permit meets, held in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (PTI)

## Djokovic says he still feels 'trauma' when he travels to Australia because of his deportation

**MELBOURNE, Jan 7:** Novak Djokovic said he still feels "a bit of trauma" when he travels to Australia, stemming from the deportation in 2022 because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19.

"The last couple of times that I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration, I had a bit of trauma from three years ago," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper published Monday, ahead of the Australian Open. "And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching."

Djokovic, who has won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam championships at Melbourne Park, continued: "The person checking my passport — are they going to take me, detain me again or let me go? I must admit I have that feeling."

Back in 2022, Djokovic sought, and initially obtained, an exemption that would allow him into the Australian Open — and the country — even though

there were strict rules requiring shots to protect against the coronavirus. But after his flight landed, he was detained at the airport, his visa was canceled and he was sent to an immigration hotel.

A judge later reinstated the visa and ordered Djokovic's release, ruling he wasn't given enough time to speak to his lawyers. Australia's immigration minister then took away the visa again, based on "public interest." Djokovic's appeal of that ruling was denied by a three-judge panel, and he was deported. He faced a possible three-year ban from the country as someone whose visa was revoked, but Australia had a change of government, its pandemic border rules changed and a new immigration minister granted Djokovic a visa in 2023 — when he went on to claim the trophy.

"I don't hold any resentment, to be honest," Djokovic told the Herald Sun about the saga. "I don't hold a grudge."

The Australian Open begins Sunday (Saturday EST), and Djokovic will be pursuing his



11th trophy in Melbourne to add to his men's record and an unprecedented 25th major singles title overall.

A year ago, Djokovic lost in the semifinals to eventual champion Jannik Sinner.

"I just hope to, before I retire, get at least one more title there,"

said the 37-year-old Djokovic, whose only triumph at a tournament in 2024 was his singles gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics in August.

Djokovic opened 2025 at the Brisbane International last week, losing in the quarterfinals to Reilly Opelka. (AP)

## Largest-ever Indian contingent to feature at India Open Super 750

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Star shuttlers Lakshya Sen and PV Sindhu will headline host India's largest-ever contingent of 21 players at the Yonex-Sunrise India Open Super 750 badminton tournament, starting here from January 14.

With top stars like Olympic champions Viktor Axelsen, An Se Young, and world No. 1 Shi Yuqi leading the field, top-tier action is expected at the Indira Gandhi Stadium.

Axelsen, a 2023 finalist, had withdrawn from the last edition after falling sick while playing in the Malaysia Open.

A total of 21 Indian players, including three men's singles, four women's singles, two men's doubles, eight women's doubles, and four mixed doubles pairs, will compete in the USD 950,000 BWF World Tour event, which offers 11,000 ranking points for the champions.

"With so many Indian players competing in a Super 750 event, it's a remarkable sign of the growth and rise of Indian badminton on the world stage," Sanjay Mishra, General Secretary, Badminton Association of India, said in a release.

"This is just the beginning— 2025 promises to be a year where more names will feature alongside the established names, while fresh faces will emerge and shine bringing glory and pride to India."

The tournament, which was elevated to Super 750 category in 2023, saw India field 14 entries in the past two editions, and India's highlights were Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy reaching the men's doubles final and HS Prannoy making the men's singles semifinals in 2024. Chirag and Satwik, semifinalists at the 2024

China Masters, will lead India's men's doubles charge. Satwik, returning from injury, will look to regain his form after limited play since the Paris Olympics.

Apart from Satwik-Chirag, India's hopes will also rest on former champion Lakshya Sen and two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu.

The competition will feature 18 of the world's top-20 men's singles players and 14 of the top-20 women's singles shuttlers.

The men's doubles line-up is being led by China's Paris Olympics silver medal winning combination of Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang along with Paris bronze medallists Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik of Malaysia, Danish pair of Kim Astrup and Anders Rasmussen and Indonesia's Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto.

**LIST OF INDIA PLAYERS:** Men's Singles - Lakshya Sen, HS Prannoy, Priyanshu Rajawat Women's Singles - PV Sindhu, Malvika Bansod, Anupama Upadhyaya, Aakarshi Kashyap

Men's Doubles - Chirag Shetty/Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, K Sai Pratheek/Pruthvi K Roy

Women's Doubles - Treasa Jolly/Gayatri Gopichand, Ashwini Ponnappa/Tanisha Crasto, Rutuparna Panda/Swetaparna Panda, Mansa Rawat/Gayatri Rawat, Ashwini Bhat/Shikha Gautam, Sakshi Gahlawat/Apoorva Gahlawat, Sania Sikkandar/Rashmi Ganesh, Mrunmayee Deshpande/Prerana Alvekar

Mixed Doubles - Dhruv Kapila/Tanisha Crasto, K Sathish Kumar/Aadya Variyath, Rohan Kapoor/G Ruthvika Shivani, Ashith Surya/Amrutha Pramuthesh. (PTI)



# Rohit and Kohli's Test future depends on selectors: Gavaskar

**SYDNEY, Jan 7:** Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's Test future is now in the hands of selectors, said former India captain Sunil Gavaskar while advocating an honest deep-dive into the team's downward spiral in the last six months.

In an interview to PTI, Gavaskar spoke about India's recent debacles, including the home whitewash by New Zealand, the way forward and the responsibility on the Ajit Agarkar-led national selection committee to give a fair chance to those waiting in the wings.

Asked about the raging debate surrounding the future of struggling stars Rohit and Kohli, Gavaskar said, "How long they continue is really up to the selectors."

"Now that India has failed to qualify for the WTC (World Test Championship) final, it would be pertinent to reflect on the reasons that (why it) happened," he added.

This is the first time since the WTC's inception that India could not make the finals following a 1-3 loss to Australia in the Border-Gavaskar series that concluded on Sunday.

That defeat also meant that the coveted BGT was surrendered to Australia for the first time in a decade. The primary reason for the debacle was the batting unit's failure to fire with Rohit and Kohli proving to be the weakest link.

Kohli scored 190 runs in nine innings including an unbeaten century, while Rohit's tally was a dismal 31 from five completed knocks.

Gavaskar didn't mince words while point-



ing out the repeated failures of the team's batters, who failed to cross the 200 mark six out of nine times during the series.

"It is clear that in the last six months, the batting failed and that was the main reason that we lost matches that we should have won," the former captain stated.

"So, if changes are required for the new cycle of the WTC which starts in mid-June in England, then hopefully the selectors will take into account who would still be there for the final in 2027 and choose accordingly," Gavaskar put things perspective.

The 75-year-old former India captain did not take names but said there are some good performers coming up in the domestic circuit and the onus is now on the selectors to give them a fair chance.

"Unless they are given a chance how will we know if those doing well in Ranji Trophy will do well at the international level? Here's where good selections come in," he said.

Gavaskar also complimented the selection committee for unearthing a talent like Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was one of India's three centurions in the just-concluded tour, others

being Yashasvi Jaiswal and Kohli.

"Compliments to Ajit Agarkar and his team for seeing the potential in Nitish Kumar Reddy and picking him for the Test squad too," he said of the player, who also enjoys strong backing of head coach Gautam Gambhir.

On the bowling front, Gavaskar said India has enough talent that needs to be given the requisite opportunities to ensure that a generational star like Jasprit Bumrah is not overburdened. Once again, he refrained from taking names of the potential candidates, who would shape the bowling attack going forward.

"India has got loads of promising pacers who are waiting for an opportunity. Yes, Bumrah should not be overburdened and if others step up then we can have an attack that can win matches in any conditions," he said.

The culture of putting stars at a pedestal has been an oft-stated problem in Indian cricket. But Gavaskar said it is not very difficult to stay grounded even with that if one is capable of taking an honest look at performances.

"We see our faces in the mirror every day and since we do that to us, we don't notice the changes that have come over the years. Only when we see photos or videos of earlier days do we notice the changes," he explained.

"It is then that we look to make the changes needed to look at our best. To do that, however, we need to take a long honest look at ourselves again," he said. (PTI)

## Lloyd slams proposed 2-tier system, says terrible for nations who work hard to get Test status



**GUYANA (WEST INDIES),**

**Jan 7:** Former West Indies captain Clive Lloyd has said it would be a bad idea to have a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between the big-three nations, saying it would be hugely detrimental for the West Indies and countries who have worked hard to get Test-match status.

The International Cricket Council, in collaboration with cricket boards of India, Australia and England, is exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between these three nations.

The Age had reported that Jay Shah, the new ICC chairman, is set to meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points.

"I think it will be terrible for all those countries who work so hard to get to Test match status and now they'll be playing among themselves in the lower section," Lloyd was quoted saying in the Trinidad & Tobago Guardian.

Expressing dismay over former ICC chairman Greg Barclay's suggestion that the West Indies be disbanded and play as individual countries, Lloyd said: "We (West Indies) have a great history and now you're going to tell us because of a monetary sit-

uation, (we should be disbanded)."

One of the most successful captains in history, Lloyd attributed the disparity in performance between the top-three and the rest to unequal disbursement of funds by the ICC.

"You could imagine they're talking about dismantling the West Indies, that is not the way to go. The way to go is to give them (West Indies and other teams) the same amount of money so they can improve their facilities, get better systems in place so that they can improve their cricket," the 80-year-old opined.

He also criticised the World Test Championship cycle, saying it is not "well organised".

The WTC cycle covers two years but not all 12 Test-playing nations compete in it, with Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Ireland left out, while the remaining nine teams don't all play each other in the cycle.

"It's not well organised as such because if I am in a Test team, I want to play cricket so I can qualify for that system," said Lloyd.

"They (ICC and cricket boards) should sit down and have a system where it's not only T20 cricket. People still want to watch Test cricket and until we get that right, we will all be in this system." (PTI)

## Assam Men's and Women's teams depart for Sr National Sepak Takraw Championship

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** The 34th National SepakTakraw (Men's and Women's) Championship 2025 has been announced. The Assam men's and women's teams were selected after a rigorous training camp held in Hailakandi from December 27 to January 5. Assam SepakTakraw Association General Secretary Bishnu Ram Nunisa stated. The tournament will take place from January 10 to January 14 in Warangal, Telangana.

The two teams selected for the tournament are as follows: Men's Team: Birkant Sinha, Abhijit Sinha, Hemand Sinha, Puren Sana Sinha, Prince Sinha, Minglen-thaiba Sinha, Premchandra Sinha, Singlemba Sinha, Amarjit Sinha, Theiba Sinha, Indra Sinha, Nityananda Shaikia, Vishwadeep Sinha, and Malengamba Sinha.

Women's Team: L. Thainu Chanu, O. Chan Chan Devi, K. Debita Sinha, Dimpri Gogoi, Lavita Bhujel, Sangrila Musahari, Jaifantbi Sinha, Sumitri Senapati, Namrata Sinha, Shanta Shikha Cheleng, Premita Sinha, Sanjita Sinha, Preetika Musahari, and Monika Sinha.

Officials: Shantanu Rajkhowa and Bidhumukhi Sinha.

The team departed for Telangana by train on Tuesday.

## Smith, Williamson unlikely to feature in PSL; PCB awaits clearance for England players

**KARACHI, Jan 7:** Star overseas batters Steve Smith and Kane Williamson are unlikely to make themselves available for Pakistan Super League (PSL) and the PCB is also awaiting clearance from the England Cricket Board (ECB) for participation of their players in the T20 tournament in April-May.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday said top players such as David Warner, Adil Rashid, Chris Woakes and Mustafizur Rahman will feature in the Platinum category during the players draft on January 11.

The other players in the Platinum category, which is the highest, include Australia's Matthew Short, Riley Meredith, and Steve Smith (subject to confirmation), along with England's Adil Rashid, Gus Atkinson, Jason Roy, Jonny Bairstow, Tom Curran, and Tom Kohler-Cadmore.

New Zealand's Finn Allen, Kane Williamson (subject to confirmation), and Mark Chapman are also part of the platinum category. Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka and West Indies' Shai Hope are also included in this category.

Apparently Smith and Williamson have excused themselves from the PSL due to prior commitments. The PSL for the first time will clash with the IPL and the PCB has been making efforts to secure the high-profile overseas players who were not picked in the IPL. (PTI)

## Jasprit Bumrah nominated for ICC Men's Player of the Month award

**DUBAI, Jan 7:** Star India pacer Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday nominated for the ICC Men's Player of the Month award for December 2024 after his standout performance against Australia in the just-concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

In the month of December, Bumrah took 22 wickets in the three Tests at a phenomenal average of 14.22 and overall, the 31-year-old finished with 32 wickets across five Tests.

Unfortunately, Bumrah could not bowl in Australia's second innings at Sydney because of a back spasm.

His standout spells included nine wickets in both the Brisbane and Melbourne Tests, which played a pivotal role in keeping India in competition.

Competing with Bumrah for the award is Australian skipper Pat Cummins, who guided Australia to 3-1 series win over India, and South African seamer Dane Paterson.

Pacer Cummins showcased fine form, claiming 17 wickets across three Tests against India at an average of 17.64.

His best bowling performance came in Adelaide, a sensational 5/57, which helped the hosts secure a commanding 10-wicket victory.

Cummins also contributed with the bat through crucial knocks of 49 and 41 in Melbourne.

Paterson's bowling efforts against Sri Lanka and Pakistan were crucial in the Proteas' successful campaign.

He took 13 wickets in two Tests at an average of 16.92 as SA sealed a place against the Aussies in the World Test Championship final later this year. (PTI)



## De Villiers hopes BCCI allows Indian players to compete in SA20

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** South African great Ab de Villiers hopes the BCCI will allow Indian players to take part in the SA20 in the near future as it will only raise the profile of the young franchise-based league.

Dinesh Karthik is set to become the first Indian cricketer to compete in the SA20 but that was only made possible when he announced his international and domestic retirement last year.

The BCCI doesn't allow active players to take part in overseas leagues and as of now, the only way to play events outside India is by calling time on your career at home. Having said that, there is a growing trend of cricketers taking retirement in India to try their luck in the burgeoning overseas competitions.

"I would love to see more Indian players involved. We know Dinesh Karthik will be here this year which is fantastic

and it's great for the tournament.

"And hopefully the BCCI will allow us to get more Indian players in the future to come and join the fun of the SA20," said de Villiers in a select media interaction ahead of third edition of SA20 beginning on January 9.

Having said that, he is fully aware that the BCCI is not going to make active Indian players available for overseas leagues anytime soon.

De Villiers reckons the only way to take a league ahead of its rivals is by attracting the best overseas talent like the IPL has done over the years.

"We (SA20) can just keep growing with regards to the overseas players. That's a large part of the success of the IPL over the years and I've followed the IPL since 2008. It's every year the overseas contingents seem to get stronger and stronger." (PTI)

## We know how to beat Aussies: Rabada

**CAPE TOWN, Jan 7:** Fiery South African pacer Kagiso Rabada, no stranger to beating Australia, believes the prospect of facing them in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June has already sparked anticipation and motivation in his side.

Reigning champions Australia secured their spot in the WTC final with a six-wicket victory over India in the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney, clinching the series 3-1.

South Africa were the first team to qualify after defeating Pakistan by 10 wickets in the Boxing Day Test.

"It's actually quite some distance away, but a big occasion like the World Test Championship final gets you up for it," Rabada said on SuperSport after taking a six-wicket haul in his side's 10-wicket, second-Test demolition of Pakistan that completed a 2-0 sweep.

Up against defending champions Australia, the Proteas will start as underdogs but Rabada, who twice played a big part in winning series against Australia in 2016-17 and 2017-18, is confident of pulling off an upset.

"South Africa versus Australia has always been an intense rivalry, because we play cricket quite similar. We play hard -- and they're going to come hard at us, and we know that. But we also know how to beat them," he said.

About the significance of Test cricket, Rabada said: "One hundred per cent, Test cricket is still alive. It's our best format that we've been playing right now."

"When you look at South African cricket and all our legends, they've all been great Test cricketers. The world's best players are Test cricketers, and this series against Pakistan has been a wonderful advertisement for Test cricket, especially in South Africa."

The Proteas don't have any Test assignment in the build-up to the WTC Final at Lord's from June 11-16 and coach Shukri Conrad has said they're looking at the possibility of a one-off match against either Ireland or Afghanistan.

"We're going to try and get a Test match, possibly in the UK, against Ireland or Afghanistan, whoever is free. And if unsuccessful, we'll obviously go out a couple of days earlier, and make sure we camp there really well, probably in Canterbury," said Conrad.

The coach was also all praise for his skipper Temba Bavuma for playing a key role in South Africa's resurgence.

"He's played unbelievably well this summer, and full marks to him," Conrad said.

"I think any captain who wants to lead from the front, they want to lead through performance as well, and that's what Temba's done exceptionally well." (PTI)

## Whitewash at home bigger failure than BGT loss; not fair to target Rohit, Virat: Yuvraj

**DUBAI, Jan 7:** World Cup-winning former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh has said that being whitewashed at home by New Zealand was a bigger low for Team India than the loss of Border-Gavaskar Trophy but refused to join the chorus of criticism against embattled veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

India have endured a difficult last few months in the five-day format, going down 0-3 to an under-strength New Zealand at home, which was a first in the team's Test history. This was followed by a 1-3 drubbing by Australia in the away edition of the Border-Gavaskar series.

Both the debacles have been largely attributed to the team's batting frailties, especially those of Rohit and Kohli.

"According to me, losing (to) New Zealand is more hurting (sic). Because they are losing 3-0 at home. You know, that is not acceptable. This (losing BGT) is still acceptable because you have won two times in Australia. And this time you lost," Yuvraj told 'PTI Videos' in an interview here.

"Australia has been a dominant side for the last so many years, that is my thought," the 43-year-old hero of India's 2011 World

Cup triumph said.

While Kohli managed at least a hundred during the series despite continuing to be dismissed whenever he was baited outside the off stump, Rohit was worse with a tally of just 31 runs and had to drop himself from the final Test.

But Yuvraj said it is unfair to lambast the duo given their past achievements.

"We are talking about our greats, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, we are saying very bad things about them," he said.

"...people forget what they have achieved in the past. They are one of the greatest cricketers of this time. Okay, they lost, they did not play good cricket. They are getting hurt more than us," he added.

Hopeful that India would bounce back strongly, Yuvraj said he has full faith in not just Rohit and Kohli but also new head coach Gautam Gambhir, who was his former teammate as well.

"I feel that Gautam Gambhir as a coach, Ajit Agarkar as a selector, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, they are the best minds in cricket right now," he asserted.

"And they have to decide what's the



way for Indian cricket in future," he said. The big-hitting former batter also

lauded Rohit for dropping himself from the Sydney Test, saying it was a

selfless act.

"I think it is a big thing. I have never seen in the past that the captain's form is not going well and he himself has gone out. And this is Rohit Sharma's greatness that he has kept the team ahead of himself," Yuvraj said.

"I think he is a great captain. Whether win or lose, he will always be a great captain. And in his captaincy, we have played the (ODI) World Cup final. We won a T20 World Cup. We have achieved a lot," he pointed out.

He urged the critics to exercise restraint while dissecting the team's performance.

"I was a student of the game and now I am a student of the game. The amount of cricket I have played, they have played more cricket than me," said the man, who played 304 ODIs, 40 Tests and 58 T20 Internationals for India, amassing 11,000 runs across formats.

"I can give my opinion. And my opinion is that when players are not performing, it is easy to say bad about them. But it is very difficult to support them. Media's job is to say bad about them. My job is to support my friends and brothers. For me, they are my family. Simple," he signed off. (PTI)