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 ● Thousands flee as wildfires burn out of control in, around Los Angeles

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 ● UP govt will reclaim every inch of land taken under pretext of Waqf: Adityanath  
 ● Members echo party stand at parliamentary panel meeting on simultaneous polls

Vol .No. I Issue No. 306 RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

## HC refuses to lift bar, next hearing on Jan 10

Uncertainty looms large over holding of panchayat polls

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** The uncertainty over holding Panchayat elections in Assam still persists as Gauhati High Court has not lifted the suspension in announcing the polls on Wednesday.



The Court heard at least 30 petitions regarding the delimitations of Panchayats which according to the petitioners was not done by the government complying with all rules. The Court has fixed January 10 for the next hearing in this matter.

senting one of the petitioners. "The Advocate General representing the government requested to allow the notification process; however, the Court has turned it down and the next date of hearing is fixed on January 10," he added.

The High Court had previously ordered that no notification for the Panchayat elections should be issued until January 8. However, the state government has sought reconsideration of this decision, citing concerns over the need to proceed with the elections as planned. In response, the court has instructed the plaintiffs to submit their replies by today.

Additionally, the court has directed those copies of the government's application be served to the parties involved today, ensuring transparency (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Vigilance raids Diphu residence of Aswini Kumar Doley over corruption charges

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 8:** Sleuths from the Chief Minister's Special Vigilance Cell conducted a raid at the residence of Sivasagar Zila Parishad CEO Aswini Kumar Doley over the charges of corruptions here on Wednesday in Diphu.

The raid took place at his residence in Rongbangbong Hemari Inghi village under Ward No. 7 in Diphu town. Vigilance officials arrived around 12:30 PM and contin-

ued the raid until 3 PM. However, Doley, his wife Mirmilli Derapi, and other family members were not present from the property during the raid operation.

During the three-and-a-half-hour search, the Vigilance team reportedly collected several items, including three family photographs, three bank passbooks, and land-related documents.

This was the third raid by the Vigilance Cell on Doley's proper-

## UMRANGSO COAL-MINE TRAGEDY

# One body recovered, 8 remain trapped

Highly-trained 'clearance divers' skilled in deep diving on site: Navy

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** The rescue team deployed in the coal mine in Dima Hasao's Umrangso recovered the body of one of the nine trapped workers on Wednesday.

"The recovered body of the labourer was sent to Hailong for the post-mortem and after due procedure it will be handed over to the family," Harmeet Singh, Special DGP of Assam Police who has been looking after the rescue operation said.

Singh said that the de-watering of the tunnel has been done and the rescue team is exploring every option to extract water which are pouring from other channels.

"The de-watering of the tunnel was done; however, there are channels which are pouring water back to the tunnel. We have been bringing small pumps to extract water from the tunnel and meanwhile the navy divers are looking into the



tunnels for the rescue effort. However, as of now they could not spot anything," Singh added.

A navy team that includes highly-trained "clearance divers" skilled in deep diving and recovery operations is on-site in Assam to assist in the rescue of miners trapped.

"In response to an urgent request for assistance, the Indian Navy has

mobilised a specialised team to assist in the rescue of miners trapped in Umrangso, a remote industrial town in the Dima Hasao district of Assam," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The team, comprising one officer and 11 sailors is, on site. The team has highly trained "clearance divers", skilled in deep diving and recovery operations.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma conveyed his condolences to the family members of the deceased worker.

"Para divers have just recovered a lifeless body from the bottom of the well. Our thoughts and prayers are with the grieving family," Sarma said.

Sarma said that the rescue operation is in full swing with Army and NDRF personnel entering the well.

"The rescue operation is in full swing with Army and NDRF divers having already entered the well. Navy personnel are on-site, making final preparations to dive in after them. Meanwhile, SDRF de-watering pumps have departed from Umrangshu for the location. Additionally, the ONGC de-watering pump has been loaded onto an MI-17 helicopter at Kumbhigram, awaiting weather clearance for deployment," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## BJP calls for removal of CEM Gorlosa

**HT Correspondent**  
**HAFLONG, Jan 8:** The main streets of Haflong turned into a battleground of slogans on Wednesday as hundreds of BJP leaders and workers demand to remove the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) Chief Executive Member (CEM) Debolal Gorlosa.

The protesters accused Gorlosa of autocratic governance and chanted slogans like "BJP Zindabad," "Narendra Modi Zindabad," and "Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Zindabad." The protesters also handed over a memorandum to the administration and party high command, calling for his immediate removal to safeguard the BJP's reputation in the region.

One protester strongly criticised Gorlosa's administration in Dima Hasao district and sought his immediate

removal from the post. "He must be removed from his post for the good of the party," the protester said.

The rebellion within the BJP has reportedly been simmering for some time, with growing dissatisfaction over Gorlosa's leadership. Since the start of the New Year, dissident BJP leaders, activists, and supporters have intensified their protests.

The massive gathering reportedly involved thousands of BJP workers, effectively bringing Haflong town to a standstill.

While addressing reporters, BJP dissident leader and former NCHAC Executive Member (EM) from Langting constituency Golonjo Thaoson, along with BJP leader Jaydesh Phanglo, claimed that around 15,000 party members and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## J P Nadda unveils slew of health projects in Assam

**TEZPUR/MANGALDAI/AMIN GAON, Jan 8:** Union Health and Family Welfare Minister J P Nadda on Wednesday rolled out a series of healthcare projects, including a new library and informatics centre at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), in Assam.

Nadda laid the foundation stone of a critical care block at Mangaldai Civil Hospital in Darrang district and reviewed ongoing developmental work at AIIMS Guwahati and other places.

Accompanied by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Nadda reached the LGBRIMH complex and unveiled the library and informatics centre at Tezpur in Sonitpur district. Nadda reached Guwahati late on Tuesday and was supposed to reach Tezpur by helicopter on Wednesday morning. However, due to inclement weather, he travelled by road from Guwahati, an official said.

Nadda also attended the Board of Governors meeting at LGBRIMH after inaugurating the library and informatics centre along with (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam Police held captive in Nagaland

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 8:** A team of Jorhat police, including Teok Officer-In-Charge (OC) Jatun Borah and Selenghat IC Gangaram Phukan, were held captive overnight in a village in Mokokchung district of Nagaland. The team had inadvertently strayed into the area on Tuesday while pursuing vehicle thieves.

According to sources, the policemen were accosted by locals, resulting in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
Department of Health & Family Welfare



NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION  
एकता स्वास्थ्य सेवा

# Inauguration of Jonai Co-district Civil Hospital, Dhemaji

**Inaugurated by**  
**Shri Ashok Singhal**  
 Minister, Health & Family Welfare etc., Assam



**In august presence of**  
**Shri Pradan Baruah**  
 MP, Lakhimpur



**Shri Bhuban Pegu**  
 MLA, Jonai LAC

Date : 9 January 2025 | Venue : Jonai, Dhemaji

**SALIENT FEATURES**

|   |  |   |   |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Project Amount: Rs. 21 Crore<br><b>1) MAIN BUILDING</b><br><b>(A) Provisions in Ground Floor:</b><br>• Reception/Registration<br>• OPD- 12 nos.<br>• Pre Labour and Post Labour room<br>• Delivery room | • Instrument Sterilization room<br>• Maternal ward<br>• Procedure room (Injection)<br>• 22 bed SNCU<br>• Pharmacy<br>• Pediatrics clinic<br>• X-Ray room | • Mortuary room<br>• Lift 2 nos.<br>• Medical Store<br>• Emergency Observation<br>• ECG room<br>• USG room<br>• Admission and Enquiry | • Plaster room<br>• Mobile X-Ray<br><b>B) Provision in First Floor:</b><br>• Separate wards for Male, Female and Pediatric (Total 30 beds)<br>• OT 2 nos. | • Intensive Care Unit<br>• Laboratory, Blood Store<br><b>2) RESIDENTIAL ACCOMODATION:</b><br>• 4 nos. Doctor's Quarter<br>• 8 nos. Nurses Quarter<br>• 4 nos. Attendant Quarter | <b>3) ANCILLARY BUILDING:</b><br>• Incinerator<br>• ETP |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|

(NHM/D/2024-25/492)

# Odisha eyeing to be among top five economies in India by 2047: Majhi

**BHUBANESWAR, Jan 8:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday said that Odisha aspires to be among the top five state economies in the country by 2047, when India will celebrate 100 years of Independence.

While addressing the joint business session between MEA and Odisha organised as part of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, Majhi said India has become the fifth-largest economy in the world and at present the fastest-growing big economy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Odisha also aspires to be a part of this growth journey, while from the 13th biggest economy in the country with about 100 billion USD economy we want to propel ourselves to be among the top five economies in the country," he said. "I hope as the country celebrates its 100th year of Independence in 2047. We will achieve this goal and Odisha will be in the proud club with a 1.5 trillion dollar economy," Majhi said.

He said India is the favourite destination of global FDI in the world and Odisha wants to be the favourite destination of FDI in India. To realise this goal, he said, the foundation has to be strong and should be laid early, which the state is doing with Utkarsh Odisha (a business summit to be held later this month). Majhi said the state has a defined and clear roadmap and its vision for transformation is centred on future-ready sectors such as renewable energy advanced manufacturing, petrochem-



icals, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology. Odisha has natural bounty of virgin forests, beautiful and green mountains, 480-km long coastline and sea beaches, Asia's largest saltwater natural lake, hundreds of historical and religious places, he said while asking investors "What more do you need to invest in the field of tourism?"

The CM urged the diaspora to explore the possibilities in this important sector which promises so many possibilities. Addressing the meeting, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said India is using 3Ts (Trade, Technology and Tourism) to evaluate foreign policies. He urged the investors in the Indian diaspora to look into the 3Ts when they are here in Odisha.

The 'Look East' policy of the government of India actually has a historic origin in Odisha, the Bali

Yatra. The connection to South East Asia was actually started in Odisha, he said.

Mission Purvodaya speaks about the rejuvenation of the eastern part of the country. One of the earliest commitments made by the government during the third term of PM Modi was to take practical decisions to enable Purvodaya to actually happen and Odisha plays a crucial part in this direction, he said. The potential for trade in Odisha is really enormous as it has a talented pool of workforce, he said. Stating that the state has incredible tourism potential, Jaishankar said tourism is the biggest employment generator and multiplier in the world.

"Those who will invest in tourism in the state are actually contributing to the inclusive growth of the state in a very powerful way apart from their own

growth," he added.

Stating that this meet was the beginning of the conversation for diaspora, Jaishankar hoped that many of them (NRIs) would come back to the state again and again and their confidence in the Odisha government would translate into business proposals and investment decisions.

Speaking on the occasion, Odisha Industries minister Sampad Chandra Swain said the state is on the journey towards a remarkable transformation. "We are blending our rich culture with modern innovation to achieve growth. For us ease of doing business is not just an idea, it is a way of life," he said. The state has simplified the investment process through the 'Go Swift' single window system, which ensures that all approvals are given smoothly and quickly, Swain said. He said investors who have come to Odisha appreciate the state's transparent and responsible governance.

Stating that Odisha has become a trusted partner for business worldwide, the minister said, "Whether you are a big company or a new entrepreneur, we offer policies that ensure stability and growth. Our governance model is very simple. We have created a talent pool that meets global standards. Young dynamic workforce is disciplined, hardworking and ready to deliver."

Appealing to the investors to come forward and invest in Odisha, Swain assured all support to them in setting up their units in the state. (PTI)

## HDFC, ICICI Bank major drag Markets settle marginally lower on muted GDP growth projection

### Rupee plunges 13 paise to settle at new record low of 85.87 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Jan 8:** The rupee extended its slide for the second straight session and declined 13 paise to hit a fresh record low of 85.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid higher crude oil prices and stronger American currency.

Lacklustre sentiment in domestic equity markets and sustained outflow of foreign funds also played spoilsport even as investors stayed cautious over lower economic growth projection by the government, forex analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.82 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.89 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit settled at 85.87 (provisional) against the dollar, 13 paise lower than its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee settled with a loss of 6 paise at 85.74 against the dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent higher at 108.76. The 10-year US bond yields also remained elevated at 4.67 per cent amid expectations of delayed interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.90 per cent to USD 77.74 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex skid 50.62 points, or 0.06 per cent, to settle at 78,148.49 points, while the Nifty fell 18.95 points, or 0.08 per cent, to 23,688.95 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded ₹ 1,491.46 crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The latest government data released on Tuesday showed India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25 due to poor show by the manufacturing and services sectors. (PTI)

**MUMBAI, Jan 8:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile session on Wednesday, as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of the earnings season amid lower economic growth projections.

Besides, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows also dented sentiments.

However, buying in bellwether stocks TCS and Reliance Industries managed to restrict a steep decline in markets, traders said. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex fell 50.62 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 78,148.49. During the day, it dropped 712.32 points or 0.91 per cent to 77,486.79. The NSE Nifty skidded 18.95 points or 0.08 per cent to 23,688.95.

"Slowing economic growth projections and caution ahead of Q3 numbers added volatility in the market. However, the market witnessed a recovery from the day's low owing to the accumulation of beaten-down blue-chip stocks and in expectation of government reforms in the upcoming budget to lift the tepid economy. "The near-term sentiment is likely to be subdued due to the rise in US bond yield and fear of fewer rate cuts by the Fed," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, ICICI

Bank, NTPC and State Bank of India were the major laggards.

Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, ITC, Asian Paints, HCL Tech and Maruti were among the gainers.

"IT stocks to be in focus as Tata Consultancy Services is set to kick-start the Q3 earning season with its results tomorrow. While revenue for the IT giant is expected to remain impacted by fulfilments, client-specific challenges are likely to normalize in 3Q. Its EBIT margin may improve, driven by talent development, training, and operational efficiency. Rising crude prices led to buying interest in upstream oil & gas companies."

"US markets will remain shut on Thursday on account of the National Day holiday. We expect Indian markets to remain range-bound with stock/sector-specific action on the back of upcoming Q3 results," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined by 1.12 per cent, and the midcap index went lower by 1.09 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, consumer durables dropped 1.86 per cent, capital goods (1.34 per cent), services (1.26 per cent), power (1.17 per cent) and utilities (0.95 per cent). In contrast, Energy, IT, oil & gas, realty, teck and BSE Focused IT were the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors

(FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,491.46 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"Investors look toward the FOMC minutes for fresh momentum, while the Fed's hawkish stance and elevated US bond yields remain significant headwinds," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory, while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading in the green. US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

The rupee extended its slide for the second straight session and declined 13 paise to hit a fresh record low of 85.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.79 per cent to USD 77.66 a barrel.

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. (PTI)

# India can do 'frontier work' in AI, but investment a barrier: Nadella

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** India must get into frontier work in artificial intelligence and build foundational models, but investment is a real entry barrier and just one mathematical breakthrough can change entire dynamics, Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said here on Wednesday.

During his second day of Microsoft India AI Tour, Nadella said that India can do great work in the area of Indic languages and transforming its industries using artificial intelligence.

"There's no reason why India can't do frontier work, but you can even define frontier pretty unique. So for example, I don't think the last known big breakthrough in AI frontier has happened. I always say we are one mathematical breakthrough away from that entire edifice being thrown out and being going after something else," Nadella said.

He said academics in India, the research institutions, including Microsoft Research, are very fantastic math team and algorithms team.

"Let's not be bound, quite frankly, with what is considered frontier. So I would say India definitely should also do frontier work. Also use the frontier in order to, post training, to make it great for Indic languages, make it great for Indian industry, and so on," Nadella

said. In response to a question by additional secretary in the IT ministry Abhishek Singh on whether India should build its own AI foundational model, Nadella said that India always has an option to do that but the real entry barrier in making foundational models is investment.

He said the other way to look at the investment barrier is to lower the cost with the help of research, which is always open for India.

"I think that is the design space here is there for India to make some smart, strategic choice. And I'm not saying you shouldn't do like you know, but then you have to be mindful that it is a capital intensive business if you want to be on the frontier," Nadella said.

At present, India is using AI engines or the foundational models developed by OpenAI, Google etc.

At the event, Microsoft announced strategic partnerships with RailTel, Apollo Hospitals, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra Group, and upGrad to help their teams and customers benefit from cloud and AI innovation. The company also signed an agreement with India AI to advance AI and emerging technologies in the country and establish AI Centre of Excellence and AI Productivity Labs to foster inclusive growth. (PTI)

## Commerce ministry cuts Nov gold imports data by USD 5 bn

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The commerce ministry has revised downwards the gold import data by USD 5 billion to USD 9.84 billion for November, according to the Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS).

The DGCIS is an arm of the

ministry of commerce.

As per the ministry data released last month, the country's gold imports in November reached a record high of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold surge.

Noticing this unusual surge, the commerce ministry was examining if there were any calculation mis-

take in the compilation of the gold imports data for the month, as the sharp surge pushed the trade deficit to a record last month.

The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to a record USD 37.84 billion in November. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## HC refuses to lift bar,

in the legal proceedings. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier announced that the Panchayat elections would be held as per the original schedule. But the administration could not proceed with the notification of polls due to bar from the court. The government requested the court to allow the elections to take place without further legal entanglements, emphasising the need for the polls to proceed in panchayats despite ongoing cases.

The court's decision follows multiple petitions filed due to discrepancies in the constituency redetermination process. These petitions argue that the elections should be postponed until these errors are rectified. As the legal battle continues, all eyes are now on the January 10 hearing, which will determine the next steps in the Panchayat polls in the state.

## One body recovered, 8 remain

Sarma mentioned. A senior Army official informed that a specialised Navy team, including Clearance Divers, is on-site to rescue trapped miners. "Equipped with advanced gear & Remote Operating Vehicles (ROVs), the team is coordinating with the Indian Army, NDRF & civil administration for a swift response," the Army official added.

The chief minister has already blamed illegal coal mining for the incident and one person was already arrested in connection with illegal mining. At least nine labourers got trapped in a coal mine a couple of days ago and the state government launched an all out rescue effort coordinating with the Army and Navy special task forces.

## J P Nadda unveils slew of health

Sarma and Assam Health and Family Welfare minister Ashok Singhal.

"I attended the Board of Governors meeting, where several proposals were placed. We approved all those proposals so that the institute moves ahead at a rapid pace in the coming days," Nadda told reporters after the meeting.

Later in a post on X, he said that the state-of-the-art library and informatics centre will play a crucial role in empowering students with the tools and resources needed for their academic growth and research in mental health.

LGBRIMH is an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the central government.

Later, Sarma in a series of posts on X said, "I had the privilege of joining Adarniya Shri @JPNadda ji in dedicating the Library & Informatics Centre at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health and attending its Board of Governors Meeting. The new facilities will boost its research capabilities."

The LGBRIMH is one of India's oldest mental health institutions and the best tertiary psychiatric care centre in the Northeast, he added. "It is gladdening to note that the central government is putting its weight behind taking the capabilities of this great institute to the next level," Sarma said.

After Tezpur, the Union minister reached Mangaldai in Darrang district, where he laid the foundation stone of a 50-bed state-of-the-art critical care block at Mangaldai Civil Hospital.

"This critical care unit will be ready in one-and-a-half-years. We are going to develop a total of 28 such critical care units of around Rs 25 crore each across Assam. These centres will change the landscape of healthcare in Assam," he added.

Nadda, who is also the BJP's national president, asserted that the state is progressing fast in every sector under the leadership of Sarma and the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Your duty is to strengthen such a government, which is working for you, in due course of time," he added. The new critical care block at Mangaldai will be developed under the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission at a cost of Rs 23.75 crore, a senior official of the Health and Family Welfare Ministry said.

"This is going to be a major step towards strengthening healthcare in Assam. This initiative will enhance access to advanced healthcare services for the people of the state," he added. The official stressed that this initiative underscores the government's commitment to improving public health infrastructure and delivering quality healthcare for all.

The chief minister said that the critical care block will ensure world-class timely care for patients of Darrang and the adjoining areas on the north bank of Brahmaputra in the coming period.

"We are going to develop 28 such critical care block units in different hospitals of Assam and 100 per cent funding will be done by the Centre," he added. He also inspected the facilities at Assam Cancer Hospital in Mangaldai and interacted with the people to seek their feedback on the state's modern healthcare system. "This state-of-the-art hospital will provide top-tier cancer care, ensuring that people of Darrang and the surrounding region no longer have to travel outside the state for treatment," Nadda said later on X.

After that, Nadda assessed the ongoing construction work of the bypass project and the Skill University at Mangaldai.

He also visited the Sipahjar First Referral Unit in Darrang district, interacted with doctors and healthcare workers, reviewed the available facilities, and assessed the quality of services provided.

Nadda's last programme was at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)-Guwahati, located in Kamrup district. There, he along with Sarma, reviewed the ongoing developmental work of healthcare facilities in the presence of senior officials. "I am fully satisfied with the progress of the AIIMS. The OPD and faculty divisions are functioning very well. The IPD will be further strengthened and fully operational by mid-2025," Nadda told reporters after the meeting. He further said that faculty will be enhanced and a few directions have been given to remove "the bottlenecks" in due course of time, before departing from Guwahati. (PTI)

## Vigilance raids Diphu residence

he has served as an Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) in Sivasagar and was later transferred to other areas, including the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Doley is the brother of former Congress MLA from Dhemaji, Sumitra Patir. His second wife, Sivani Pegu Doley, is a Range Officer in the Forest Department in Morigaon district. Local residents stated that the house is known as Mirmili Derapi's residence and that they have rarely seen Doley. Neighbors also mentioned that the family maintains limited interaction with the community.

## BJP calls for removal of CEM

supporters participated in the protest. "If Debolal Gorlosa is not removed, we will escalate our agitation and stage demonstrations near the state BJP office," Phanglo warned.

## Assam Police held captive

one officer, Bidyut Dutta, being injured. Dutta has since been admitted to a private hospital in Dibrugarh district.

"A 16-member team had acted on credible information and gone to a remote area near the Assam-Nagaland border in search of a motorcycle thief. However, they inadvertently entered Yangshanshi village in Nagaland, where they were surrounded by local residents," said Jorhat Superintendent of Police (SP) Shwetank Mishra while speaking to reporters on Wednesday.

During the confrontation, one police officer sustained injuries. The situation was resolved after SP Mishra contacted his counterpart in Mokkokchung. A Nagaland police team arrived at the village on Wednesday morning and facilitated the release of the Jorhat police team.

SP Mishra clarified that there is no tension along the Assam-Nagaland border following the incident. However, he has requested the Jorhat Deputy Commissioner to take up the matter with the Mokkokchung district administration by organising a border meeting to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

# Union Budget should reduce personal I-T for lower-income groups: EY India

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The Budget is expected to focus on boosting private capex, tax simplification and reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to stimulate demand, EY India said.

The Union Budget for 2025-26 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

EY India, in its Budget expectation note, said with over ₹ 31 lakh crore stuck in income tax disputes as of 2023-24, there is an urgent need to clear Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) backlog and bolster alternate dispute resolution mechanisms like advance pricing agreements and safe harbours.

"While a full comprehensive review of the direct tax code may take time, we might see some initial steps towards its implementation in this Budget. I also hope for a reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to provide relief and stimulate demand," said Sameer Gupta, National Tax Leader, EY India.

EY said the expectations from Budget are focused on a set of strategic reforms that can propel the economy forward. With an emphasis on fiscal consolidation, tax system simplification, and invest-



ment-driven growth, the Budget is expected to lay a solid foundation for sustained economic development.

EY anticipates significant reforms to simplify the tax system and improve taxpayer services, reduce litigation, and enhance tax compliance.

The government is already working on simplifying the Income Tax laws. It should follow a consultative approach and invite public comments on the draft proposals, EY said.

"Key areas of focus are likely to include enhancing public spend-

ing, reducing the fiscal deficit, incentivising private sector investment, and introducing targeted tax reforms that foster business innovation," EY said.

In the last Budget, government had rationalised the capital gains structure in terms of holding period of assets and tax rates. The government may further address some of the unintended anomalies to make the rationalisation of capital gains more complete, EY said.

For instance, the holding period for capital assets, such as business undertakings in slump sales may be reduced from 36 months to 24

months and unlisted shares in IPO offer for sale (OFS) from 2 years to 1 year, aligning them with listed securities.

Gupta further said for businesses, particularly SMEs, reducing the complexity of tax compliance is critical.

To achieve sustainable growth in FY26, the government must prioritise reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of GDP in FY26 while reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio, which stands at 54.4 per cent, well above the fiscal responsibility and budget management (FRBM) target of 40 per cent.

A medium-term real GDP growth target of 6.5 per cent or higher will require boosting the aggregate investment rate (GFCF) measured at constant prices to 34 per cent. This can be achieved by increasing the government's capital expenditure, improving capital efficiency and encouraging states to enhance their investment spending. To stimulate private sector investment, a progressive reduction in interest rates should be considered. Additionally, targeted employment schemes should be fast-tracked to uplift urban demand and support economic momentum in FY26, EY said. (PTI)

### Forest minister inaugurates Entry Gate and Gypsy safari on Nameri's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary



**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Jan 8:** Nameri Tiger Reserve witnessed a significant milestone on Tuesday (January 7) with the grand inauguration of the Nameri Entry Gate and Gypsy Safari by the Minister of Environment and Forest Chandra Mohan Patowary, marking the commencement of the 25th Anniversary Celebrations of the iconic Tiger Reserve.

The commemorative entry gate at Potalali was launched by minister Patowary symbolising Nameri's conservation journey along with a new Gypsy Safari in the buffer area along the picturesque Jia-Bharali River, featuring stunning viewpoints that provides visitors a closer connection with Nameri's serene landscapes and diverse wildlife.

The minister attending as the chief guest formally launched the celebrations at a grand event held in Potalali.

In his speech, minister Patowary announced the steps initiated by the government to attract tourists from different parts of the world to the Nameri Tiger Reserve.

It is pertinent to be mentioned that over the next three months, the celebrations aim to highlight Nameri's conservation legacy and its commitment to wildlife preservation and community welfare through a series of engaging events and initiatives.

To involve all the stakeholders tourists, researchers, conservationists, and local communities, fostering a deeper connection with Nameri's rich biodiversity, the 25th-anniversary celebrations featured a wide range of activities, including photography competition, quiz competition, massive awareness programmes, cultural events, science symposium, state-level culmination event etc.

Notably, during the last year 1036 foreign tourists and more than 30,000 domestic tourists visited the tiger reserve from which the Nameri Tiger Reserve authority has earned more than Rs twenty seven lakh.

During the event minister Patowary handed over the appointment letters to two contractual teachers appointed for forest village schools as part of Nameri's commitment to local community development.

In recognition of community co-operation, the minister distributed 2 cheques of Four lakh twenty four thousand ninety to two Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) of Nameri-Seijosa EDC and Bhalukpong EDC to acknowledge their efforts in assisting the Forest Department to regulate picnics in buffer areas, ensuring the protection of forests and wildlife.

The event was attended by field director of Nameri Tiger Reserve Piraision B, principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) and chief wildlife warden Vinay Gupta, district commissioner of Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali and other dignitaries.

It is worth mentioning that the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border area of Sonitpur district under West Assam Wildlife Division is rich in biodiversity of deer and various migratory birds, bats, elephants, tigers, deer wolves, various species of butterflies, snakes, Asian wild dogs and orchids.

### ONGC Assam Asset provides ₹ 100 cr to Assam govt: Asset manager

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, Jan 8:** ONGC Assam Asset on Tuesday organised the Final distribution Program under the Annual SC/ST Component Plan 2024-25 in association with All India SC/ST Employees Welfare Association (AISC-STEWA) Nazira/Sivasagar branch on Jan 5 in which the chief guest and the ED-asset manager, ONGC, Assam Asset, Bhaskar Chowdhary said that ONGC Assam Asset provides revenue of ₹ 100 crore to the Government of Assam and ₹ 100 crore to the Central Government every month.

In addition, it pays about ₹ 600 crore annually to the government, including GST in other categories including various contract works.

He further added that ONGC has been continuously working for the development of society through the CSR scheme. That is why ONGC must not just survive but stay strong and increase its Oil and Gas production in Assam Asset.

All India SC/ST Employees Welfare Association (AISC-STEWA) Nazira/Sivasagar branch Chairman Dembi Ram Panging, speaking on the occasion, said that ONGC officers and employees have been working day and night for the production of Oil and Gas. They are oil field soldiers.

He further added that they are working towards women empow-

# ABSU stages statewide sit-in demonstration

## Thousands of participants witnessed

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 8:** Seeking a resolution for immediate solutions on the long pending educational related issues and grievances of the Bodo community, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) staged a three-hour sit-in demonstration in all district headquarters across the state of Assam on Wednesday.

In Kokrajhar, the sit-in demonstration strike was held at the Bodofa Children's Park, JD Road where thousands of students' union activists, members and well wishers representing different social organisations participated with holding banner, placards etc, and demanded immediate solutions to the issues and problems of the Bodo community.

The sit-in demonstration was organised by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) of Kokrajhar district committee, and supported by various social organisations including the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Samaj, Harimu Afad, All Assam Tribal Sangha, All BTR Venture Senior Secondary School Employees' Association.

The protest demonstration started from 11 am and continued till 2 pm that highlighted their demand of the solutions to the issues and problems of the Bodo medium related educational environment.

A memorandum was submitted to the chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma through the district commissioner, Kokrajhar seeking immediate solutions to the issues and problems of the educational related and problems of the Bodo community.

### US, India collaborate to mitigate climate change, boost agroforestry in Assam

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 8:** The US government, through the Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited, inaugurated a cutting-edge tree nursery at the Kakajan Tea Estate in Jorhat.

The nursery will support local and national climate change mitigation goals by increasing plant production to sequester carbon while utilising the latest agroforestry tools to enhance the resilience of Assam's farming systems.

Kakajan Tea Estate, owned by Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited, a part of the Tata Group, is India's second-largest tea producer. Set to become a central hub in the state for the large-scale propagation of indigenous tree species, the nursery has the capacity to produce one million healthy plants annually, significantly contributing to the state's carbon sink.

Equipped with advanced technologies such as automated irrigation, fertigation, and climate control systems, the nursery is well-positioned to supply high-quality planting materials to farmers and other tree growers. It will also play a pivotal role in building climate resilience and empowering local communities in their agroforestry efforts.

USAID/India mission director Dr Steven G. Olive said, "The United States is proud to support

the demand includes inclusion of Bodo in Key Examinations; recognition of Bodo as a subject in the Assam Judicial Service Exams and as Language 1 in the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET).

The students union demanded infrastructure development which include establishment of 35 new Bodo-medium model high schools and upgrading 101 high schools to higher secondary status, along with teacher recruitment.

The students' union demanded provincialisation of the educational institutions through the implementation of Clause 6.3 of the BTR Peace Accord for provincialisation of venture schools across the state.

The students' union also demanded recruitment of educational staff to have the better welfare and upliftment of the educational environment and said that appointment of academic officers, translators, lecturers, and teachers for Bodo-medium institutions and related departments.

"Introduction of Bodo in Model Degree Colleges in Baksa, Dhudnoi, and Balipara, and distribution of Bodo-language educational materials in Anganwadi centers across the region," the union said.

The students union also sought a support for colleges outside BTR with initiating recruitment of assistant professors for Bodo departments in 10 colleges outside the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The students union demanded teacher transfer of teachers of proficient in Bodo to Bodo-medium schools across the state.



"In a decisive move to address the long-pending educational demands of the Bodo community and highlight the Government of Assam's failure to prioritise these issues, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) carried out statewide sit-in demonstration today at every district headquarters in Assam in a peaceful protest", the students union leaders said.

"Despite numerous representations, dialogues with concerned government departments and officials, and repeated assurances made by the government in various meetings and sittings, the educational demands of the Bodo community remain long pending and have not been given due importance or priority, and accordingly the students union and several social organisations have staged the sit in demonstration", the students

union leaders added.

In Chirang, the ABSU and several social organisation members, workers and well wishers have thronged at the demonstration and demanded immediate solutions on the issues and problems of the Bodo medium related educational environment across the state.

**Our Tezpur correspondent adds:** The demands raised by the organisation include inclusion of Bodo Language Paper in Grade III, Paper V, Assam judicial Service Mains Examination, in the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET); establishment of 35 new Model Bodo Medium High Schools; graduation of 101 Bodo-medium High Schools to Higher Secondary Schools, along with the recruitment of PGT for these upgraded institutions, immediate provincialisation of venture institu-

tions as per Clause 6.3 of the BTR Accord, recruitment to fill up the vacant and dropout post of the Bodo Medium Schools; recruitment and filling of the vacant academic officer post for Bodo medium in the newly formed Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), formerly the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA); recruitment and appointment of an academic officer for the Bodo medium at the Assam Textbook and Publication Corporation, recruitment and appointment of a lecturer in Bodo language at the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT); creation of teacher post Recruitment of two permanent teachers at every EGS schools under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) that offers Bodo-medium education; introduction of Bodo as a medium of instruction in the model; degree Colleges located in Baksa, Dhudnoi and Balipara; introduction and distribution of educational books & TLM in the Bodo language at Anganwadi centers, exclusion of BTR Sixth Schedule Council from Assam College Services recruitment Board; recruitment of one assistant professor for each of the Bodo departments in 10 colleges located outside the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR); creation of additional post of professor, associate professor and assistant professor for Bodo Department at Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University; setting up of full functional Udalguri Campus of Bodoland University from the next academic session; es-

establishment of one new Science and Law College in each district of BTR, and New Medical College & Hospital at Udalguri; sanctioning of new departments along with post teaching and non-teaching for Bodoland University; creation of additional post in provincialised degree colleges in BTR area and Kokrajhar Govt College; introduction of new departments at BB Engineering College, Kokrajhar with sanctioned posts, introduction of PG i.e. M.Ed course in Govt CTE, Kokrajhar; filling up the vacant posts of officers in the Director of Education, BTR, Kokrajhar; providing of PM Poshan under MDM Scheme for venture Schools as Right to Education and Right to Food, equality before law; transfer of teachers proficient in reading and writing in Bodo to Bodo-medium schools from currently teaching in various schools of different mediums across Assam; transfer of teachers of non-Bodo medium background and appointed in Bodo medium LP, UP and High school across the state.

With rest of the state in Dhokiajuli Co- District headquarter the Sonitpur District President and secretary Jeet Swargiary and Enosh Mochary respectively led the programme in presence of other ABSU workers of the district while in Udalguri District ABSU central committee president Dipen Boro along with a number ABSU members demonstrated the programme and at the end submitted their demands to the state and central government through the local administrations.

### JP Nadda inaugurates Library and Informatics Centre of LGBRIMH



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Jagat Prakash Nadda, inaugurated the Library and Informatics Centre of the Lokopriya Gopinath Boro-doi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH) in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in Tezpur on Wednesday.

It may be noted that the institute stands as one of India's oldest mental health institutions and serves as a premier mental healthcare facility in the North-Eastern region.

With the support of the Central Government, the institute has been modernised and elevated to meet higher standards of excellence.

The newly inaugurated three-storey centre boasts an extensive

repository of 37,766 books, complemented by 535 e-books, journals, and online periodicals, spanning diverse disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology, psychiatric nursing, neurosciences, and laboratory medicine, said an official statement.

These state-of-the-art facilities are expected to significantly enhance the institute's research capabilities. Later, the Union Minister presided as chairperson over the 11th meeting of the "Board of Governance" of LGBRIMH.

Chief minister Sarma also attended the meeting as vice-chairperson of the institute.

The event was attended by minister of health and family welfare etc. Ashok Singhal, MP Ranjit Dutta, and MLAs Prithviraj Rabha, Krishna Kamal Tanti, and Ganesh Limbu.

Additionally, several senior officials from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, including its additional secretary, L S Changan, along with the vice-chancellor of Gauhati University, Dr Nani Gopal Mahanta, were also in attendance, the statement concluded.

### Land Pattas and Ration Cards distributed

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Jan 8:** MLA of Baihtalango, Rupsing Teron ceremonially distributed land Pattas in a function held at Chek-artu village in West Karbi Anglong district. Twenty families got their land documents in the programme.

In another programme held at Jengkha, West Karbi Anglong, ration cards were distributed among beneficiaries.

The programme was attended by Executive Member (EM), Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Mangal Sing Timung and others.

### BTCLA speaker Katiram Boro visits Gunotsav program in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 8:** The first phase of the ongoing Gunotsav is being held in 11 districts of the state including Kokrajhar, the heart administration of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

During the event, 1716 schools are participating, and showcasing their talents across the district.

On Wednesday, BTC Legislative Assembly speaker, Katiram Boro visited Bipin Bihari LP School in Kokrajhar as part of the Gunotsav program, which is being conducted across various schools in the district to evaluate and enhance the quality of education.

The first phase of Gunotsav is currently underway in 11 districts, with Kokrajhar seeing active participation from 1,716 schools.

The initiative is designed to assess the educational standards and address challenges faced by schools in the region.

During his visit, speaker Boro interacted with students, teachers, and parents, highlighting the critical role of community involvement in creating a strong educational foundation.

He has emphasised that the Gunotsav program is creating a quality educational environment across the schools and hopeful that the schools are getting ray of uplift in near future.

### BCPL distributes sports equipments and assistive devices on 18<sup>th</sup> foundation day



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Jan 8:** The Brahmputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL), on its 18th Foundation Day, distributed sports equipment to local schools and smart assistive devices to visually impaired individuals as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The event, held at BCPL Township in Barbaruah, was attended by senior officials from BCPL and the district administration, including Prithviraj Dass, director of finance, BCPL; Rima Trishna Saloi, assistant commissioner, Dibrugarh;

Samiran Bora, inspector of schools, Dibrugarh; and Sitangshu Paul, general manager (HR), BCPL.

BCPL provided sports items such as footballs, volleyballs, cricket bats, carrom boards, chess sets, and badminton kits to schools including Barbaruah Girls High School, Rameswar Higher Secondary School, Dibrugarh District Karate Do Association, Dibrugarh University Sports Board, Borpathar High School, Sessa Tinali Moidamoni High School, Government Girls Higher Secondary & Multi-Purpose School, and Dibrug-

garh Government Boys HS School. Visually impaired individuals received smart assistive devices and cane sticks to enhance their mobility and daily lives.

Speaking at the event, BCPL managing director Pranjal Changmai said, "Our CSR initiatives reflect our commitment to uplifting the communities where we operate. By providing sports equipment to schools, we aim to promote teamwork and active participation among students. The assistive devices will support visually impaired individuals in leading more independent lives."

In addition to this, BCPL has undertaken several significant CSR projects, including constructing Barbaruah Market, upgrading Barbaruah PHC and AMCH infrastructure, providing hearing vans and garbage carrier vehicles, supporting skill development programs, funding a research project at AMCH, and promoting sports through upgrades to Chowkidinghee Field, Jalannagar Stadium, and an indoor sports stadium.

The company also provided solar lighting to rural areas, mid-day meals under the Akshay Patra Scheme, and assistance to SHGs in sericulture, handloom, and textiles, among other initiatives. These efforts demonstrate BCPL's commitment to sustainable development and community welfare.

### Chutia Yuba Sammilan launches indefinite hunger strike

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 8:** Chutia Yuba Sammilan staged indefinite hunger strike in front of Jorhat District Commissioner office on Wednesday here.

Protestors representing various districts shouted slogans and displayed play card against the government. Shymal jyoti Chutia, president Chutia Yuba Sammilan central committee said that they were fighting for their legal needs.

"We have taken this stern democratic protest for some demands. The demands include ST status and council for our community, the bridge linking Majuli and Jorhat be named as Sadhoni Setu," Chutia said.

Mridupabon Saikia, Pranjal Hazarika joint secretary, Raj barhoo Chutia, sports secretary of Central committee, many office bearers and hundreds of protests participated in the agitation.

### Khatkhathi Weekly Market shed inaugurated

**HT Correspondent**  
**BOKAJAN, Jan 8:** Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang inaugurated the Khatkhathi Weekly Market shed at Khatkhathi, Karbi Anglong district on Wednesday in presence of the Deputy Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, Dr Nual Momin.

The market was constructed under Market Modernisation and Improvement Program, in short MMIP Scheme. The scheme was requested by the Greater Khatkhathi Bazar Committee.

The market inauguration was done in the morning by the CEM at 11 am where the president of Greater Khatkhathi Bazar Committee, Longsoder Bongrum and secretary Sailen Tokbi; Executive Members of KAAC, Surjya Rongphar, Madhurjya Dhekialy Phukon and Member of Autonomous Council, Abhijit Kro, were present.

### Complaint filed against APHLC leader

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 8:** Karbi indigenous faith followers filed a complaint at the Diphu police station on January 7 for taking action against a leader of All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), Semson Teron, law secretary of APHLC, Bokajan LAC.

Karbi Indigenous faith organisations namely, Karbi Honghari Amei, Hemphu Mukrang Adorbar, Karbi Kurasar Chingrum Amei and Karbi Anglong Rong Asar Amei filed the FIR at Diphu police station complaining that Semson Teron had insulted the Karbi Indigenous faith practices by commenting 'Rest in Peace' on a post of Rongker Karli on social media on January 5.

In the FIR, the organisations said they were unhappy at the comment insulting their religion and demanded immediate action.

It may be mentioned that most Karbi tribals still follow its old traditional indigenous faith and observe Rongker Karli on January 5 for the welfare of their respective villages and its villagers.



# The severity of environmental pollution

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

All living things and everything around us are part of the environment. That is why everyone needs to have a holistic understanding of the environment. Protecting or conserving the environment is essential for the welfare of all living on earth. Before the triumph of science and the population explosion, there was a natural balance everywhere. The atmosphere was rich in oxygen, the food and drinking water were pure and nutritious. Healthy development of life depends on nutritious food, sterile clean drinking water and clean air. But man has brought his own danger by destroying the natural balance for his own benefit, polluting the air, water and soil. Today, the severity of environmental pollution is reaching its peak day by day around the world. World Environment Day has been celebrated every year since 5 June 1974, unanimously decided at the United Nations Conference in Stockholm in 1972 to combat environmental pollution. But one day of the year is certainly not enough to keep the environment healthy. If we, every citizen, are not properly aware of the seriousness of environmental pollution and environmental conservation today, if we cannot bring pollution in water, land or atmosphere under control, if we cut down trees and destroy forests daily for our personal gain. Inevitable.

When the environment is polluted, its effects are seen everywhere. Some of the things released into the atmosphere make the air we breathe unclean, causing various diseases in our body. When water or soil is polluted, it causes damage to people as well as plants and animals. Noise pollution can also be dangerous to humans and other animals in many cases. Today, environmental pollution is taking a serious form in most countries of the world. The developed countries of the world have already achieved considerable success in controlling environmental pollution as the people of these countries have become more aware and conscious in this regard. However, despite continuous efforts to protect the environment in our country, the amount of pollution is increasing day by day due to lack of proper awareness about environmental pollution and lack of awareness among the majority of the people of the country.

Therefore, it is important to understand that the rapid population growth and the over-mechanization and civilization of civilization in different countries of the world, large and small, contribute directly or indirectly to the destruction of the natural balance. He's sure he's coming. Smoke emitted from factories,

various types of gases—carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulphide, etc. pollute the air. Meanwhile, fumes emitted from fuel-powered vehicles pollute the atmosphere and pose a threat to public health. We use firewood, coal, natural gas, kerosene etc. for cooking, lighting or for cooling in winter. The combustion of these fuels we use pollutes the air with gaseous pollutants like carbon dioxide, methane, sulfur etc. as well as smoke and ash. Many people burn plastic items, broken plastic dishes, cups, plates, polythene etc. as they do not decompose in the soil. When these are burnt, they produce compounds of barium, lead, cadmium, selenium, aldehydes, cyanide and arsenic, which are very harmful to human health. In our rural society, most of the households still do not have improved toilets. The government has already taken steps to create awareness and construct toilets through the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' but it has not been fully effective. Many people still defecate in the open, on the banks of rivers and lakes, which causes foul smell and air pollution. In addition, air pollution is caused by odors emitted from hospitals, markets, fish and broiler waste.

The natural balance is not maintained by humans themselves. There are many reasons why people are destroying nature in the name of establishing villages and cities. They have mercilessly cut down trees and plants. Many forests have already been lost to human destruction. These forests, one of the means of purifying the life-giving oxygen of man, will one day suffer the consequences of the decline of human cruelty. On the other hand, the nuclear age has begun since the end of World War II. Air pollution caused by combustion of wood, coal, oil etc. or other components is normal. But the nuclear reaction is far worse. The atomic bombing of World War II devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki and had a worldwide reaction. As a result, millions of people died from radioactive radiation in the atmosphere until 32 years later, and many people suffered from various abnormal diseases. But even today, various countries are overzealous in developing nuclear bombs and bringing the destruction of the world closer. In addition, the increasing number of rockets, space missions, satellite launches, and aircraft movements in the upper atmosphere has depleted the ozone layer in the stratosphere, allowing the sun's ultraviolet rays to enter the Earth One foreshadowing a deadly future. Today, another serious environmental problem is rising global warming. Gases like carbon dioxide increase the temperature of the Earth by trapping the heat of the Sun in the



atmosphere. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to prevent the destruction of trees and shrubs. A team of UN experts believes that if these temperatures are not reduced immediately, global temperatures will rise unprecedentedly within 35 years. It is true that no government or department can succeed in environmental development or conservation without public awareness and community involvement in environmental conservation. Without proper knowledge of why and how environmental problems arise, the public's cooperation in solving such problems cannot be expected. For example, if the people are not aware of the problems caused by polythene or the kind of pollution it causes, the problem cannot be solved by passing a law and stopping the use of polythene departmentally.

No living thing can survive without water. Water covers 70 percent of the Earth's surface, but only 2.7 percent is fresh water. Besides drinking, water is used for agriculture, industry, cooking, bathing, washing clothes and dishes. Currently, the world's waters are polluted due to various factors such as population growth, expansion of industry, use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture. Wastes from oil refineries, rubber industries, textile industries, paper and leather industries are discharged into nearby rivers, streams, beaches etc. due to the discharge of various chemicals in the water. Wastewater from people's homes, hotels, offices, etc. flows into nearby canals and rivers. This

wastewater is mixed with spit, feces, detergents used for cleaning the premises, feces of domestic animals etc. and pollutes the water of these reservoirs. If other animals drink this water for any reason, it is dangerous. It also poses a threat to aquatic animals in the reservoir. Oily toxic substances from fuel-powered vehicles in rivers contribute to water pollution. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to prevent the spread of garbage along the rivers. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to prevent the spread of garbage along the rivers. Contaminated water contains germs of various deadly diseases. Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, jaundice, itching, etc. are caused by contaminated water.

Various pesticides and chemical fertilizers used in agriculture cause soil pollution. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the fact that the land is polluted by various wastes from industrial sectors and the growth of rats, flies, insects etc. caused by such wastes poses a threat to public health. Similarly, soil pollution is caused by the disposal of human, animal and bird feces and spit. The germs of various deadly diseases caused by these are transmitted to humans or other animals from flies that lay their eggs in the contaminated soil. There is a high risk of spreading deadly diseases such as leptospirosis, Q fever and anthrax to humans by dumping the feces of various animals on the ground. Similarly, noise pollution can cause various health problems to humans as well as

animals. Noise is increasing day by day due to modern civilization and now this noise is a serious problem. Noise pollution is increasingly caused by the noise of industries, vehicles, etc. Sudden loud noises are more harmful than continuous noise, as such loud noises can cause sudden deafness and even death from cardiac arrest. Noise or sound pollution causes tension, sleep disturbances, and affects work activity.

A closer look at the pollution areas makes it clear that excessive population growth is the main cause of any kind of pollution. Wherever there is more people, there is more garbage or noise. Therefore, it is essential to take appropriate measures for population control in every populous country today. Proper education is needed for public awareness. Only through proper education will the quality of life of the people improve and if the quality of life improves, environmental pollution will automatically come under control. In the developed countries of the world, especially the United States, France, Germany, Switzerland, etc., it is considered the moral duty of every citizen to control the environment. In these countries, industries, factories, etc. are built far away from the main cities or residential areas and the smoke and waste emitted from them are disposed of in a scientific manner. The governments and citizens of these countries are also very aware of transport pollution. No vehicle is allowed to operate without a pollution certificate. Blowing of car horns is also prohibited except when necessary. Emphasis has been placed on tree planting in every city. There are no people smoking in public places, chewing Paan, Gutka and drinking everywhere.

Today, the government has taken various initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Nirmal Assam, Afforestation etc. in our state or country to control pollution and it cannot be denied that such initiatives have made the people at least somewhat aware about the environment. However, such measures will not go far unless every citizen of the country is aware of himself. We need to be vigilant today to avoid the extreme disasters caused by serious environmental pollution. It is imperative today that we control pollution at least to some extent through tree planting, population control, scientific disposal of waste from factories and industries. Otherwise, life may be wiped out from the Earth in a very short time. (The writer is CRCC of Nabari Cluster, Biswanath Education Block, Education Department, Assam. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9435386040, 9864539966)

## India's forest cover increases but declines in biodiversity-rich areas

By: Kundan Pandey

The Forest Survey of India has released its 18th India State of Forest Report, indicating a marginal increase in India's forest and tree cover. However, a concerning trend shows a decline in forest cover across several biodiversity-rich areas.

The report, released a year later than scheduled, highlights trends in forest cover change, degradation, agroforestry, carbon sink, mangroves, and forest fires. According to the report, India's total forest and tree cover is 8,27,357 square kilometres, accounting for 25.17% of the country's geographical area. This includes 7,15,343 sq km (21.76%) of forest cover and 1,12,014 sq km (3.41%) of tree cover.

The report claims an increase of 1,446 square km in forest and tree cover since 2021, comprising a forest cover increase of 156 sq km (0.2%) and a tree cover increase of 1,289 sq km (1.16%). It categorises forest data into recorded forest areas which largely consists of the reserved forests and protected forests and non-notified forests.

While recorded forest areas show a minor increase of 7.28 sq km, 20 states and union territories report a decline in the category. States like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and the majority of North East states have registered negative growth in the recorded forest area. In contrast, non-notified forests have increased by 149 sq km.

A former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force, Karnataka, BK Singh finds something amiss. He says, "In India, plantation is happening in 18,000 sq km annually. But the total forest and tree cover increase is merely 1,400 sq km in two years. It is a total mismatch." What is happening to the plantations? He asked. "Either the forests are being cut, and plantations are partly supplementing, or a major chunk of plantations are failing. It must be examined."

Singh says, "Though there are success stories in bits and pieces, the latest ISFR [India State of Forest Report] largely creates a disappointing picture."

Durgawadi Sacred Grove in Ambe Hatvij, Junnar, Pune, situated on the edge of the Western Ghats. The Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Areas have lost 58.22 sq km of forest cover over the past decade. Image by Nikhil More via Wikimedia Commons (CC-BY-SA-4.0).

Decline in eco-sensitive regions  
The report paints a rosy picture, claiming an overall forest and tree cover increase. However, eco-sensitive zones like the Western Ghats, Himalayan states, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands have witnessed a decline in forest cover. Over the past decade, the Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Areas have lost 58.22 sq km of forest cover, while the latest assessment shows 327 sq km decrease in the northeastern region. Recorded forest areas in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands have also declined.

Debadityo Sinha, a Senior Resident Fellow and Lead of the Climate & Ecosystems team at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, says that report highlights that the prime natural forest and eco-sensitive zone are threatened, and the country is moving towards the planted forest. The report boasts of increased carbon sequestration due to

an increase in plantation, but it remains silent on carbon unlocked due to increased deforestation.

The report also provides a glimpse into deforestation trends in the last decade from 2011 to 2021, through its tree canopy density classification. Forests are categorised as Very Dense Forest (VDF, ≥70% canopy density), Moderately Dense Forest (MDF, 40%-70% canopy density), and Open Forest (OF, 10%-40% canopy density). Alarming, 46,707 sq km of VDF, MDF, and OF have degraded into non-forest areas, while 5,573 sq km have turned into scrub. Over the past decade, 40,709 sq km of forests have lost density, shifting from VDF and MDF to OF.

Calling it a massive change in the quality of existing forests, Sinha says there is a need for a proper study to understand how much carbon gets unlocked when natural forests are cut. Forest Survey of India should include this aspect in its biennial report when it shares the increased potential of carbon sink due to an increase in forest and tree cover.

Agroforestry increases, mangrove cover falls  
The latest forest survey dedicates a chapter on agroforestry, a land use system that integrates trees and shrubs on farmlands and rural landscapes. It claims that 21 states and UTs have shown an increasing trend in tree cover, which indicates that agroforestry is being promoted here. The report estimates the total tree cover under agroforestry in 2023 at 1,27,590 sq km, including trees with a Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) of 5 to 10 cm and bamboo. Agroforestry has grown by 20.02% over the past decade, from 2013 to 2023.

The total growing stock (sum of all trees by number or volume) under agroforestry in the country is estimated at 1,291.68 M m<sup>3</sup> in 2023, an increase of 286.94 M m<sup>3</sup> (28.56 %) since 2013. Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, and Rajasthan have the highest growing stock under agroforestry among states, while Jammu & Kashmir, Andaman & Nicobar, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu lead among UTs.

Singh underlines an issue related to accuracy by saying that agroforestry is, by and large, tree cover and not forest cover. The tree cover is not included in the satellite imagery assessment. The researchers studied 42,972 sampled plots to estimate the tree cover and extrapolated the findings. So, accuracy is not as high as that of the satellite imagery interpretation, but agroforestry has been growing, and this is a good sign, he said, adding, "So we are unable to hold on to our forest, but we are able to grow agroforestry."

On the other hand, the report highlights a decrease in mangrove cover. India's total mangrove cover is 4,991 sq km, accounting for 0.15% of the country's geographical area. Very dense mangroves constitute 29.33%, moderately dense mangroves represent 30.07%, and open mangroves comprise 40.60%. Since 2021, mangrove cover has decreased by 7.43 sq km, with notable declines of 36.39 sq km in Gujarat and reductions of 4.65 sq km in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. However, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have seen increases of 13.01 sq km and 12.39 sq km, respectively.

Sinha underscores the importance of studying the reasons behind the decline in Gujarat and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, as mangroves play a vital role in mitigating climate change and protecting coastal ecosystems. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## Biomedical waste is dangerous

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

Healthcare activities protect and restore health and save lives. But what about the waste and by-products they generate? About 85% of the total waste generated by healthcare activities is normal, non-hazardous waste comparable to household waste. The remaining 15% is considered hazardous material that may be infectious, chemical, or radioactive. Measures to ensure safe and environmentally sound management of healthcare waste can prevent adverse health and environmental effects from such waste, including unintended release of chemical or biological hazards. Healthcare waste contains potentially harmful microorganisms that can infect hospital patients, healthcare workers, and the general public. Other potential hazards may include drug-resistant microorganisms that spread from healthcare facilities to the environment. Adverse health outcomes associated with healthcare waste and by-products also include injuries from sharp objects; exposure to pharmaceutical products, particularly antibiotics and cytotoxic drugs and substances such as mercury or dioxins, released into the surrounding environment during the handling or incineration of healthcare waste; chemical burns arising in the context of disinfection, sterilization or waste treatment activities; air pollution resulting from the release of particulate matter during medical waste incineration; thermal injuries associated with open burning and the operation of medical waste incinerators; radiation burns; and the spread of antimicrobial resistance through unsafe storage, treatment and disposal of pharmaceutical waste. Several reasons exist for inadequate healthcare waste services. These include limited legal frameworks (e.g., policies, regulation, guidelines), lack of awareness of the health hazards associated with

healthcare waste, inadequate training in proper waste management, absence of waste management and disposal systems, inadequate financial and human resources, and low priority. Many countries either do not have proper regulations or do not monitor and enforce them.

Worldwide, an estimated 16 billion injections are performed each year. Not all needles and syringes are disposed of safely, creating risks of injury and infection and opportunities for reuse. Injecting with contaminated needles and syringes has decreased significantly in low- and middle-income countries in recent years, partly due to efforts to reduce the reuse of injection equipment. Despite this progress, unsafe injections were still responsible for 33,800 new HIV infections, 1.7 million hepatitis B infections, and 315,000 hepatitis C infections. A person who experiences a needlestick injury from a needle used on an infected source patient has a 30%, 1.8%, and 0.3% risk of becoming infected with HBV, HCV, and HIV, respectively. Additional hazards arise during cleanup at waste disposal sites and during the handling and manual sorting of hazardous waste from healthcare facilities. These practices are common in many regions of the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Waste handlers face an immediate risk of needlestick injuries and exposure to toxic or infectious substances. The treatment and disposal of healthcare waste can also pose indirect health risks through the release of pathogens and toxic pollutants into the environment.

Disposal of untreated healthcare waste in landfills can lead to contamination of drinking, surface, and ground water if those landfills are not properly constructed. Minimizing healthcare waste should be a priority. This will significantly reduce the amount of waste that needs to be handled and

treated. Waste minimization actions include green purchasing and selecting products where shipping is minimized and have less and ecological packaging, switching to reusable products when safe and feasible, ordering/receiving pharmaceuticals only based on documented need, and recycling common items including plastics, paper, and cardboard. Treatment of healthcare waste with chemical disinfectants can result in chemical substances being released into the environment if those substances are not handled, stored, and disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner.

Managing healthcare waste requires greater attention and diligence to avoid the adverse health outcomes associated with poor practice, including exposure to infectious agents and toxins. Key elements to improving healthcare waste management are to promote practices that reduce the amount of waste generated and ensure proper waste segregation; develop strategies and systems, along with strong monitoring and regulation, to progressively improve waste segregation, destruction, and disposal practices with the ultimate aim of meeting national and international standards; favour safe and environmentally friendly treatment of hazardous healthcare waste (e.g., autoclaving, microwaving, integrated steam treatment with internal mixing, and chemical treatment) over medical waste incineration, where possible; create a comprehensive system, responsibilities, resource allocation, and select safe and environmentally friendly management options to protect people from hazards when collecting, handling, storing, transporting, treating, or disposing of waste. Universal, long-term reform requires government commitment and support, although immediate action can be taken at the local level. (The author is a poet, freelance journalist and columnist, radio and TV panelist)

## That Arctic blast can feel brutally cold, but how much colder than 'normal' is it really?

By: Richard B (Ricky) Rood

An Arctic blast hitting the central and eastern US in early January 2025 is creating fiercely cold conditions in many places. Parts of North Dakota dipped to more than 20 degrees below zero, and people as far south as Texas woke up on Jan. 6 to temperatures in the teens. A snow and ice storm across the middle of the country added to the winter chill.

Forecasters warned that temperatures could be "10 to more than 30 degrees below normal" across much of the eastern two-thirds of the country during the first full week of the year.

But what does "normal" actually mean? While temperature forecasts are important to help people stay safe, the comparison to "normal" can be quite misleading. That's because what qualifies as normal in forecasts has been changing rapidly over the years as the planet warms.

**Defining normal**  
One of the most used standards for defining a science-based "normal" is a 30-year average of temperature and precipitation. Every 10 years, the National Center for Environmental Information updates these "normals," most recently in 2021. The current span considered "normal" is 1991-2020. Five years ago, it was 1981-2010.

But temperatures have been rising over the past century, and the trend has accelerated since about 1980. This warming is fueled by the mining and burning of fossil fuels that increase carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. These greenhouse gases trap heat close to the planet's surface, leading to increasing temperature.

Because global temperatures are warming, what's considered normal is warming, too. So, when a 2025 cold snap is reported as the difference between the actual temperature and "normal," it will appear to be colder and more extreme than if it were compared to an earlier 30-year average. Thirty years is a significant portion of a human life. For people under age 40 or so, the use of the most recent averaging span might fit with what they have experienced. But it doesn't speak to how much the Earth has warmed.

**How cold snaps today compare to the past**  
To see how today's cold snaps – or today's warming – compare to a time before global warming began to accelerate, NASA scientists use 1951-1980 as a baseline.

The reason becomes evident when you compare maps. For example, January 1994 was brutally cold east of the Rocky Mountains. If we compare those 1994 temperatures to today's "normal" – the 1991-2020 period – the US looks a lot like maps of early January 2025's temperatures: Large parts of the Midwest and eastern US were more than 7 degrees Fahrenheit (4 degrees Celsius) below "normal," and some areas were much colder.

But if we compare January 1994 to the 1951-1980 baseline instead, that cold spot in the eastern U.S. isn't quite as large or extreme. Where the temperatures in some parts of the country in January 1994 approached 14.2 F (7.9 C) colder than normal when compared to the 1991-2020 average, they only approached 12.4 F (6.9 C) colder than the 1951-1980 average. As a measure of a changing climate, updating the average 30-year baseline every decade makes warming appear smaller than it is, and it makes cold snaps seem more extreme. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

# Japan links Chinese hacker MirrorFace to dozens of cyber attacks

**TOKYO, Jan 8:** Japan on Wednesday linked more than 200 cyber attacks over the past five years targeting the country's national security and high technology data to a Chinese hacking group, MirrorFace, detailing their tactics and calling on government agencies and businesses to reinforce preventive measures.

The National Police Agency said its analysis on the targets, methods and infrastructure of the cyber attacks by MirrorFace from 2019 to 2024 concluded they were systematic attacks linked to China with an aim of stealing data on

Japanese national security and advanced technology.

The targets of the Chinese government-led cyber attacks included Japan's Foreign and Defence ministries, the country's space agency and individuals, including politicians, journalists, private companies and think tanks related to advanced technology, the NPA said.

Experts have repeatedly raised concerns about the vulnerability of Japan's cyber security, especially as the country steps up its defence capabilities and works more closely with the United States and

other partners to strengthen cyber defences. Japan has taken steps but experts say more work is needed. MirrorFace sent emails with attachments containing malware to targeted organisations and individuals to view data saved on computers mainly from December 2019 to July 2023, often from Gmail and Microsoft Outlook addresses using stolen identities, the NPA investigation found.

The emails typically used as subjects key words such as "Japan-US alliance," "Taiwan Strait," "Russia-Ukraine war" and "free and open Indo-Pacific," and

included an invitation for a study panel, references and a list of panelists, the NPA said.

In another tactic, the hackers targeted Japanese organisations in areas of aerospace, semiconductors, information and communications from February to October 2023 by exploiting vulnerabilities in virtual private networks to gain unauthorised access to information. The attacks included one on the Japan Aerospace and Exploration Agency, or JAXA, which acknowledged in June it had suffered a series of cyber attacks since 2023, though sensitive information related to rockets, satellites and defence was not affected. It was investigating to take preventive measures.

Last year, a cyber attack paralysed operations at a container terminal at a port in the city of Nagoya for three days.

More recently, Japan Airlines was hit by a cyber attack on Christmas, causing delays and cancellations to more than 20 domestic flights, though the carrier was able to stop the onslaught and restore its systems hours later and there was no impact on flight safety. (AP)



Trump will be sworn in on January 20 as the 47th President of the United States

## 'All hell will break out if hostages in Gaza are not freed': Trump warns Hamas

**WASHINGTON, Jan 8:** US President-elect Donald Trump has warned that "all hell will break out in the Middle East" if the hostages being held by Hamas are not released by Inauguration Day.

Trump did not elaborate on what actions he might take if the captives are not released by the time he takes office.

Officials say about 100 hostages, including some Americans, who were seized on October 7, 2023, remain captive in Gaza, though they believe many of them may have died in captivity.



"All hell will break out. If those hostages aren't back, I don't want to hurt your negotiation, if they're not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East," Trump told reporters at a news conference in Mar-a-Lago, Florida.

Trump will be sworn in on January 20 as the 47th President of the United States.

He was responding to a question on the status of negotiations with Hamas on the release of American hostages. His Special Envoy to the Middle East Steven Charles Witkoff, who has just returned from the region, told reporters that they are on the verge of it.

"I believe we've been on the verge of it. I don't want to discuss sort of what's delayed it, no point in being negative in any way. But

I think it's the president, his stature, what he's said he expects, the red lines he's put out there, that's driving this negotiation," Witkoff said.

Noting that they are making a lot of progress, he said: "I don't want to say too much because I think they're doing a really good job back in Doha. I'm leaving tomorrow to go back to Doha. But I think that we've had some really great progress and I'm really hopeful that by the inauguration we'll have some good things to announce on behalf of the president."

"I actually believe that we're working in tandem in a really good way, but it's the president, his reputation, the things that he has said that are driving this negotiation. So hopefully it'll all work out and

we'll save some lives," Witkoff said. Negotiations between Hamas and Israel are ongoing in Qatar, with Hamas this week naming 34 hostages in Gaza — including two dual US citizens — it would be willing to release in a ceasefire deal, the National Public Radio reported.

Trump, in response to a question, warned Hamas to release all the hostages by January 20.

"It will not be good for Hamas and it will not be good frankly for anyone. All hell will break out. I don't have to say anymore, but that's what it is. They should have given them back a long time ago — they should have never taken them. There should have never been the attack of October 7th. People forget that, but there was

and many people were killed," he said.

"They're no longer hostages. I have people from Israel and others calling, begging me to get — we also had people there from the United States just so you know. They're holding some so-called hostages from the US, but I've had mothers come to me and fathers crying, can I get the body of their son back? Can I get the body of their daughter back?" he said.

"That beautiful girl where they threw her in the car, pulled her by her ponytail and threw her in the car like she was a sack of potatoes. I said, what happened to her? Sir, she's dead. Like a 19, 20-year-old, beautiful girl. The way they treated her," he said as he applauded his special envoy for the progress being made so far.

"I tell this, I don't want to hurt the negotiation. If the deal isn't done before I take office, which is now going to be two weeks, all hell will break out in the Middle East," Trump said.

The Biden administration has unsuccessfully tried to help broker a ceasefire in Gaza for well over a year. The first ceasefire — weeks after the October 7 attack — saw the release of dozens of hostages, but subsequent efforts to pause the fighting and secure the release of additional hostages have gone nowhere. (PTI)

## Thousands flee as wildfires burn out of control in, around Los Angeles



**LOS ANGELES, Jan 8:** California firefighters battled wind-whipped wildfires that tore across the Los Angeles area, destroying homes, clogging roadways as tens of thousands fled and straining resources as officials prepared for the situation to worsen early Wednesday.

The flames from a fire that broke out Tuesday evening near a nature preserve in the inland foothills northeast of LA spread so rapidly that staff at a senior living centre had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot. The residents waited there in their bedclothes as embers fell around them until ambulances, buses and even construction vans arrived to take them to safety.

Another blaze that started hours earlier ripped through the city's Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity residences and memorialised by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA."

In the frantic haste to get to safety, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases.

The traffic jam on Palisades Drive prevented emergency vehicles from getting through and bulldozer was brought in to push the abandoned cars to the side and create a path. Video along the Pacific Coast Highway showed widespread destruction of homes and businesses along the famed roadway.

Pacific Palisades resident Kelsey Trainor said the only road in and out of her neighbourhood was blocked. Ash fell all around them while fires burned on both sides of the road.

"We looked across and the fire had jumped from one side of the road to the other side of the road," Trainor said. "People were getting out of the cars with their dogs and babies and bags, they were crying and screaming." A third wildfire started around 10.30 pm and quickly prompted evacuations in Sylmar, a San Fernando Valley community that is the northernmost neighbourhood in Los Angeles. The causes of all three fires were under investigation.

Flames were being pushed by Santa Ana winds topping 60 mph (97 kph) in some places. The winds were expected to increase overnight, producing isolated gusts that could top 100 mph (160 kph) in mountains and foothills — including in areas that haven't seen substantial rain in months.

The situation prompted the Los Angeles Fire Department to take the rare step of putting out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help. It was too windy for firefighting aircraft to fly, further hampering the fight.

The erratic weather caused President Joe Biden to cancel plans to travel to inland Riverside County, where he was to announce the establishment of two new national monuments in the state.

He remained in Los Angeles, where smoke was visible from his hotel, and was briefed on the wildfires.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved a grant to help reimburse California for the firefighting cost.

Officials didn't give an estimate of structures damaged or destroyed in the Pacific Palisades wildfire, but they said about 30,000 residents were under evacuation orders and more than 13,000 structures were under threat. Gov. Gavin Newsom visited the scene and said many homes had burned.

By evening the flames had spread into neighbouring Malibu and several people there were being treated for burn injuries and a firefighter had a serious head injury and was taken to a hospital, according to Los Angeles Fire Department Capt. Erik Scott.

Things were expected to worsen overnight. "By no stretch of the imagination are we out of the woods," Newsom warned residents, saying the worst of the winds were expected between 10 pm Tuesday and 5 am Wednesday. He declared a state of emergency.

As of Tuesday evening, nearly 167,000 people were without power in Los Angeles county, according to the tracking website PowerOutage.us, due to the strong winds.

Recent dry winds, including the notorious Santa Anas, have contributed to warmer-than-average temperatures in Southern California, where there's been very little rain so far this season. Southern California hasn't seen more than 0.1 inches (0.25 centimetres) of rain since early May.

The Pacific Palisades fire started around 10.30 am and quickly consumed about 4.6 square miles (11.6 square kilometres) and sent up a dramatic plume of smoke visible across Los Angeles. The neighbourhood, which borders Malibu about 20 miles (32 kilometres) west of downtown LA, includes hillside streets of tightly packed homes along winding roads nestled against the Santa Monica Mountains and stretches down to beaches along the Pacific Ocean.

Long-time Palisades resident Will Adams said he immediately went to pick his two kids up from St. Matthews Parish School when he heard the fire was nearby. Meanwhile, he said embers flew into his wife's car as she tried to evacuate.

"She vacated her car and left it running," Adams said. She and many other residents walked down toward the ocean until it was safe.

Adams said he had never witnessed anything like this in the 56 years he's lived there. He watched as the sky turned brown and then black as homes started burning. He could hear loud popping and bangs "like small explosions," which he said he believes were the transformers exploding. "It is crazy, it's everywhere, in all the nooks and crannies of the Palisades. One home's safe, the other one's up in flames," Adams said. Actor James Woods posted footage of flames burning through bushes and past palm trees on a hill near his home. The towering orange flames billowed among the landscaped yards between the homes.

"Standing in my driveway, getting ready to evacuate," Woods said in the short video on X.

Some trees and vegetation on the grounds of the Getty Villa were burned by late Tuesday, but staff and the museum collection remain safe, Getty President Katherine Fleming said in a statement. The museum located on the eastern end of the Pacific Palisades is a separate campus of the world-famous Getty Museum that focuses on the art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. The fire also burned Palisades Charter High School.

Film studios cancelled two movie premieres due to the fire and windy weather, and the Los Angeles Unified School District said it temporarily relocated students from three campuses in the Pacific Palisades area. (AP)

## Impeached S Korean president's lawyers slam detention efforts as acting leader warns of clash



**SEOUL, Jan 8:** Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader expressed concern Wednesday over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel.

As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain Yoon following last week's failed effort, the presidential security service fortified Yoon's compound with barbed wire and rows of tightly placed vehicles blocking the path to his residence.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff if they obstruct efforts to seize the embattled president. The office, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military, has been seeking Yoon's detention since he repeatedly ignored summons for questioning about whether his brief power grab on December 3 constituted rebellion.

In a news conference, Yoon's lawyers challenged the legitimacy of a new detention warrant issued Tuesday by the Seoul Western District Court, arguing that the anti-corruption agency lacks legal authority to investigate rebellion charges or order police to detain suspects.

Yoon Kap-keun, one of the lawyers, urged the anti-corruption agency to either indict the president or seek a formal arrest warrant — a process that would require a court hearing.

However, he said the president would only comply with an arrest warrant issued by the Seoul Central District Court, accusing the agency of deliberately choosing the Western District Court because of its allegedly favourable judge. He didn't give a clear answer when asked whether the president would appear at the Central District Court for a hearing on an arrest warrant, saying security issues must be settled first.

"People are suffering in the severe cold and government officials must be experiencing significant internal conflict," the lawyer said, referring to daily protests by both Yoon's critics and supporters near his residence. "Please consider this as us taking a step back based on good will."

The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative effort leading to the president's impeachment on December 14, accused his lawyers of attempting to stall the process and urged the anti-corruption agency to swiftly execute the detention warrant against him. About 150 anti-corruption agency investigators and police officers attempted to detain Yoon at his residence on Friday but retreated after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours. The investigators have not yet made another attempt to detain him.

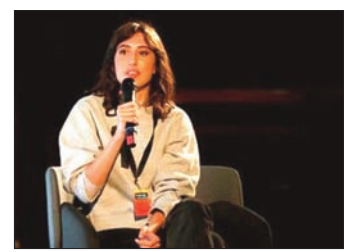
Police said they are considering "all available options" to bring Yoon into custody and haven't publicly ruled out the possibility of deploying SWAT teams, although it's unclear whether investigators would risk triggering a confrontation with presidential security forces, who are also armed. (AP)

## Italian journalist Cecilia Sala released from Iran, returning home

**ROME, Jan 8:** An Italian journalist detained in Iran since December 19 and whose fate became intertwined with that of an Iranian engineer wanted by the United States was freed Wednesday and is heading home, Italian officials announced.

A plane carrying Cecilia Sala took off from Tehran after "intensive work on diplomatic and intelligence channels," Premier Giorgia Meloni's office said, adding that Meloni had informed Sala's parents of the news.

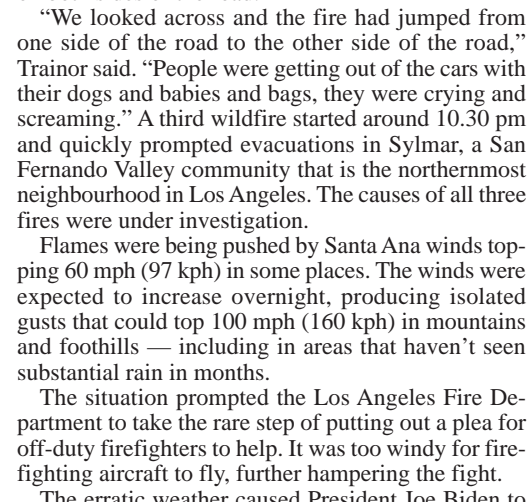
There was no immediate word from the Iranian government on the journalist's release. Sala, a 29-year-old reporter for the Il Foglio daily, was detained in Tehran on December 19, three days after she arrived on a journalist visa. She was accused of violating the laws of the Islamic Republic, the official IRNA news agency said.



Italian commentators had speculated that Iran was holding Sala as a bargaining chip to ensure the release of Mohammad Abedini, who was arrested at Milan's Malpensa airport three days before on December 16, on a US warrant.

The US Justice Department accused him and another Iranian of supplying the drone technology to Iran that was used in a January 2024 attack on a US outpost in Jordan that killed three American troops. He remains in detention in Italy. (AP)

## 'It should be a woman. Long ago it should have been, but thank God' Pope Francis has named first woman to head major Vatican office, choosing Italian nun



**ROME, Jan 8:** Pope Francis on Monday named the first woman to head a major Vatican office, appointing an Italian nun, Sister Simona Brambilla, to become prefect of the department responsible for all the Catholic Church's religious orders.

The appointment marks a major step in Francis' aim to give women more leadership roles in governing the church. While women have been named to No. 2 spots in some Vatican offices, never before has a woman been named prefect of a dicastery or congregation of the Holy See Curia, the central governing organ of the Catholic Church.

The historic nature of Brambilla's appointment was confirmed by Vatican Media, which headlined its report "Sister Simona Brambilla is the first woman prefect in the Vatican."

The office is one of the most important in the Vatican. Known officially as the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, it is responsible for every religious order, from the Jesuits and Franciscans to the Mercy nuns and smaller newer movements.

The appointment means that a

woman is now responsible for the women who do much of the church's work — the world's 600,000 Catholic nuns — as well as the 129,000 Catholic priests who belong to religious orders.

"It should be a woman. Long ago it should have been, but thank God," said Thomas Groome, a senior professor of theology and religious education at Boston College who has long called for the ordination of women priests. "It's a small step along the way but symbolically, it shows an openness and a new horizon or possibility."

Groome noted that nothing theologically would now prevent Francis from naming Brambilla a cardinal, since cardinals don't technically have to be ordained priests.

Naming as a cardinal "would be automatic for the head of a dicastery if she was a man," he said.

But in an indication of the novelty of the appointment and that perhaps Francis was not ready to do that far, the pope simultaneously named as a co-leader, or "pro-prefect," a cardinal: Ángel Fernández Artime, a Salesian.

The appointment, announced in the Vatican daily bulletin, lists Brambilla first as "prefect" and



Fernández second as her co-leader. Theologically, it appears Francis believed the second appointment was necessary since the head of the office must be able to celebrate Mass and perform other sacramental functions that currently can only be done by men.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee, chair of the religion and philosophy department at Manhattan University, was initially excited by Brambilla's appointment, only to learn that Francis had named a male co-prefect.

"One day, I pray, the church will see women for the capable leaders they already are," she said. "It's ridiculous to think she needs help running a Vatican dicastery. Moreover, for as long as men have been

in charge of this division of Vatican governance, they have governed men's and women's religious communities."

Brambilla, 59, is a member of the Consolata Missionaries religious order and had served as the No. 2 in the religious orders department since 2023. She takes over from the retiring Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, 77.

Francis made Brambilla's appointment possible with his 2022 reform of the Holy See's founding constitution, which allowed laypeople, including women, to head a dicastery and become prefects.

Brambilla, a nurse, worked as a missionary in Mozambique and led her Consolata order as superior from 2011-2023, when Francis made her secretary of the religious orders department.

One major challenge she will face is the plummeting number of nuns worldwide. It has fallen by around 10,000 a year for the past several years, from around 750,000 in 2010 to 600,000 last year, according to Vatican statistics.

Brambilla's appointment is the latest move by Francis to show by example how women can take leadership roles within the Catholic hierarchy, albeit without allowing them to be ordained as priests.

Catholic women have long complained of second-class status in an institution that reserves the priesthood for men.

Francis has upheld the ban on female priests and tamped down hopes that women could be ordained as deacons.

But there has been a marked increase in the percentage of women working in the Vatican during his papacy, including in leadership positions, from 19.3 per cent in 2013 to 23.4 per cent today, according to statistics reported by Vatican News. In the Curia alone, the percentage of women is 26 per cent. (AP)

**7,309 people arrested in drug, alcohol-related cases in Mizoram in 2024: Excise**



**AIZAWL, Jan 8:** A total of 7,309 people have been arrested in drug and alcohol-related cases in dry Mizoram in 2024, the state's Excise and Narcotics Department said in a statement on Wednesday.

The drugs seized by the department include 46.5 kg of heroin, 138.8 kg of methamphetamine tablets and 586.6 kg of ganja, the statement said. The department also seized 67,911 litres of country-made or locally brewed illicit liquor, 16,768 litres of Indian-made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), 357 litres of foreign-made liquor and, 177 bottles and 36,535 cans of beer, it said.

Also, 7,523 Alprazolam tablets, 6,129 Nitrazepam tablets, 2,580 Diazepam tablets and 4,119 litres of BEDC (Myanmarese alcoholic beverages) were seized, the statement added. (PTI)

**500 youth from Manipur to be provided skill training in Delhi: CM**

17 startups have already employed around 432 IDPs

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said that around 500 youth from the state shall be provided skill training in Delhi for cabin crew placements in airlines and priority will be given to internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Addressing a programme here, Singh said that the training will be funded by the ministry of tourism.

He said 17 startups have already employed around 432 IDPs.

Asserting that the government has been extending all possible assistance in shifting people affected by the ethnic conflict to safer places, Singh said, "In Phubala area in Bishnupur district, prefabricated houses have been constructed by the government. People have been moved to houses located at a safer place. So far, around 2,500 prefabricated houses have been occupied."

Speaking about various schemes



in the state, he said. "Chief Minister-gi Hakshelgi Tengbang (chief minister's health assistance) was launched on January 21, 2018, by the government after considering the hardships faced by the poor

and needy people for medical treatment while Sotharabasin-gi Tengbang (assistance for the weaker sections) was launched for the welfare and development of the differently abled persons."

Under School Fagathansi Mission (let's improve school mission), children of the labour card holders residing in relief camps are being provided free education in government schools, he said.

"Under Chief Minister-gi Artistes Singi Tengbang (chief minister's assistance for artistes) scheme, a monthly pension is being provided to around 900 artistes and thousands of families have benefited under 'One Family One Livelihood Scheme'," he said.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic conflict between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis in Manipur since May 2023. (PTI)

**Tricolour hoisted on 73-foot mast near India-China border**

**ITANAGAR, Jan 8:** A tricolour on a 73-foot-tall mast now stands at Gorsam Chorten in Jemithang, the first administrative centre near the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district.



The flag was hoisted on Wednesday in the presence of over 200 locals and Indian Army personnel.

Organised jointly by the Army, the civil administration and local monks, the ceremony was led by Tawang Brigade Commander Brigadier Vipul Singh Rajput.

Zila parishad member Lek Norbu, Jemithang Circle Officer Deewan Mara, local village elders and school children attended the event, a statement said.

The flag was hoisted with full military honours by Army personnel, followed by the singing of the national anthem.

Beyond its symbolic importance as a national monument close to India's borders with China and Bhutan, the high-mast flag enhances the scenic Jemithang Valley's appeal to visitors, contributing to tourism development in the area, the statement said.

The project is part of broader development efforts in border areas, with plans to install more such

flags at other key locations in the district in the future, it said.

The project was executed by the Tezpur-based Gajraj Corps and its Ball of Fire Division with the support of the Flag Foundation of India. It is the second high-mast flag installed in the Tawang sector, following the one raised at the strategic Bum La Pass in January last year, it added. (PTI)

**MHA approves new State Emblem for Tripura govt**

**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Jan 8:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has officially approved a new State Emblem or Logo for the Government of Tripura.

In a communication addressed to Dr P.K. Chakravarty, secretary of the department of information & cultural affairs, Debobroto Basu, under secretary of the MHA, confirmed the approval.

The letter stated that the proposed emblem was reviewed under the State Emblem of India (Regulation of Use) Rules, 2007, as amended in 2010, and found compliant with the prescribed guidelines.

"I am directed to refer to the Government of Tripura's letter dated October 28, 2024, enclosing the proposed design of the emblem. The proposal has been examined in terms of Rule 4(2) of the State Emblem of India (Regu-

lation of Use) Rules, 2007 (as amended in 2010) and found in order. The ministry of home affairs hereby conveys its approval for the proposed emblem/logo for the Government of Tripura," the letter reads.

Tripura chief minister, Dr Manik Saha, took to Facebook to share the news, stating, "As per the decision of the State Government, the emblem has been approved by the Central Government for official use as the State Emblem/Logo of the Government of Tripura. This special logo, approved by the Union home ministry, will play a significant role in showcasing the culture and history of the State."

The approval marks a key milestone in the State Government's efforts to represent Tripura's unique cultural heritage and historical identity through its official symbol.

**TYCM urges Manipur govt to restore grassroots democracy**

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** The Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM) has urged the Government of Manipur to expedite the conduct of the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) elections at the earliest to restore grass-root democracy and local self-government for the hill tribals of Manipur.

The elections for the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), mandated under Sections 11 & 13 of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971, were due in 2020 but have not been conducted, it said.

"Now, four years have lapsed without any progress, representing a significant denial of democratic rights and political suppression of grass-root local self-government in the hill tribal areas. This prolonged inaction appears to be an intentional effort to weaken and demolish the framework of Local Self-Government, thereby suppressing constitutional tribal rights," the tribal youth body stated.

According to the TYCM, the non-existence of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) for the past four years has led to a loss of development opportunities for the tribal population and the abandonment of numerous beneficial schemes.

The council also said these losses cannot be easily recovered/compensated for by future generations.

Furthermore, the failure to conduct ADC elections constitutes a suppression of the tribal communities in hill areas and is a violation of the Indian Constitution, the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, and the law of the land.

The Hill Areas Committee (HAC) had resolved to recommend to the Government of Manipur to conduct the long-pending election to the ADCs as soon as possible. As the system of Caretaker Chairmanship has been cancelled under Order No. TA-501/1/2022 e-TA & H, Government of Manipur, in compliance with the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court order dated 15. 03. 2024 passed in WA. No. 353 of 2023, a temporary committee consisting of 20 members for each ADC was proposed to be formed until elections are conducted, it pointed out.

This includes 18 members selected from former ADC members, experts in local self-governance, and eminent persons, along with 2 government nominees, the council added.

The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971 does not provide for the formation of such interim committees, and the proposed measure is not only extralegal but also a direct affront to the democratic principles underlying the ADCs, said the TYCM. The youth body also said the Gauhati

High Court's order dated 15. 03. 2024 passed in WA. No. 353 of 2023, "clearly states that the appointment of Caretaker Chairmanship is unconstitutional". It added, "These temporary measures risk creating confusion and undermining the faith of tribal communities in local self-government".

The TYCM then strongly objected to this resolution, "which blatantly violates" the provisions of The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971. The proposed measures are illogical and unconstitutional, causing confusion among tribal communities, it also said.

"These actions attempt to eradicate and abolish the principles and spirit of the 1971 Act, which was established to ensure appropriate representation in local self-government. The decision of the HAC misleads the tribal populace and invites unnecessary complications," the tribal youth body mentioned.

The TYCM said it had already submitted memorandums to the Chief Minister of Manipur, the Governor of Manipur and the Chairman of the Hill Areas Committee (HAC), urging them for immediate attention and action on these pressing issues.

The TYCM reiterated its demand for the timely conduct of ADC elections and the restoration of democratic rights to the tribal population of Manipur. (NNN)

**Villagers asked to evacuate from 'land of Konsaram'**

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** The Konsakhul (Konsaram) Village Authority, a Liangmai Naga village, has directed the Leilon Vaiphei village (Kukizo) to vacate the village from the "land of Konsaram" within 15 days from the date of issuing this order.

The Liangmai Naga village authority has accused the Leilon Vaiphei village of violating "our age-old principle of peaceful co-existence that we upheld with honour by outraging modesty of a woman of my villager and brutally assaulted her in broad daylight at the behest of your order/instruction on January 7, 2025, at K. Lungwiram, under Kangchup Gejang sub-division, Kangpokpi district".

The Konsakhul Village Authority told the Leilon Vaiphei village that the latter had "blatantly ignored the fact that on humanitarian grounds Leilon Vaiphei was allowed to settle as tenants on the land of Konsaram Naga". Of late, according to the Liangmai Naga village, the Leilon Vaiphei has been indulging in anti-social activities, targeting innocent Naga villagers in the Konsaram area showing scant regard to our generosity and kindness. "It is deeply painful to state that, despite displaying our unparalleled magnanimity and forgiveness, you have

crossed all limits," the Konsakhul (Konsaram) Village Authority stated.

"As the lease agreement signed between the landlord (Konsaram) and the tenant (Leilon) had already expired, therefore you are hereby asked to vacate your village from the land of Konsaram within 15 days from the date of issuing this order. Failing which, you will be forcefully evicted from our soil and if there is any bloodshed in the process of eviction, you will be held responsible for that," the Liangmai Naga village authority stated. (NNN)

**Arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur's Thoubal**

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** Security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition during search operations in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said on Wednesday.

The seized items include a pistol, mortar, hand grenade and live rounds of ammunition, they said.

The recovery was made during search operations at Irong Tangkhul village near Hangoilok in the district on Tuesday, a police officer said.

Meanwhile, the Manipur Police arrested an active member of the pro-seceded outfit PREPAK (Pro) from Bishnupur district, he said.

The 26-year-old was apprehended from the Sunusiphai area on Tuesday, the officer added. (PTI)

**Six people stranded on Siang river island rescued**



**ITANAGAR, Jan 8:** Six people, stranded on an island in the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh, were rescued on Wednesday, police said.

They had gone to collect stink bugs from the island in East Siang district using a country boat and due to inclement weather, they could not return. Deputy Superintendent of Police Ayup Boko told PTI.

The Mebo police station received information about them around 8.30 pm, he said. A rescue team, comprising police and disaster response force personnel, was formed and it reached the site around 10.30 pm but due to darkness and heavy rain, they postponed the rescue operation.

The team rescued the stranded persons on Wednesday morning. They were identified as Opang Tamuk (41), Punchung Rai (19), Rajen Narzari (19), Sompma Marpeche (19), Santosh Chetry (21) and Vijay Tamang (17), the DSP said. (PTI)

**Manipur Cong leaders meet new Governor at Raj Bhavan**

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** Manipur Congress leaders, including its state president K Meghachandra and Lok Sabha member Angomcha Bimol Akoiyam, met new Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan here on Wednesday.

Bhalla took oath as the 19th Governor of Manipur on Friday.

"We called on the newly appointed governor. During the meeting, we informed him about the hardships faced by the people... and the crisis in the state, which will soon step into the second year... there is no sight of restoration of peace and normalcy," Congress legislature party leader O Ibobi Singh told reporters.

"We also shared our constructive suggestions with him, and assured

the Governor of our assistance in every way possible," Singh said.

Manipur has been rocked by ethnic conflicts since May 2023, which have claimed over 250 lives and rendered thousands homeless.

"Restoration of normalcy is not just decline in incidents of firing... only when inmates of relief camps return to their original homes can we presume that normalcy has returned," the Congress leader added.

Meanwhile, a Raj Bhavan statement said that Singh and his team greeted Bhalla on being appointed as the Governor.

"The team discussed the situation... and made suggestions which the governor welcomed and urged to work collectively for the people of the state," it said. (PTI)

**Tripura BJP Janjati Morcha slams CPIM's tribal wing**

**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Jan 8:** The Janjati Morcha, the tribal wing of Tripura's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has strongly criticised the Gana Mukti Parishad (GMP), the tribal wing of the opposition CPI(M), for accusing the government of neglecting indigenous communities.

The BJP leaders dismissed the allegations as baseless and labelled GMP's planned Raj Bhawan Abhiyan on January 9 as a futile exercise.

Addressing a press conference, Bidyut Debbarma, vice president of BJP Janjati Morcha and a member of the District Council, firmly defended the government's record. "The Raj Bhawan Abhiyan by GMP is unnecessary and irrelevant. Since the BJP took charge in Tripura in 2018, the state has witnessed unprecedented development for the Janajati community." Achievements such as the CM Rubber Mission, resolution of the 23-year-long Bru issue, renaming Agartala Airport as Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport, establishment of Eklavya Model Residential Schools, declaration of Aspirational Blocks, celebrating Maharaja Bir Bikram's birth anniversary on August 19, and setting up the Tribal Research Institute are clear examples of progress," Debbarma said. He further added that under the BJP's

leadership, the central government has introduced several welfare schemes benefiting tribal communities, and many Janajati individuals have been honoured with prestigious awards such as the Padma Shri.

Debbarma criticised the CPI(M) and Congress for failing to address tribal issues during their tenure. "Previous governments ignored the Janajati community's welfare. BJP has not only worked for their development but has also respected their sentiments and heritage. Special packages have been sanctioned, and proposals have been submitted to grant more power to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)," he said.

Dismissing the CPI(M)'s claims of inadequate development, joblessness, and lack of MNREGA work, Debbarma challenged the opposition to identify a single village without electricity under the current government. "If they can point out such issues, we will resolve them immediately. These false allegations are merely tactics to mislead the people," he asserted.

The BJP Janjati Morcha reiterated its commitment to the welfare of Tripura's indigenous people, emphasizing that the transformative changes since 2018 have brought hope and prosperity to the community.

**'Increase in enrollment rate in elementary education in Arunachal'**

**ITANAGAR, Jan 8:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said there has been an increase in the enrollment rate in elementary education and a reduction in the dropout rate at the secondary level in the state.

He said the state has achieved a notable reduction in the dropout rate at the secondary level to 11.7 per cent.

Khandu wrote on X, "Our concerted efforts have yielded remarkable outcomes. The Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate in elementary education has reached an impressive 100 pc. Similarly, the average annual school dropout rate at the secondary level has reduced significantly."

The chief minister credited Team Arunachal for driving



impactful changes in the education sector. He highlighted that the initiatives are aligned with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the goals outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

"In sync with the grand vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister

Innovative programmes like 'Building as Learning Aid' and the establishment of new Eklavya Model Residential Schools have ensured that modern educational facilities are accessible to every child, reinforcing our commitment to inclusive and quality education for all, the chief minister added.

According to the 2024 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Scoreboard, this milestone is part of Arunachal Pradesh's strides in achieving the global education goal under SDG 4.

As per the 2024 SDG scorecard, 100 pc adjusted net enrollment rate in elementary education. The average annual school dropout rate at the secondary level has dropped down to 11.7 pc. (PTI)

No.TDB/GAD/102/2024-25/1512 Date 08/01/2025

**INVITATION FOR BIDS**

The Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block, Dist-Tamulpur, BTC, Assam invites bid affixing non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty Five Paisa) only from the approved and eligible contractor Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II or Class-III category registered with Assam PWD (R&B)/Irrigation Deptt. for the following work under GAD Deptt. under SOPD fund for the year 2024-25. Tender Box will be available for dropping tender in the Office of the Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block from 09/01/2025 up to 2.00 PM on 01/02/2025 (if any holidays or Bandh falls then the subsequent day) and the tender box will be opened at the same day on 3.00 PM in same office.

| Sl. No. | Name of work   | Tender value (In Lakh) | Time of Completion                                  | Tender Cost & Earnest Money & Date of Tender   |
|---------|--|------------------------|---|--|
| 1       | Construction of Robha at Nowakhat Durga Mandir under SOPD, BTC for the year 2024-25. | 10.00                  | 180 days from the date of issue of final work order | 1. Tender cost @ 0.03% of A/A amount to be pledged by Bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC.<br>2. Earnest money @ 2% (In case of ST/SC 1%) of estimated value to be pledged by demand draft/FDR in favour of B.D.O Tamulpur Development Block<br>3. Bidders are specifically requested to inspect the field and study the working condition before submitting their offer/bid. |

Details NIT may be seen at Office of the B.D.O Tamulpur Development Block, Tamulpur, Dist- Tamulpur.

Sd/-  
Block Development Officer,  
Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1267

**NAME CORRECTION**

I, Harendra Chowdhury, Unit: Assam Regti Centre, Son of Surendra Chowdhury, a resident of Village-Natun Sirajuli, P.O:- Natun Sirajuli, P.S:- Dhekiajuli District-Sonitpur, Assam do hereby solemnly affirm and declare via a notary affidavit at Sonitpur, Tezpur that my actual and correct name is Harendra Chowdhury but in some documents my name is inadvertently recorded as Harendra Choudhury and Harendra Chaudhuri instead of Harendra Chowdhury. I hereby declare that Harendra Chowdhury, Harendra Choudhury and Harendra Chaudhuri is the names of one and same person i.e me Harendra Chowdhury.

**NAME CORRECTION**

I, Harendra Chowdhury, Unit: Assam Regti Centre, Son of Surendra Chowdhury, a resident of Village-Natun Sirajuli, P.O:- Natun Sirajuli, P.S:- Dhekiajuli District-Sonitpur, Assam do hereby solemnly affirm and declare via a notary affidavit at Sonitpur, Tezpur that my wife's actual and correct name is GAYATRI CHOWDHURY and my daughter's actual and correct name is ESHANI CHOWDHURY and my another daughter's actual and correct name is MEGHNA CHOWDHURY. But, in my Service Record and Family details wherein their names has been recorded as GAYATRI CHOUDHURY, ESHANI CHOUDHURY and MEGHNA CHOUDHURY instead of GAYATRI CHOWDHURY, ESHANI CHOWDHURY and MEGHNA CHOWDHURY. I do hereby declare that GAYATRI CHOUDHURY and GAYATRI CHOUDHURY is the name of one and same person i.e. my wife and ESHANI CHOWDHURY and ESHANI CHOUDHURY is the name of one and same person i.e. my daughter and MEGHNA CHOUDHURY is the name of one and same person i.e. my daughter.

# Members echo party stand at parliamentary panel meeting on simultaneous polls



**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The parliamentary panel constituted to scrutinise the two bills on simultaneous elections held its first meeting on Wednesday, with BJP members lauding the concept, and opposition MPs questioning it.

Officials of the Ministry of Law and Justice made a presentation on the provisions of the proposed laws during the meeting, citing support to the idea of simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls by various bodies, including the Law Commission of India, sources said.

BJP members batted for the 'one nation, one election' proposal, saying it is in the interest of the country, they said.

A Congress member said the idea is against the basic fabric of the Constitution, while a Trinamool Congress MP said it negates people's democratic rights, they added.

Headed by BJP MP PP Chaudhary, the 39-member joint committee of Parliament comprises members from all major parties, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

from Congress, Sanjay Jha from JD(U), Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde, AAP's Sanjay Singh, and Kalyan Banerjee from Trinamool Congress.

Chaudhary is a former minister of state for law.

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill were introduced in the Lok Sabha during the recent Winter Session and referred to the committee.

The government decided to increase the committee's strength from 31 to 39, as more political parties expressed their desire to be part of the exercise to examine the two draft legislations on simultaneous elections.

Former Union ministers Anurag Thakur, Parshottam Rupala and Manish Tewari, along with several other lawmakers, including Anil Baluni, Bansuri Swaraj and Sambit Patra, are also members of the committee.

The panel has 27 members from the Lok Sabha, and 12 from the Rajya Sabha. (PTI)

# UP govt will reclaim every inch of land taken under pretext of Waqf: Adityanath

'Hard to tell whether it is a Waqf Board or a board of land mafias'

**LUCKNOW, Jan 8:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said the state government will reclaim every inch of land that has been taken under the pretext of waqf.

Speaking at the 'Maha Kumbh Mahasammelan' organised by a private news channel here, he claimed that the belief system of Sanatan Dharma represents the world's oldest culture, standing above comparison with any religion or sect.

"I inherit a legacy that spans thousands of years, with its cultural and spiritual events equally ancient. The tradition of Sanatan is higher than the sky and beyond comparison," Adityanath, according to an official statement, said.

Taking a strong stance on the Waqf Board, he said, "It is hard to tell whether it is a Waqf Board or a board of land mafias."

He said his government has amended the Waqf Act and is actively investigating all "occupied" land. "We will reclaim every inch of land that has been taken under the pretext of Waqf and it will be used to build housing, educational institutions and hospitals for the poor," he affirmed.

Highlighting the ancient heritage of Sanatan Dharma, Yogi asserted that the tradition of Kumbh far predates the Waqf institution.

"The stature of Sanatan Dharma is higher than the sky and its depth deeper than the ocean. It cannot be compared to any sect or religion,"



he said.

Chief Minister Adityanath strongly criticised the Samajwadi Party (SP) and its leaders, alleging that they failed to uphold the principles of (socialist leader) Dr Ram Manohar Lohia.

He reminded that Dr Lohia had once said, "If you want to understand India, study the traditions of Ram, Krishna and Shiva. Those who claim to follow the ideals of Lohia never truly understood his words."

Addressing the dispute over religious sites in Sambhal, the chief minister pointed out that the Puranas mention Sambhal as the birthplace of Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Lord Shri Hari Vishnu.

He condemned attempts to encroach religious sites by damaging them, stating, "Our government took decisive action based on the court's order and sent a clear message to the rioters."

Highlighting the development of Ayodhya, he said, "We have transformed Ayodhya into a centre of development and heritage. Those who once opposed Ayodhya's progress have no moral authority to visit the city now."

On religious conversion and "ghar wapsi", he said, "If someone genuinely wishes to return to their original faith from the heart, they should be welcomed. This reflects a conscious respect for religion and tradition."

Discussing national and Hindu unity, Adityanath emphasised that Sanatan Dharma has always held the highest position, asserting that Hindu unity and national unity go hand in hand.

"History bears witness that division has always led to weakness, unity has made us invincible. That is why I have always maintained

'Batenge to katenge, ek rahenge to nek rahenge.' (Divided we fall, united we thrive)," he said.

Criticising the opposition, Yogi accused certain groups of attempting to divide the society along caste and religious lines, calling them forces conspiring to weaken the nation. He asserted that the people of the country have grown more aware and are no longer susceptible to such divisive tactics.

He emphasised the profound significance of the Maha Kumbh during the event and explained that after the 'Devasura Sangram' (the battle between gods and demons), drops of nectar fell at four sacred locations — Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik.

The Maha Kumbh at these sites has served as a platform for shaping India's knowledge, ideology and social direction throughout history, he said.

The Maha Kumbh is more than just a religious gathering and it symbolises India's spiritual heritage and national unity, he added.

Adityanath highlighted that during the Maha Kumbh, sages from across India will gather to reflect on the social and political conditions of their times, making the event not just a reverence for tradition but also essential for preserving cultural wisdom for future generations.

He lauded the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said, "Organising Maha Kumbh represents a remarkable confluence

of India's heritage and development." Reflecting on the 2019 Prayagraj Kumbh, he highlighted how modern technology, efficient management and cultural traditions were seamlessly integrated.

"We will strive to achieve the same harmony in the upcoming Maha Kumbh," he assured.

He emphasised that the UP government, in collaboration with the Centre, has taken numerous measures to ensure that the Maha Kumbh is both grand and meticulously organised.

"This event is drawing not just the citizens of India but also people from around the globe," he said, describing Maha Kumbh as a golden opportunity to showcase the country's rich cultural heritage on an international stage.

"This event transcends caste, creed and gender barriers. Maha Kumbh will serve as a powerful reflection of the progress India has made over the past decade under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It stands as a living testament to India's prosperity, rich heritage and spiritual tradition," Adityanath said.

He said certain individuals, "who thrive on foreign leftovers", are trying to tarnish the nation's image and accused them of exploiting caste divisions for political gains. He, however, affirmed that the people of India have become more aware and will not fall prey to such divisive tactics. (PTI)

# Bengal leader in all spheres, efforts to undermine that status won't succeed: Mamata



**KOLKATA, Jan 8:** Asserting that West Bengal is a leader in every sphere - from education to culture and sports, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said the people of the state know how to counter any threat to undermine that pre-eminent position and heritage.

She also said that all members of Bengal's Santosh Trophy squad, which won the championship this year again, will be recruited into the state police force in the junior official rank under a special quota.

Speaking at the 'Students Week' programme here, she named social reformer Rammohan Roy and polymath Iswarchandra Vidyasagar to buttress her point that Bengal has shown the path in eradicating social evils like practice of 'Sati' and exploitation of widows, while ushering female education.

Banerjee also underscored how Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam had spread the message of brotherhood, patriotism, amity and love for the motherland through their poems and songs to "unite people and not divide them."

"Now if someone threatens to undermine that spirit, that glorious heritage of the state, counter that, combat that," she said without elaborating.

Banerjee said that sons and daughters of Bengal are working in every leading institute and organisation of the world and the country, reflecting the state's distinguished position in the field of education.

"Besides (Economist) Amartya Sen and (historian) Sugata Bose, both associated with Harvard University, so many Bengali academicians are spread worldwide, making the country India their home state proud with their achievements and contributions," she said.

Addressing the hundreds of students present at the venue, the chief minister asked them to study in the state's "top class higher educational institutions" offering a wide array of courses and realise their dreams.

# Some members of BJP's 'Pandit Prakashthi' join AAP's 'Sanatana Sewa Samiti', claims Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Monday claimed that some members of the BJP's 'Pandit Prakashthi' (Priest Cell) joined his party's 'Sanatana Sewa Samiti' ahead of Delhi assembly elections. Delhi goes to polls on February 5 and votes will be counted on February 8.

In a press conference, Kejriwal said those who quit the BJP's Pandit Prakashthi to join AAP include Vijay Sharma, Jitendra Sharma, Brijesh Sharma, Manish Gupta, Dushyant Sharma and Udaykant Jha among others. Party leaders who were present on the occasion included Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj. On Monday, the AAP chief had announced that his party would launch a 'Pujari Granthi Saman Yojana' if it gets re-elected in Delhi. He promised a monthly allowance of ₹ 18,000 for Hindu temple priests and granthis of gurdwaras.

After welcoming the new members, the former Delhi chief minister said, "I am happy that we started the education and health revolution and now we are starting this revolution for our priests." (PTI)

# 'Assault on state rights', CPI(M) flags UGC draft regulations on appointing VCs; seeks withdrawal

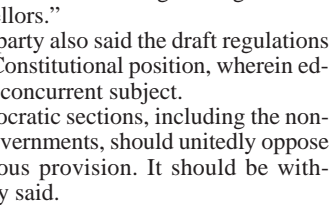
**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Wednesday said the University Grants Commission's draft regulations 2025 contains a provision which is a "direct assault" on state rights on the question of selecting vice-chancellors (VCs) for state-run universities, and demanded that it should be withdrawn.

The new guidelines give the governor, who is also the chancellor of state universities, the power to appoint a committee to select the vice-chancellor, the CPI(M) Politburo said in a statement, claiming that it is happening in the backdrop of governors "arbitrarily" appointing VCs in some "opposition-ruled states".

"The draft UGC regulations 2025 contains a provision which is a direct assault on the rights of states on the question of selecting vice-chancellors in state-run universities," the statement said. "The guidelines give the governor-cum-chancellor the power to appoint a three-member selection committee in which the chancellor's nominee will also be the chairperson. This is happening in the backdrop of governors acting arbitrarily in appointing vice-chancellors in some opposition-ruled states," the CPI(M) said.

Claiming that the state government will have no say as to who will be appointed in the selection committee, the CPI(M) said, "At one stroke, the Centre through these guidelines can appoint vice-chancellors of its choice in all

# Ganga dredging in Prayagraj 'environmental crime', says SP chief Akhilesh



**LUCKNOW, Jan 8:** Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday termed the Ganga's dredging in Prayagraj an "environmental crime" to grant contracts to a select group of people to earn money through corruption.

The Kannauj MP shared on X a news clip of dredging in the Ganga for the Maha Kumbh.

"History has been a witness that rivers create their own paths. This natural flow is a self-made path for the continuity of rivers. Accepting this geographical truth, tampering with the flow of rivers is an environmental crime," he said in the post accompanying the clip.

"The purpose of installing dredgers in the Ganga during the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh is only to give contracts to their own people and earn money from them through corruption," he added, without taking any names.

Where the rivers will meet should be left to nature, doing arbitrary things and forcibly changing the flow is both inappropriate and undesirable, he also said.

"Doing so will have a bad effect on the biology of the aquatic life and natural ecological balance of the Ganga," he added.

The Maha Kumbh will begin on January 13 and conclude on February 26. (PTI)

# Showdown between AAP, BJP over 'Sheesh Mahal' as drama unfolded outside Civil Lines bungalow

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** A high drama unfolded Wednesday outside the 6, Flagstaff Road bungalow, once occupied by former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and dubbed a 'Sheesh Mahal' by the BJP, as AAP leaders attempted to enter it but were stopped by the police.

The party workers later tried to reach the Prime Minister's official residence on Lok Kalyan Marg, but were stopped by police again, following which they staged a "dharna".

In its turn, the BJP also took media to the AB 17 Mathura Road bungalow allotted to Chief Minister Atishi to show that she already had a government residence and sought to know why she was asking for a separate bungalow.

AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj staged a sit-in outside the Flagstaff bungalow after they were not invited to enter it, which they had invited the media to tour with them in a bid to counter

the BJP's "Sheesh Mahal" jibes.

Police set up barricades and deployed personnel in front of the bungalow, preventing the AAP leaders from entering the premises.

They then moved to the PM's house, and when stopped, staged a sit-in near the Tughlak Road Police Station. The party leaders accused the BJP-led central government of running away from the challenged inspection of the PM residence, which they alleged had been renovated at an inordinate cost.

"BJP's lie has been exposed before the entire nation today. They claimed that there is a mini bar, a swimming pool, and a commodore made of gold at the former Chief Minister's residence. However, they did not allow us to enter and show the truth to the public."

"Now, they are also preventing us from revealing the reality of the Prime Minister's residence, which has been built at a cost of 2,700 crore," Sanjay Singh said at the protest near the PM's residence. (PTI)

# Cong promises ₹ 25 lakh health cover under 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana'

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The Congress on Wednesday promised a "Jeevan Raksha Yojana" for free health insurance of up to ₹ 25 lakh if voted to power in Delhi.

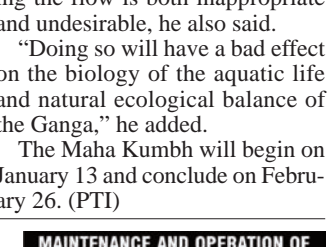
Senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot said the proposed scheme would be a game-changer.

"The chances of the Congress forming the government in Delhi are increasing. I believe this is also necessary for the country," he said.

Gehlot also highlighted that the proposed scheme reflected the party's commitment to addressing Delhi residents' healthcare needs.

The party's campaign slogan "Hogi Har Zarurat Puri, Congress Hai Zaroori" was prominently displayed during the announcement, highlighting the Congress's "promise

# India conveys readiness to Maldives to support its capability enhancement for defence preparedness



**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** India on Wednesday conveyed to the Maldives its readiness to support the island nation in boosting its defence preparedness as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh hosted his Maldivian counterpart Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon for wide-ranging talks focusing on maritime security cooperation.

In their meeting, the two defence ministers reasserted their firm commitment to work closely in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership, according

# India conveys readiness to Maldives to support its capability enhancement for defence preparedness

to an Indian readout.

Maumoon is on a three-day visit to India, nearly eight months after New Delhi completed pulling out its military personnel from the Maldives following a demand by its pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu.

The overall episode had significantly frayed the ties between the two nations.

The defence ministry said the two ministers comprehensively reviewed various aspects of bilateral defence and security cooperation.

"During the talks, both sides reasserted the firm commitment to

work closely in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership," it said.

Singh "reaffirmed" India's readiness to support the Maldives in capability enhancement for defence preparedness, including provisioning of defence platforms and assets to augment its capacities, as per its national priorities and in line with New Delhi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and the vision of SAGAR, the ministry said.

SAGAR stands for Security And Growth for All in the Region. (PTI)

of ensuring essential services for all.

Gehlot said the proposed scheme aimed at providing comprehensive health coverage to families, covering medical expenses for critical illnesses, hospitalisations, and treatments.

"Congress is the party which has kept this country united till date. We believe that the Congress takes along all the castes and religions," he stated.

This health scheme was very successful in Rajasthan and it will be successful in Delhi also. This is a universal scheme which will be for all the people of Delhi, he said.

I believe that you can win elections by polarisation, but cannot run the country or develop it. Bringing back Congress in Delhi is very important. (PTI)

**RAILWAY NOTICE**

No: LD/IMG/DAR/MAJOR/31 Dated: 07-01-2025  
Major memorandum No. LD/IMG/DAR/MAJOR/31 Dated: 04-07-2025 was issued against Smt. Rajmoni Devi, Tech-I/DSL/LMG (M) under-SSE/DSL/Lumding due to unauthorizedly absenting from duty from 03-11-2023 to till date. CO copy SF-5 could not handed over to CO due to absenting till date.

Accordingly undersigned has nominated Sri Dibakar Pator, CMS/DSL/Lumding as inquiry officer to inquire the case and IO was fixed several inquiry dated on 04-11-2024, 14-11-2024, 26-11-2024, 10-12-2024 & 28-12-2024 and letter sent CO's residential home address Smt Rajmoni Devi, Tech-I/DSL/LMG (M) Railway Quarter No. 291 Type-I at Brick Field Colony PO-Lumding, Dist-Hojai, State-Assam, Pin-782447 (as per service book record) through registered post but same were returned back to inquiry officer with postal remarks, "address left RTS". So, it is directed to Smt. Rajmoni Devi to attend on 23-01-2025 at 11.00 hrs. in the SSE/DSL/LMG office at DEMU care Centre Lumding without fail. Otherwise ex-Parte decision will be taken against her.

Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical), Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
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# Court's opinion vs legislative power: SC on CEC, election commissioners selection

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** It will be court's opinion versus the legislative power to enact law, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said as it posted the pleas challenging the appointment of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners under the 2023 law on February 4.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and Ujjal Bhuyan was informed by advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing an NGO, the incumbent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar was set to superannuate on February 18, and a new CEC would be appointed under the new law, if the court didn't intervene.

Bhushan said the top court in its March 2, 2023 verdict set up a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the CJI to appoint the CEC and election commissioners (EC).

"However, under the new law the selection committee will comprise the Prime Minister, a union cabinet minister, the Leader of Opposition



or the leader of the largest opposition party in Lok Sabha. They have removed CJI from the selection committee," submitted Bhushan.

While posting the hearing on February 4, the bench said it would see whose views had supremacy.

"It will be the opinion of the court under Article 141 versus legislative power to enact law," it underscored.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for one of the

petitioners, said the government did not remove the basis of the March 2, 2023 judgement, and enacted a new law.

Bhushan said the government couldn't control the appointment of election commissioners as it would be a threat to democracy.

"We are of the view that the government cannot remove the CJI from the selection panel which was directed to be formed by the Supreme Court on March 2, 2023,"

he said. Sankaranarayanan said the only way the Centre could have got around the judgement was by amending the Constitution and not enacting a law.

The bench asked Bhushan and Sankaranarayanan to remind the judges on February 3 for the matter to be taken up the following day.

On March 15, 2024, the top court refused to stay the appointments of new ECs under a 2023 law which excluded the CJI from the selection panel and deferred the hearing on a batch of pleas challenging the appointments.

The top court told the petitioners the March 2, 2023 verdict directed for the three-member panel comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the CJI to operate till Parliament enacted a law.

Bhushan, who appeared for the petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), challenged the CJI's exclusion and contended the Election Commission should be insulated from "political" and "executive interference" for maintain-

ing a healthy democracy.

ADR's plea alleged the verdict was overruled by the Centre without removing its basis and the composition of the selection committee under the new law which amounted to excessive interference of the executive in the appointments and was detrimental to the independence of the poll panel.

Former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Sandhu were recommended to be appointed as ECs in 2024 by a selection panel chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the new law.

The NGO challenged the validity of Section 7 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, which excluded the CJI.

The apex court's March 2, 2023 verdict held leaving the appointment of the ECs and CEC in the hands of the executive would be detrimental to the health of the country's democracy and the holding of free and fair elections, it said. (PTI)

## BSF using both ultra-modern, conventional methods to guard border with B'desh: Official



**PETRAPOLE (WB), Jan 8:** Guarding the challenging international borders between India and Bangladesh, the Border Security Force (BSF) has adopted mechanisms that converge conventional methods and ultra-modern technologies to prevent smuggling and human trafficking.

A senior official said that the BSF's South Bengal Frontier, which guards 913 km length of the international border between the two neighbours, extensively uses electronic surveillance in cohesion with conventional methods like sentry posts and foot patrolling.

Noting that nearly half the 913 km long border guarded by the South Bengal Frontier is yet to be fenced, he said that several methods have been adopted by the force to stop smuggling and human trafficking along the difficult terrain and riverine sections.

"Pan, Tilt, and Zoom" (PTZ) cameras apart from fixed ones are in place in extensive numbers to keep an eye on every movement where fencing is yet to be completed, the senior BSF official said.

The cameras, equipped with night vision facilities, have sensors to detect and pinpoint any human movement along the borders. The information is passed on to the sentries from the control rooms, he told visiting reporters at Petrapole in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, around 110 from Kolkata.

Out of the 32 km-long border in one battalion command area of the BSF near the Petrapole land customs station, only 11 km are fenced while the rest area is guarded in a seamless convergence of conventional and ultra-modern technologies, he said.

"Manpower, technology and resources are used in a proper manner to prevent smuggling and human trafficking," he said.

The official said that the land ac-

quisition process is on for putting up smart fencing in the unfenced area and some land along the border has been handed over to the force for the purpose by the state administration according to BSF's requirement.

Conditions become more challenging during the monsoons as the Betna river flowing along the border and other water bodies in this area overflow owing to heavy rain, he said.

"The BSF jawans have themselves put up barbed wire along the border where smart fencing is yet to be put up," the official said.

These are, however, aided by top-end gadgets including trip layer flares which get activated when any intruder touches the wires, helping the force to easily locate movement in the area in the darkness of night.

"The smugglers and traffickers will continue to make efforts, but we are prepared to meet the challenges," the BSF official said.

The official said that gaps in sentry monitoring areas are also covered using electronic surveillance, including 360-degree rotating cameras and sensors which start blowing when anyone touches the camouflaging placed around these gadgets.

"Every movement is monitored along the border at the control rooms and directions are given from there to the concerned sentries for necessary steps," he said.

The official said that the BSF personnel are equipped with pump action guns (PAG), which are non-lethal weapons, on sentry duty in the area.

At places where villages are located close to the border, netting is also used to cover the smart fences, which are 20 feet high at places, to prevent anyone from throwing some articles from across the border intended to be received by recipients waiting on the other side. (PTI)

## Every citizen of this country akin to a soldier: IAF chief

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh on Wednesday said that every citizen of India is akin to a soldier and that while serving the country in uniform has a different charm, one can also serve the nation even without donning military colours.

In his address at the ongoing Republic Day National Cadet Corps (NCC) Camp at Delhi Cantonment, he underlined the ethos of the NCC, noting that this is the place where people from different backgrounds "become one," embodying the essence of India.

He said that the young minds of India, trained at the NCC and the Republic Day camp, are being prepared for nation-building, as they are the future of India who will later take up various professions.

"I have heard many cadets express a desire to join the armed forces - the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It's wonderful that you want to, as serving the nation in uniform has a distinct charm. But to serve the nation, one may not necessarily need to wear a uniform. This is something we must remember," the IAF chief said.

He further said that service to the nation is not confined to those in uniform, nor is patriotism limited to them, rather "it resides in everyone, every citizen of this country," he added.

He recounted a visit to a camp to emphasise his point. "Somebody there said - 'Every soldier is a citizen in uniform, and every citizen is a soldier out of uniform'. I think that is the way... Each and every citizen of this country is a soldier, and should look after the country, to ensure its safety and security..."

## Speedy trial run on 180-degree gradient added new chapter in Indian Railway, says CRS



**BANIHAL/JAMMU, Jan 8:** A new chapter was written in the Indian Railways' history with a successful rising grade speed trial in the challenging geography from Jammu and Kashmir's Katra to Banihal along the USBRL project, a top official said on Wednesday.

The remarks by the Northern Circle's Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) Dinesh Chand Deshwal offers a positive indication for an early start to direct rail services between Kashmir and rest of the country.

However, he said they would analyse the data collected after completion of the two-day statutory inspection later in the day before the Centre might take a decision to start the much-awaited service.

Talking to reporters on reaching Banihal after the successful high-speed trial run from Katra station, Deshwal said his team would return to Katra and all the collected data would be analysed before a decision was taken on the start of direct train services to Kashmir.

"The trial run at 110 kilometres per hour on the 180-degree rising grade in such a challenging geography from Katra to Banihal has written a new chapter in the history of the Railways. The trial run was smooth and filled with a sense of fulfilment and the credit for it goes

to our engineers who have done such a great work," the CRS said.

The trial train left Katra station at 10:30 am and reached Banihal station within one-and-a-half hours. The train left for Katra on its return journey at 2 pm and is expected to reach its destination by 3:30 pm.

This is the final speed trial run on the trek.

Deshwal, who reached Katra on a two-day statutory inspection of the newly completed railway line, said the Centre would take the final decision on the start of services between Kashmir and the rest of the country. "I am not in a position to talk about it (start of services). The statutory inspection will be completed by this evening and all the gathered data analysed in accordance with guidelines of the Northern Railway," he said.

The CRS said the inspection and the trial runs on the trek had been satisfactory so far.

"Our infrastructure is outstanding and very soon a fair decision will be taken based on our report," he added.

Last month, Rail Minister Ashwini Vaishnav announced the completion of the Reasi-Katra section, an important development for connecting Kashmir with the rest of the country after nearly three decades of work. (PTI)

## Does a woman with intellectual disability have no right to become mother: Bombay HC

**MUMBAI, Jan 8:** The Bombay High Court on Wednesday questioned whether a woman with intellectual disability has no right to become a mother.

A division bench of Justices R V Ghuge and Rajesh Patil was hearing a petition filed by a 27-year-old woman's father, seeking permission for medical termination of her 21-week pregnancy on the ground that she was of a mentally unsound mind and unmarried.

The man in his plea submitted that his daughter wanted to continue the pregnancy.

The bench had last week directed that the woman be examined by a medical board at the state-run JJ Hospital in Mumbai.

As per the report submitted by the medical board on Wednesday, the woman is not mentally unsound or ill, but was diagnosed with borderline intellectual disability with an IQ of 75 per cent.

The bench noted that the woman's parents had not made her go through any psychological counselling or treatment, but only kept her on medication since 2011.

The medical board's report said

there were no abnormalities or anomalies in the foetus and the woman was medically fit for continuation of the pregnancy.

The report, however, also said that termination of the pregnancy could be done.

Additional government pleader Prachi Tatke submitted to the court that consent of the pregnant woman is of paramount importance in such matters.

The bench took note of the fact that the medical board report has clearly stated the woman is not mentally disabled or of an unsound mind.

"The observation (in the report) is that she has below average intelligence. Nobody can be super intelligent. We are all human beings and everybody has different levels of intelligence," the court said.

"Just because she has below average intelligence, does she have no right to be a mother? If we say that persons with below average intelligence do not have the right to be parents, it would be against the law," the HC said.

As per provisions of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, a

## Jal Shakti minister reviews Swachh Bharat progress in Karnataka, Haryana

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil on Tuesday conducted comprehensive review meetings of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G) for Karnataka and Haryana, charting the way forward for rural sanitation and waste management.

The review meetings assessed the progress made by the two states in the 2024-25 financial year.

In his address, Patil lauded the states for their progress in achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus Model Village status, noting that 37 per cent of Haryana's villages and 18 per cent of Karnataka's villages had been declared ODF-Plus Model.

However, he emphasised the need to address the remaining gaps.

"Both Haryana and Karnataka must strive to become regional leaders in achieving the Swachh Bharat Mission goals. Sustaining these achievements and driving targeted interventions will ensure a cleaner and healthier environment for rural communities," Patil said.

Of Haryana's 6,619 villages, 97 per cent (6,419) have been declared ODF-Plus, with 2,500 villages achieving the ODF-Plus Model status. Of these, 1,855 villages have also been verified.

The state has achieved 76 per cent Greywater Management (GWM) coverage in its villages and implemented solid waste management in 65 per cent of villages.

Additionally, Haryana has reported 100 per cent access to and usage of toilets, according to an official statement issued by the ministry.

Efforts are on to ensure the functionality of the Solid Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) assets and to conduct ground truthing to verify progress.

At the meeting, Patil urged Haryana to intensify its efforts to address gaps in the waste management systems.

Karnataka has also made notable advancements, declaring 4,873 villages as ODF-Plus Model, with 99.3 per cent of its villages managing solid waste effectively.

Karnataka has linked 1,905 villages to Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) systems. With a target of achieving ODF-Plus Model status for all 26,484 villages by March 2025, the state is on track to make significant progress, the statement said.

Acknowledging Karnataka's efforts, Patil encouraged the state to sustain its momentum by expanding FSM coverage and enhancing greywater and plastic waste management. (PTI)

## Railways spent 76% of its budgetary outlay within first nine months: Ministry

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The Railways has spent 76 percent of its budgetary outlay within the first nine months of the current fiscal, the ministry said in a press statement.

"According to a latest expenditure report of Indian Railways till January 5, 2025, heavy investment is made in capacity augmentation, a reality aiming to make rail travel a world class experience in India," it added.

According to the Railway Ministry, the total capex for railways in the Budget Estimate 2024-25 is ₹ 2,65,200 crore with Gross Budgetary Support of ₹ 2,52,200 crores. Out of it, ₹ 1,92,446 crores have already been spent.

"For rolling stock, the budgetary provision was for ₹ 50,903 crores. Out of it, ₹ 40,367 crores were spent by 5th January, which is 79 per cent of the budget, allotted for rolling stock," it said. "In safety-related works, out of budgetary allocation of ₹ 34,412 crore, the amount spent is ₹ 28,281, which is 82 percent of the allocated amount," the ministry added.

The press note stated that the government has prioritised transforming Railways into a world class entity, which ferries on an average "2.3 crore Indians" daily at an affordable cost.

It said the fruit of the consistent Capital Expenditure (Capex) for the last one decade are visible in the form of 136 Vande Bharat trains, about 97 percent electrification of broad gauge, laying of new lines, gauge conversion, doubling



of tracks, traffic facilities work, investment in PSUs and metropolitan transport.

It also mentioned the ongoing safety and speed trial of Vande Bharat sleeper trains and said rail commuters are all set to experience world class travel very soon for long distance journeys too. "This will revolutionise the overall travel experience. This transformation of Indian Railways would not have been possible without the visionary foresight of Viksit Bharat & its prompt execution by spending in the modernization projects in a mission mode by Indian Railways," the press note said.

It added, "Despite challenges like India being the most populous nation with its vast geographical, cultural & linguistic diversity, Indian Railways is implementing a vision of transformative governance to build a new, modern & connected India. (PTI)

## ISRO has major missions ahead, says newly appointed chairman

'In Chandrayaan 4, the objective is to land there and come back collecting samples'

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Jan 8:** Eminent rocket scientist and the newly appointed chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) V Narayanan on Wednesday said that the space agency is going through a successful phase and Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan are among the prominent missions ahead.

Expressing happiness about his new stint as the Secretary, Department of Space and as the chairman of the ISRO, Narayanan said he considers it as a great luck to be part of such a great organisation led by great leaders.

"It is such a great organisation. Several great leaders have led it (in the past). I consider it as a great luck to be part of it," he told reporters here.

While replying to a question, Narayanan said the information about his new appointment was first passed on to him by the Prime



Minister's Office (PMO).

"The PM is deciding everything. The PMO has contacted. The current chairman S Somanath sir also called and said about the new appointment," he said.

When asked about the upcoming projects of ISRO, the newly

appointed Chairman said it is the time when the space agency is undertaking significant missions.

"As everyone knows, it is the time when the ISRO is going through a successful phase," he said.

While giving details about the

upcoming projects, Narayanan said the ISRO launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on December 30 and the docking experiment of the SpaDeX satellites would be held on January 9.

Stating that Gaganyaan is another major programme before the ISRO, he said the works related to the launching of the uncrewed module or uncrewed rocket as part of it are successfully progressing.

He said works are progressing at Sriharikota to send the navigation satellite, NVS 02, using a GSLV later this month.

The works to send a commercial satellite of the United States using ISRO's Mark III vehicle and the rocket assembly as part of Gaganyaan (G 1) are also progressing there (Sriharikota), he further said.

While talking about the Bengaluru-headquartered agency's fu-

ture projects, Narayanan said as everybody knows, India has become the first country to land in the south pole of the moon through the Chandrayaan 3 mission.

"In Chandrayaan 4, the objective is to land there and come back collecting samples. Works in this regard have already started," he explained. He also mentioned about the setting up of India's own space station.

"The Prime Minister has given approval for building a space station for us... The space station will have five modules and an approval has been granted to launch the first among them during (the year) 2028," the new Chairman added.

According to an official order, V Narayanan was on Tuesday appointed Secretary, Department of Space, succeeding S Somanath, who will complete his tenure next week. (PTI)



## If I rest, I'll get rusty: Mohanlal on career of over 40 years and turning director with 'Barroz'

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Working non-stop is not a new thing, says Malayalam superstar Mohanlal, who once completed 36 films in a year and remains driven by his passion for storytelling. In a career spanning more than 45 years, Mohanlal has starred in over 360 films across different industries. He started his

stint in movies with the role of an antagonist in Fazil's "Manjil Virinja Pookkal" (1980) and then featured in critically acclaimed movies like "Manichitrathazhu", "Vanaprastham", "Kireedam", "Bharatham", "Iruvar", and "Drishyam". "My passion towards my profession is a fuel for me. You should love your profession. So every day is a beautiful day for me. And I have had the chance of working with great actors and directors. I have evolved from their blessing. I am dedicated to my profession. I am a performer, and that creativity is a fuel for my journey," the actor told PTI.

"This is my 47th year in films... Normally, I'll finish one film and do the other film. But nowadays, sometimes I have to reschedule my assignments, but I can still do it. I have done 36 films in one year. So it's not a new thing for me... If I rest, I'll get rusty," he added.

The 64-year-old actor recently made his directorial debut with "Barroz", a pan-India fantasy film in which he also plays the lead role.

The decision to become a director was not a planned one, said Mohanlal, who thought he should give something back to his fans for their love and support throughout his career.

"There is no rule that you have to direct a film. This is something that just happened. When I heard the story, I thought this is something very different. I said, 'Okay, we'll produce it, but who will direct the film?'"

"Then I thought that the past four decades I have had the honour of being part of the Indian cinema, telling stories that have touched people's lives in different ways. I have to give them back some kind of gift. This is from my heart. I'm giving something back to them," he said.

Shot in 3D, "Barroz" is based on Jijo Punnoose's novel "Barroz: Guardian of D'Gama's Treasure". It was released in theatres last month.

Mohanlal takes on the titular role of Barroz, a loyal servant who has been guarding Vasco da Gama's treasure for the past 400 years. His only aim is to hand over the cellar keys to the heir of Da Gama and be free from his duties.

The idea behind the project was to create something that would not only spark the imag-

ination of children but also allow adults to revisit their old innocence and sense of wonder as kids.

"If you ask me if I will direct another film after 'Barroz', then I don't have an answer right now," he added.

Asked if his experience of working with master directors like Fazil, Shaji M Karun, Mani Ratnam, or Jeethu Joseph came in handy while making "Barroz", the actor said the film was an entirely different project because it was shot in 3D.

"You cannot take their way of filmmaking in this film... Even the 3D comes with unique challenges that differ from normal traditional 2D filmmaking, like camera movement, shot division, and editing... We needed special cameras, we had to use special colours, costumes... Everything was different.

"I haven't taken any kind of inspiration from any directors even shot-wise. This is a creativity of my own," he added.

With films like Fahadh Faasil-starrer "Aavesham", "Manjummel Boys" by Chidambaram, and Blessy's "The Goat Life", headlined by Prithivraj Sukumaran, turning out to be major money spinners, Mohanlal said it is a welcome change for the Malayalam industry.

"Ours is a small industry, so we are catering only to Keralites. But now things have changed. Our film industry has grown, and we have a lot of pan-India actors in our films. We also have to compete with other film industries. Luckily, we have a lot of stories, and new directors have come, new thought processes have come," he said. (PTI)

## We don't have tons of such triumphant movies for Latino families: Jennifer Lopez on 'Unstoppable'

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Behind a powerful person, there is an equally powerful individual, believes Hollywood star Jennifer Lopez, who, as a Latina, is honoured to bring one such story to the screen with biographical sports drama "Unstoppable".

The upcoming film is the inspiring, true story of American wrestler Anthony Robles (Jharrel Jerome), who was born with one leg but whose indomitable spirit empowered him to defy the odds and pursue his dreams of becoming a national champion. It will premiere on Prime Video in India on January 16.

The actor-singer plays Anthony's devoted and fierce mother Judy in the film. She said there aren't many stories that depict a well-rounded portrayal of a Latino family and that's why being part of "Unstoppable" was "exciting".

"When I read the script, I just found it to be such an inspirational story. It was so triumphant. We don't have tons of those movies for Latino families, so I wanted to do that. It's always like this, struggling and everything. And, even though there was struggle here, there was such a triumph at the end," the actor told PTI in a video interview.

When Lopez met the real-life Judy and Anthony, she thought this story "deserves to be told".

"He really is an extraordinary human being but there's always somebody behind the very powerful person and that was an equally powerful person and that was his mom, Judy. It was a real honour for me to be able to do this and be able to be part of telling it," she added.

Judy Robles, who was also part of the interview, "didn't believe" that Lopez was going to portray her on screen.

"She played me perfectly. She was absolutely amazing. She did me better than I could do myself. There were a lot of moments where she kept asking me, 'Is this okay? Is this what you would do?' She was true to being me, which I really appreciated and valued," she said. (PTI)



## Yash shares first glimpse of 'Toxic' on birthday



**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Kannada cinema star Yash of "KGF" fame on Wednesday unveiled the first-look video of his upcoming film "Toxic: A Fairytale for

Grownups" on the occasion of his 39th birthday.

"Toxic" is directed by Geetu Mohandas, known for "Moothon" and "Liar's Dice". It

is jointly produced by KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations.

The Kannada movie marks Yash's first project since the release of the "KGF: Chapter 2" (2022) in the superhit franchise.

The actor shared the "Toxic: Birthday Peek" on his official X page.

"UNLEASHED!!!" he wrote alongside the link to the video.

In the 59-second clip, a cigar-smoking Yash is seen making his way into a posh nightclub called 'Paraiso', wearing a white suit and fedora.

Mohandas, who co-wrote the film with Yash, praised the actor for his "mysterious and meticulous" process.

"When our two worlds of thought collided, the result is neither compromise nor chaos—it's the transformation that happens when artistic vision meets the precision of commercial storytelling transcending borders, languages, and cultural confines..."

"These words are not just spoken from a director about her actor and not just for his ardent admirers, but for anyone seeking to understand his unwavering passion for cinema and boundless spirit of creativity. Happy birthday to our Monster mind!" the director said in a statement.

Yash is also credited as a producer on the film alongside Venkat K Narayana.

The makers are yet to announce the release date of "Toxic". (PTI)

## Don't like words like legacy and milestone: Hrithik Roshan on 25 years in Bollywood

**MUMBAI, Jan 8:** Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan says he is still as shy and anxious as he was 25 years ago when he debuted as a leading man in Hindi movies with the blockbuster "Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai".

Directed by his filmmaker father Rakesh Roshan, the 2000 romantic-drama also starred Ameesha Patel in her acting debut. It is set to re-release in theatres on Friday, coinciding with Hrithik's 51st birthday.

Talking to the media during a meet-and-greet event on Tuesday evening, the actor said he doesn't like to use words like "legacy" and "milestone" to describe his silver jubilee moment in cinema.

"It's been 25 years. I don't like words like legacy, and milestone, and I'm not here to say, '25 years yeah'. I'm not doing that," Hrithik said.

"I remember when 'Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai' was released I was so shy and anxious that I didn't do a single interview. I didn't step out of my house to do anything; I just skipped the entire promotional event. 25 years have passed and unfortunately, that side of me has not changed. I'm still as shy, and just as anxious as always," he added.

Post his debut, Hrithik delivered several commercially successful and award-winning movies such as "Mission Kashmir", "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham", "Dhoom 2", "Jodha Akbar", "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara", "Super 30", "War" and "Vikram Vedha". (PTI)

## Seagram's Royal Stag partners with Netflix's Squid Game season 2 for an iconic collaboration

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Seagram's Royal Stag has collaborated with Netflix's record-breaking series 'Squid Game' for its second season. The collaboration seamlessly integrates Royal Stag's 'Live It Large' philosophy, offering audience a larger-than-life experience to be part of the global cultural phenomenon that has captivated millions worldwide. K-dramas have high affinity with the younger generation. Hence, this association allows the brand to play up on culturally relevant youth passion point, dialing up relevance & aspiration.

Speaking on the collaboration, Joydeep Basuroy, General Manager - Marketing at Pernod Ricard India shared,

"Royal Stag's association with Netflix's Squid Game allows the brand to tap into the young generation's craze for K-culture, driving up emotional connect & the brand's youth culture quotient. Royal Stag brand has always stood for those who dream large and lead their life with passion & purpose, similar to the show's premise. This partnership with 'Squid Game' season 2 allows us to offer a live-it-large experience & tangible social currency to our audience, Generation Large."

The brand is leveraging the association on various digital platforms by highlighting distinctive 'Squid Game' elements, including the mysterious masked guards and the show's signature sym-

bols. Audience can also get a chance to win exciting Royal Stag X Squid Game giveaways by visiting [www.royalstagfan.com](http://www.royalstagfan.com).

The brand's campaign #PlayItLarge was trending on Twitter on 28th Dec'24 post the show's premier.

Three years after winning Squid Game, Player 456 remains determined to find the people behind the game and put an end to their vicious sport. Using this fortune to fund his search, Gi-hun starts with the most obvious of places: look for the man in a sharp suit playing ddakji in the subway.

But when his efforts finally yield results, the path toward taking down the organization proves to be deadlier than he

imagined: to end the game, he needs to re-enter it. Director Hwang Dong-hyuk, who made history at the 74th Primetime Emmys® becoming the first Asian to win Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series, once again helms the series as director, writer, and producer.

Lee Jung-jae, Lee Byung-hun, Wi Ha-jun, and Gong Yoo reprise their roles from Season 1 with an impeccable list of new cast members including Yim Si-wan, Kang Ha-neul, Park Gyu-young, Lee Jin-uk, Park Sung-hoon, Yang Dong-geun, Kang Aesim, Lee David, Choi Seung-hyun, Roh Jae-won, Jo Yu-ri, and Won Ji-an rounding out the ensemble of colorful characters in the new season.



# Virat Kohli is always super motivated: Faf du Plessis



**CAPE TOWN, Jan 8:** Virat Kohli will be "super motivated" to put a struggling phase behind him and the premier India batter is capable of returning to his run-making ways, said former South African captain Faf du Plessis here on Wednesday.

Kohli had a torrid time in Australia during the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy, amassing a mere 190 runs at an average of 23.75 across five Tests despite starting off with an unbeaten hundred in the first Test at Perth.

Du Plessis backed Kohli, his one-time teammate at Royal Challengers Bangalore, to come back stronger from the struggles, and said retirement is a "very personal" choice.

"That is very, very personal. No one can speak to you about when that time is (up) as a player, you'll know," du Plessis told PTI on the sidelines of the SA20 Season 3's Captain's Day.

"I know someone like him is super super motivated, he's gone through it all before, so he knows exactly what to do," said Du Plessis.

The 40-year-old then went back to the day when he felt his time

was up as a Test cricketer.

"It is different for every player. Every player needs to answer that question. I remember when that time was for me," he said.

"I just knew that certainly from the Test cricket perspective for me. I didn't have that same hunger and drive anymore and I felt that that stage certainly for me was a good time to let new guys come in and also step into the T20 world.

"I wanted to do that at the stage where I still felt like I was on top of my game," he added.

Du Plessis was not pleased with ICC reportedly exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system.

"No, I think we need the game to be healthy," Du Plessis said.

"We saw over the last few years the value that was put on Test cricket by Australia, England and India making sure that there were 4-5 Test series.

"When you look at the other teams, there are two Test matches here and there and playing six Test matches a season. I do not think that is healthy for the game," he added.

"As long as we can look at Test cricket as (being) important, you just look at all the Test matches

that took place over the last few weeks, some incredible matches have been played," Du Plessis noted.

"SA deserve to raise WTC trophy"

South Africa spinner Keshav Maharaj rated the consistency of his side in Test cricket "phenomenal" and said they deserve to "raise a prestigious title."

The Proteas will face Australia in the final of the World Test Championship in June at the Lord's.

South Africa advanced to the title clash of the 2023-25 cycle with a 2-0 win over Pakistan at home, while India's string of losses against New Zealand at home and against Australia ended their hopes of a third consecutive WTC final appearance.

"If you look at our Test unit, not many people would have afforded us the opportunity of making the final, but we've been phenomenal from a consistency point of view, from a cricket perspective," Maharaj told PTI.

"The togetherness on the field and the camaraderie and spirit (that) you see within the dressing room propelled us to get there.

"Hopefully, this is our year and we go one better than we've done previously and raise a very prestigious title in the Test format," he said.

Maharaj, however, conceded that defending champions Australia are a formidable opponent.

"It's the hardest format of the game. It's most challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. As a unit, the (kind of) cricket (that) we have played, we deserve to go and raise a trophy.

"But we are against formidable opponents, hopefully, we will come up on the right side of things," he said. (PTI)

# Malaysia Open: Prannoy, Malvika enter pre-quarters

Prannoy will next face seventh seeded Shi Feng Li of China

**KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8:** India's number two shuttler HS Prannoy and rising shuttler Malvika Bansod advanced to the pre-quarters of the Malaysia Open after winning their respective men's and women's singles opening round matches here on Wednesday.

There was more delight for the Indian camp with the pairs of Tanisha Crasto/Dhruv Kapila and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran/Aadya Variyath sailing into the mixed doubles pre-quarters of the Super 1000 meet.

Overcoming a delay caused by water leaking from the roof, Prannoy eliminated his Canadian rival Brian Yang 21-12, 17-21, 21-15.

Persistent leakage had caused suspension of the match on Tuesday with Yang leading 11-9 in the second game.

Despite conceding the second game, Prannoy maintained composure to seal the decider in a match



lasting one-hour 29 minutes.

Prannoy will next face seventh seeded Shi Feng Li of China who ousted Priyanshu Rajawat 21-11, 21-16.

Malvika breezed past local favourite Goh Jin Wei 21-15, 21-16 in just 45 minutes. She will face the winner of Chinese third seed Yue Han and Yu Po Pai of South Korea.

In other Indian results, Kapila and Crasto defeated South Korea's Sung Hyun Ko and Hye Won Eom 21-13, 21-14. They will face seventh seeded Chinese pair Xing Cheng and Chi Zhang in the last-16.

Sathish and Aadya defeated Ashith Surya and Amrutha Prathmesh 21-13 21-15 to set up a pre-quarters clash against fourth seed Soon Huat Goh and Shevon Jemie Lai of the host country. In women's doubles, Rutaparna and Swetaparna Panda lost to Thailand's Benyapa and Nuntakarn Aimsaard 17-21, 10-21. (PTI)

## Dima Hasoo player in World Karate championship

**HIT BUREAU**

**DIPHU, Jan 8:** Suniram Engti of Dima Hasoo district has been selected for the Iwabuchi Cup World Karate Championship to be held from May 3-4 at San Mateo, California, USA. Engti has been selected based on his recent performance at the recently concluded All India Karate Championship 2024 held at the Buddy Badminton Hall, Meerut, City (UP) from December 21 to 22, under the auspices of Japan Karate-Do Hakuakai India. Engti hailed from Borolajai, Umrungso of Dima Hasoo district, Assam. As informed by Engti said, "I have been selected based on my recent performance at All India Karate Championship held at Buddy Badminton Hall, Meerut, City (U.P.) I am happy to represent India from the Northeast region, there are 23 officials and 14 players who have been selected for the event from India. I'll give my full efforts to bag the gold medal for the nation." (PTI)

# AFI to aggressively monitor athletes for dope testing

**CHANDIGARH, Jan 8:** The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) on Wednesday brushed aside concerns that more doping cases could embarrass the country in future following closure of national camps, saying that it will continue to monitor the athletes and share relevant information with the NADA.

The AFI decided to end national camps after the Paris Olympics, except for the relay teams which will still be under the direct supervision of the national body.

For a long time, AFI has a policy of not picking non-campers for relay teams in view of the fact that they cannot be tested frequently.

The athletes can now train at the National Centers of Excellence which are under Sports Authority of India (SAI) or they can choose private bodies like the JSW, Reliance and Tata. They can also train at centers attached with states or with Army, Navy or Air Force.

"We have formed a separate monitoring team which will monitor all the places where the athletes train. It will collect information of each athlete. This information will be shared to the NADA," outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla said when asked if it will not be difficult to track the athletes.

He also said that the General Body of the AFI has approved the report of the committee which was formed to look into the doping issue.

"We had constituted a committee under IPS officer Sagarpreet Hooda who is commissioner special cell of Delhi Police on doping issue. He has made some recommendations and the AGM has approved the recommendations. Now we will see which are implementable and how we do that."

Sumariwalla served three consecutive terms as AFI president since 2012. He was replaced by 2002 Asian Games shot put gold winner Bahadur Singh Sagoo on Tuesday.

But Sumariwalla said the AFI can only recommend the athletes to be admitted to the NCoEs.

"Any new thing will have positive and negative aspects. Of course, it will be difficult to implement initially but we believe it will be beneficial in the long run. The athletes can now train near their homes and families, can have food they like.

"Moreover, it is also about widening the pool of athletes. Earlier, we had less than 150 athletes in national camps under the AFI. Now just the NCoEs can accommodate a thousand athletes." (PTI)

## Konstas regrets stand-off with Bumrah

**SYDNEY, Jan 8:** Australia's teenage batting sensation Sam Konstas regrets his involvement in the stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, admitting he was only trying to waste time but ultimately, the Indian pace spearhead had the "last laugh".

Konstas made an impact in the final two Tests of the series with his audacious strokeplay, but also found himself at the center of a couple of fiery exchanges with Indian stars Bumrah and Virat Kohli. One such incident occurred on the opening day of the fifth Test, when Konstas had a heated run-in with Bumrah.

"I love being in the contest and always try to put my best foot forward," Konstas told CODE Sports.

Near the end of the day's play, Bumrah, looking to get in one more over, was met with resistance from the Australian players, who were trying to waste time. This led to a fiery exchange of words between Konstas and the Indian pacer.

Two deliveries later, Bumrah, who was leading the side in the absence of an off-colour Rohit Sharma, took the wicket of Usman Khawaja off the last ball. After dismissing Khawaja, Bumrah walked in Konstas' direction and stared him down.

Reflecting on the incident, Konstas admitted, "I feel like it's probably a good learning for me. I was trying to waste a little bit of time there so they didn't get another over. But he (Bumrah) had the last laugh. (PTI)

# Will leave after 2026 WC: Coach Didier Deschamps

**PARIS, Jan 8:** Didier Deschamps announced Wednesday that he won't continue as France coach after the next World Cup, bringing an end to an era in which he became the nation's most successful manager over more than a decade.

The 56-year-old Deschamps said in an interview with broadcaster TF1 that he will leave when his contract expires in the summer of 2026.

"I've been here since 2012, I'm scheduled to be here until 2026, the next World Cup, but that's where it's going to end because it has to end at some point," Deschamps said in excerpts of the interview to be aired later Wednesday.

"I did my time, with the same desire and the same passion to keep the French team at the highest level, but 2026 is all very well."

Deschamps started in his role as a successor to Laurent Blanc. After a period marred by the 2010 World Cup debacle — where the players went on strike in protest against then-coach Raymond Domenech — and off-the-pitch controversies, Deschamps led France to victory at the 2018 World Cup, also reaching the final in 2022 and at the 2016 European Championship.

At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, France lost an epic title match to Argentina.

"I'm not here for the records," said Deschamps, who also won the 2021 Nations League with France.

"The most important thing is that the France team remains at the top as it has been for many years."

Deschamps is one of only three people in soccer history to have won the World Cup as both a player and a coach, along with Mario Zagallo (Brazil) and Franz Beckenbauer (West Germany). He has the highest number of wins (105) of any France coach, ahead of Michel Hidalgo and Domenech (tied on 41).

Deschamps found himself in a difficult position after the Euros last year, where France lost 2-1 to Spain in the semifinals without impressing. France was widely criticized for its pragmatic and dull style of play at Euro 2024, with Randal Kolo Muani's header against Spain the team's first and only goal from open play by a France player all tournament.

But he has kept the confidence of French federation president Philippe Diallo.

"He's still just as motivated and ready to wear the colors of the French team," Diallo told L'Equipe newspaper, adding that he did not believe Deschamps is tired of the job.

"Didier Deschamps' career has been exceptional, marked by the most prestigious titles," he said. "At the Euros, it was another semifinal in a major tournament. He was not affected by fatigue or criticism. After the competition, I asked him the question. His clear



answer was that he was fully committed and energized to continue his mission. And that's exactly what he's doing, as we finished top of our group for the Nations League. He is still the greatest coach the French team has ever had." As a player, Deschamps captained France to victory at the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship. He also won the Champions League with Marseille in 1993 and Juventus in 1996.

Before taking charge of France's national team, he coached Monaco to the 2003-04 Champions League final and guided Juventus back to Serie A. Deschamps also achieved success at Marseille, winning the Ligue 1 title in 2010.

Europe will send 16 teams to the first 48-team World Cup, being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico in the summer of 2026. Deschamps did not elaborate on his future beyond the tournament. "There is a life afterwards," he said. "I don't know what it will be."

His planned departure will leave plenty of time for Diallo to find the right successor to Deschamps, with former France great Zinedine Zidane the overwhelming favorite if he is still interested in the job.

Zidane, who helped to lead Les Bleus as a player to their first World Cup title in 1998 and starred again when they won the European Championship in 2000, scored in two World Cup finals and was on the losing side once when he headbutted Italy's Marco Materazzi in the 2006 final on his final match as a player. As a coach, Zidane led Real Madrid to three consecutive Champions League titles. (AP)

## Michael Clarke terms 'freak' Bumrah best all-format fast bowler

**MELBOURNE, Jan 8:** Former Australian captain Michael Clarke has termed the incomparable Jasprit Bumrah the greatest all-format fast bowler after his Player-of-the-Series performance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Bumrah produced one of the best-ever bowling performances by an overseas pacer in Australia and picked up 32 wickets over five Tests.

"The thing I've thought about Bumrah, after the series finished and I was sitting and thinking about his performances, I actually think he's the best fast bowler ever across all three formats," Clarke told ESPN.

"I know a lot of great fast bowlers, Curtly Ambrose, Glenn McGrath, didn't get to play T20 cricket, so I'm not talking about those guys, but in regards to anyone who has played all three formats, I think he might be the best ever. "He's actually that good in any conditions, that's what makes him great; any conditions, any format, this guy's a freak."

The former Australia captain believed that India could have won

the series-deciding Sydney Test had Bumrah bowled in Australia's second innings and some more runs under their belt.

Bumrah had suffered an injury on the second day of the match at SCG and was immediately taken to the hospital for a scan.

The Indian pace spearhead returned to bat the following morning but he did not bowl in Australia's second innings because of a back spasm as the hosts successfully chased down a target of 162 with six wickets in hand to win the series 3-1.

"I reckon India were probably 20 runs short (in Sydney)," Clarke said.

"I reckon a 180 lead, with Bumrah in the team, I think India are home. I think Bumrah is that good... he's so much better than the other bowlers they had in the team."

Bumrah was in a league of his own as his 32 wickets came at an incredible average of 13.06 and a strike rate of 28.3. Mohammed Siraj was the next highest wicket-taker among Indian pacers with 20 scalps at 31.15. (PTI)

# CT Squad: Will Rahul and Shami make it? Toss-up between Axar and Jadeja

**SYDNEY, Jan 8:** Out-of-form veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli will continue to form the batting core of India's ODI squad but there are at least three senior players whose future in the 50-over format could be debated when the selectors gather this weekend to pick the squad for the Champions Trophy.

KL Rahul, Mohammed Shami and Ravindra Jadeja's presence in the side is not a surety for the event starting February 19 even though they were a part of last year's World Cup.

Since the final, India have played six ODIs and while Shami and Jadeja were rested, Rahul was included for both the away bilateral engagements against South Africa and Sri Lanka.

Against Sri Lanka, however, he was dropped in the middle of the series after failing to get going in the middle overs. The world is also yet to forget how his sedate half century after using up 100+ deliveries became a prime reason for India's loss on November 19, 2023

against Australia.

It is understood that Yashasvi Jaiswal has a very bright chance of making it to the ODI squad. His inclusion would ensure a left-handed batter in the top four.

But if Rishabh Pant is the first-choice wicketkeeper, then would there be any point in having Rahul as the back-up? And if Rahul is not keeping, his place as a batter is not guaranteed.

Among his closest competitors, Ishan Kishan hasn't scored enough runs in the Vijay Hazare Trophy while Sanju Samson hasn't been picked by Kerala after he missed the initial games.

If coach Gautam Gambhir still has his say in selection matters like he did till the disastrous Australia tour, then Samson, one of his personal favourites, will surely make the cut.

India will play all their Champions Trophy games in Dubai, starting with the clash against Bangladesh on February 20. This was after the team refused to travel to original hosts Pakistan citing se-



curity concerns.

**Jadeja's white-ball woes**

Jadeja's white ball batting hasn't been as good as it used to be and those who are tracking the selection committee feel that Axar Patel is being seen as way more effective in the ODIs at the moment.

Washington Sundar is expected to make it as an off-spinner but Kuldeep Yadav's fitness is some-

thing that selectors would be fretting on. Kuldeep is near full fitness but hasn't played a Vijay Hazare Trophy game.

In case Kuldeep fails to make it, one among Ravi Bishnoi or Varun Chakravarthi is expected to be picked.

**Shami's fitness**

Coming to Mohammed Shami, the veteran pacer's communication

with the team management and the selection committee on his fitness status didn't seem to have the required clarity.

However, he has bowled eight overs each in the last two Vijay Hazare Trophy games and in case Jasprit Bumrah fails to make it due to back spasms, Shami's experience will become crucial for the side.

Hardik Pandya is the seam bowling all-rounder and it will be interesting to see if Nitish Reddy will be considered.

Among the reserve specialist batters, the choice could be between Rinku Singh and Tilak Varma.

**Champions Trophy (In Contention):**

Rohit Sharma (capt), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Varun Chakravarthi/Ravi Bishnoi, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan/Mohammed Shami, Rinku Singh/Tilak Varma. (PTI)

## BFI adopts World Boxing's new weight classes

**BAREILLY, Jan 8:** The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) is conducting the men's national championships here in 10 weight categories, in line with the classification introduced by the breakaway World Boxing.

The ongoing event is being held under World Boxing's Technical and Competition Rules, which has 10 instead of the 13 weight categories that feature in the suspended International Boxing Association's (IBA) roster.

The new weight classes are 50kg (Flyweight), 55kg (Bantamweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight), 85kg (Cruiserweight), 90kg (Heavyweight) and +90kg (Super Heavyweight).

Out of these, six categories -- 55kg, 60kg, 65, 70kg, 80kg, and 90kg -- are marked as potential Olympics weight categories.

The new categories for women are 48kg (Light Flyweight) is the first division followed by 51kg (Flyweight), 54kg (Bantamweight), 57kg (Featherweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight), +81kg (Heavyweight).

World Boxing is a breakaway international body aiming to secure recognition from the Interna-

tional Olympic Committee and ensure that boxing remains on the Olympic roster.

Formed in April last year after the International Boxing Association was stripped of its status, WB has managed to pull in requisite 60 members and the IOC is expected to take a call on its recognition early next year. India joined WB a few weeks ago. Govind Sahani kicks off Nationals with win

Meanwhile, Strandja Memorial silver-medallist Govind Sahani started his Nationals campaign with a commanding win over Mohammad Aarif of Jammu and Kashmir on the opening day on Tuesday. Devendra Solanki of Rajasthan kicked off the tournament in style, defeating Donald Winston Janumala in the flyweight (47-50kg) category on Tuesday.

In the bantamweight (50-55kg) division, Badal of Himachal Pradesh emerged victorious against Mizoram's Lalhruiatlunga. The lightweight category saw Goa's Nitesh Chawan outclass Kerala's Mohamed Athif with a dominant 5-0 win, while Arunachal's Ito Ado secured a hard-fought victory over Himanshu Singh.

Bhanu Prakash defeated Ashish in the welterweight (60-65kg) category, while the (70-75kg) weight class featured impressive wins by Nikhil Dubey and Arshpreet Singh Bhatti. (PTI)

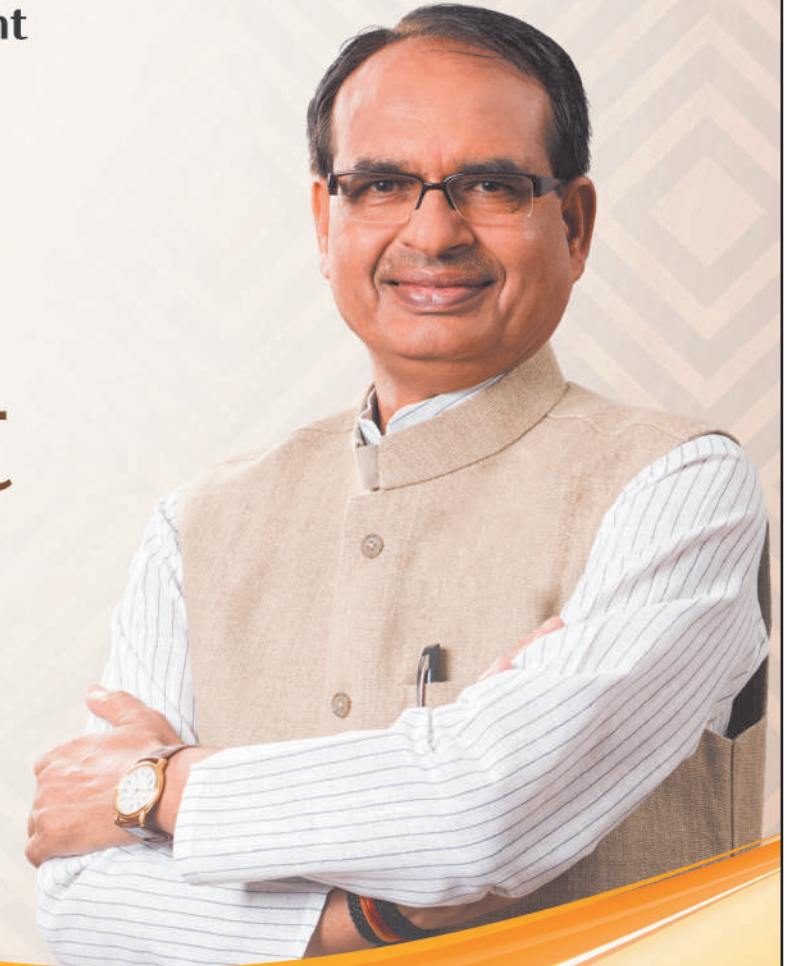


Government of Assam

Panchayat &amp; Rural Development Department



# Unabated Development IN ASSAM



## Central Function of



**Grihapravesh of  
50,000 PMAY-G Houses**

Total cost **₹650 Cr**



**Distribution of  
Agricultural Machineries**

**₹32.64Cr**

Under Dharti Aaba Janajatiya  
Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan for  
FY-2024-25

**₹28Cr**

Under National Food  
Security Mission for  
FY-2024-25

### Mission Organic Value Chain

Development for North East region

Total amount  
on machineries

**₹2Cr**

Total  
beneficiaries

**10000**

Total Farmers  
producer company

**20**

### Chief Guest

**Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan**

Union Minister of Agriculture &  
Farmers Welfare and  
Rural Development

### Guest of Honor

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**

Chief Minister, Assam

### Special Guests

**Shri Atul Bora**

Minister  
Agriculture, Horticulture etc.  
Assam

**Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass**

Minister  
Panchayat & Rural Development etc.  
Assam



Felicitation of  
**20 'Millionaire  
Baideus ( Didis )'**  
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### Virtual Inauguration



Uparhali Principal Market Yard of ASAMB, Kamrup



Jamunamukh Warehouse, Hojai

📍 Sarusajai Sports Complex, Sarusajai, Guwahati

📅 9 January 2025

🕒 3:00 PM

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