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Vol .No. XXV

Issue No. 354

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2025

PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

## College teachers firm on boycotting Gunotsav

### Meeting between agitating teachers and Pegu fails to break the ice

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: The representatives of Assam College Teachers' Association (ACTA) on Saturday met Education Minister Ranaj Pegu regarding the boycott of upcoming Gunotsav in the state and the promotion of professors working in different colleges here.

Even after the meeting, the college teachers refused to withdraw their decision to boycott the Gunotsav programme of the education department.

The ACTA in a statement already said that they would boycott the upcoming Gunotsav programme since the promotion of a lot of teachers has been pending since long.

"The meeting with the Education Minister was fruitful. But there are still uncertainties over the dates of promotion of college teachers. Meanwhile, we are still maintaining our earlier decision to boycott the education department's Gunotsav programme. However, we have an



extended meeting of our association tomorrow and we will have a detailed discussion on taking part in the Gunotsav," said Paragijoti Mahanta, the secretary of ACTA.

Meanwhile, Pegu said that the teachers raised their points in the meeting seeking the effective date of

their promotion. "I met with the representatives of the college teachers association. They raised their points in the meeting regarding the dates of their promotion. Teachers have been demanding that the date of effect of their promotion have some issues. I have instructed the department to

look into the matter and submit a report," Pegu told reporters.

He further mentioned that the promotion of teachers involves many departments apart from education—finance, personnel and law.

"Since there are many things involved in the promotion of teachers, it is very hard to take decisions on the issues raised by teachers. We will do the best of our ability to find out the flaws in the dates of their promotion," the education minister said.

Reacting to boycotting of upcoming Gunotsav in the state by college teachers, Pegu said, "I have urged the ACTA members to withdraw their decision and take part in the Gunotsav. I hope they will do so accordingly." The college teachers impart duties as external evaluators during the Gunotsav programme at schools and if they boycott the programme, the education department will find it very difficult to complete the upcoming Gunotsav in the state.

## Advantage Assam conclave to be held on February 24-25

### Himanta to meet industry leaders in Mumbai

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said he would be in Mumbai for the next three days to meet industry leaders to explore areas of collaboration for an upcoming business conclave in the northeastern state.

He will also participate in a roadshow to invite potential investors to Assam.

"For the next 3 days, I'll be in Mumbai to meet the leaders of India Inc and explore areas of mutual collaboration for the upcoming #AdvantageAssam 2.0 Summit. I will also participate in the Road Show to invite potential investors to the land of limitless opportunities – Assam," Sarma wrote on X.

The Advantage Assam conclave, to be held on February 24-25, will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the CM had recently said.

The summit aims at creating an

ecosystem that supports innovation, provides easier access to capital, removing bureaucratic hurdles to create an atmosphere for businesses and industries to be set up in Assam, Sarma had said.

The state government is focusing on strengthening manufacturing, IT, renewable energy and tourism to attract investments, which will not only boost the state's economy but create employment opportunities for youths, too, he said.

Sarma had visited Bhutan in December and participated in a roadshow for the summit.

Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay will also visit Guwahati during the conclave, officials said.

Similar roadshows are being planned in the UAE, UK, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea, Japan and Singapore to put Assam on the global investment destination map, they said. (PTI)

## Devajit Saikia set to take over as BCCI secretary

MUMBAI, Jan 4: Devajit Saikia on Saturday filed his nomination for the post of the BCCI secretary whereas Prabhjeet Bhatia applied for the post of the treasurer, with both officials being the only applicants for the two roles.

Chhattisgarh State Cricket Sangh's Bhatia has applied for the treasurer's position after the post was left vacant by the exit of Ashish Shelar, who recently took oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government.

On the other hand, Saikia has been working as the interim secretary of the Indian cricket board since Jay Shah took over as the ICC chairman on December 1.

Saikia was nominated as the interim secretary by the BCCI president Roger Binny after Shah had left the role. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM's vigilance cell raid Doley's residence

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 4: The Chief Minister's Vigilance Cell on Saturday carried out a surprise raid on the official residence of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Zila Parishad Aswini Kumar Doley in the Sivasagar Central Market area.

The raid has caused a stir among the conscious circle but the sleuths of the Vigilance team did not divulge anything before the media.

Doley is a popular Mising cultural worker and brother of former Dhemaji MLA Sumitra Patir. He has been transferred and posted as a Secretary of the Bodoland Territorial Council.

## Leopard tranquilised and captured in Nagaon town

NAGAON, Jan 4: A leopard which created panic for the last three days in Assam's Nagaon town was tranquilised and captured on Saturday, forest officials said.

The feline was reported to be prowling in the town since January 1 and was spotted in several places, an official said.

On Saturday morning, the animal was captured on CCTV cameras at Daccapatt market area following which the locals informed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Three Rohingyas escape from detention centre

GOALPARA, Jan 4: Assam Police launched a search operation to arrest three suspected Rohingyas who escaped from the detention transit camp in Goalpara district, an official said on Saturday.

The trio, taking advantage of the darkness, escaped by jumping the walls of the centre at Matia on Thursday night. Their escape came to light on Friday when the centres' officials were taking attendance, police said. The three detainees have been identified as Bodi Alam, Mustafa Kamal and Abdul Kader.

IGP(Law and Order) Akhilesh Singh visited the transit camp on Saturday to conduct an inquiry into the incident. The detention centre, which became operational in January 2023, houses alleged foreigners in the state. (PTI)

## Architect of India's nuclear programme Rajagopala Chidambaram dies at 88

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Eminent physicist Rajagopala Chidambaram, who played a key role in the nuclear tests of 1974 and 1998, passed away on Saturday, according to the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). He was 88. Chidambaram, who was also associated with the nuclear weapons programme, breathed his last at Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai, a DAE official said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was "deeply saddened" by the demise of Chidambaram.

"He was one of the key architects of India's nuclear programme and made ground-breaking contributions in strengthening India's scientific and strategic capabilities. He will be remembered with gratitude by the whole nation and his efforts will inspire generations to come," the prime minister said.

Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh extended his condolences to Chidambaram's family.

"Saddened to learn about the passing away this morning of emi-

nent nuclear scientist Dr. Rajagopala Chidambaram, who led India's Atomic Energy Commission and played a key role in the development of strategic weapons.

"Dr. Chidambaram's role in the two nuclear tests conducted by India was memorable. He also had the distinction of being Principal Scientific Advisor to the Govt of India for 17 years," Singh said.

Chidambaram held numerous prestigious positions during his six-decade career, including Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India (2001-2018), director of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (1990-1993), chairman of Atomic Energy Commission, and secretary to the government of India, DAE (1993-2000).

He also served as chairman of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (1994-1995).

"The nation owes greatly to this brilliant scientific mind, and we shall forever cherish his tremendous contributions," Congress



president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X.

Ajit Kumar Mohanty, secretary, Department of Atomic Energy, termed Chidambaram's demise an irreparable loss.

"Dr. Chidambaram was a doyen of science and technology whose contributions furthered India's nuclear prowess and strategic self-reliance. His loss is an irreparable one for the scientific community

and the nation," he said.

"The nation mourns the loss of a true visionary. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and loved ones during this time of grief," the DAE said in a statement. It said Chidambaram's unparalleled contributions to India's scientific and strategic capabilities and his visionary leadership in science and technology will forever be remembered.

## Some people trying to spread venom in society in name of caste: Modi

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday attacked the Opposition for spreading venom in society in the name of caste and asked people to thwart such conspiracies with a view to strengthening the shared culture and heritage of villages.

Inaugurating the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, the Prime Minister said his government has been focusing on rural development since 2014 and villages will play a key role in realising the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

In an oblique reference to Congress leader and leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and other INDIA bloc leaders, Modi said some people are trying to spread venom in society in the name of caste and weaken the social fabric.

"We have to thwart these con-



spiracies, and preserve and strengthen the common heritage of our villages," he stressed.

Opposition leaders including Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav have been continuously demanding caste census. Modi said that since 2014, he has been constantly in the service of rural India.

"Ensuring a dignified life for the people of rural India is the priority of my government," the Prime

Minister said and added that the vision of the government is to ensure an empowered rural India, provide ample opportunities for villagers, reduce migration and ensure ease of life to the people of villages.

Talking about the schemes to provide basic amenities in villages, Modi said toilets have been made as part of Swachh Bharat Mission, and crores of people in rural India have been given pucca houses as part of PM Awaas Yojana.

He said safe and clean drinking water is also being provided through Jal Jeevan Mission.

"Today, healthcare facilities are being provided in more than 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs to the people," said the Prime Minister. He added that telemedicine, assisted by digital technologies, has ensured the option of best doctors and hospitals (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'BJP has vested interest in keeping Manipur on boil'

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: After fresh violence erupted in Manipur, the Congress on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said he could not escape the constitutional culpability of not following "rajdharna".

In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the BJP had some vested interest in keeping the border state on the boil.

"The BJP is the matchstick which burnt Manipur!" he said in his post. He also shared a screengrab of a news report about the latest violence.

The Congress chief said in the post, "Narendra Modi ji, your last

visit to Manipur was for seeking votes for the BJP, way back in January 2022. Violence erupted in the state on May 3, 2023."

"More than 600 days have passed, and media reports through satellite images

have now revealed that villages after villages have been wiped off in the state," he added.

Kharge said fresh violence was witnessed recently when a mob attacked the Kangpokpi district superintendent of police, resulting in injuries.

"Your incompetent and shameless chief minister has expressed regret but has conveniently brazened (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## BJP-Congress should formally declare alliance for Delhi polls: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said the Congress and the BJP should formally declare their alliance, amid the two opposition parties sharpening their attacks on the former chief minister ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

Kejriwal also took a dig at the Congress, saying barring a few mediapersons, people had stopped taking the party "seriously".

He alleged a "covert, behind-the-scenes" collaboration between the two parties for the assembly polls.

Relations between AAP and the Congress, both partners in the opposition INDIA bloc, soured after the two sides failed to seal an alliance for the Haryana elections.

AAP has also demanded action against senior Congress leader Ajay Maken for allegedly calling Kejriwal "anti-national" and threatened to approach other parties of the INDIA bloc for removing the grand old party from the grouping.

Earlier on Saturday, some women protested outside Kejriwal's Firozshah Road residence, demanding payment of a monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000 in Punjab, which is also governed by AAP.

In a press conference, Kejriwal claimed the protest-



ing women were from the Congress and the BJP.

"These women belong to the Congress and the BJP, not Punjab. All women in Punjab stand with AAP. They trust us," he asserted.

He further said, "The Congress and the BJP should officially declare that they are contesting the elections against AAP in an alliance. This covert, behind-the-scenes collaboration is unacceptable."

Attacking the BJP, Kejriwal said the party had no chief ministerial face or agenda and its leaders were trying to win the Delhi polls (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## The CROPS experiment aims to understand how plants grow in the unique conditions of space

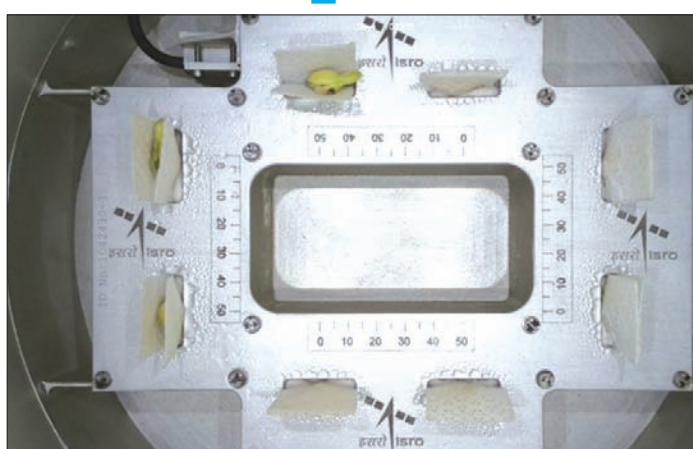
### ISRO grows cowpea seeds in space

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: ISRO on Saturday said the cowpea seeds it had sent to space onboard the PSLV-C60 POEM-4 platform have germinated under microgravity conditions within four days of the launch of the mission.

The space agency sent eight cowpea seeds as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) experiment conducted by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) to study plant growth in microgravity conditions.

"Life sprouts in space! VSSC's CROPS experiment onboard PSLV-C60 POEM-4 successfully sprouted cowpea seeds in 4 days. Leaves expected soon," ISRO said in a post on X.

The PSLV-C60 mission placed two SpaDeX satellites in orbit on



the night of December 30. The fourth stage of the rocket carrying the POEM-4 platform has been orbiting the earth with 24 onboard experiments at an altitude of 350 km

since Tuesday. The CROPS experiment aims to understand how plants grow in the unique conditions of space, which is essential for future long-duration

space missions.

The experiment involves growing eight cowpea seeds in a controlled environment with active thermal regulation, simulating conditions that plants might encounter during extended space travel.

CROPS is envisioned as a multi-phase platform to develop and evolve ISRO's capabilities for growing and sustaining flora in extraterrestrial environments.

Designed as a fully-automated system, a five to seven-day experiment has been planned to demonstrate seed germination and plant sustenance until reaching the two-leaf stage in a microgravity environment. The cowpea seeds have been placed in a closed-box environment with active thermal control. Passive measurements, including (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Draft data protection rules balance regulation, innovation: Vaishnav

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules drafted by the government create a balance between regulation and innovation while protecting citizens' rights, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Saturday.

The government has issued draft rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection Act on Friday for public consultation till February 18.

"Rules have to be within four walls of the Act. It is within the ambit of the Act passed by Parliament. These rules have been framed to ensure a balance between regulation and innovation while completely safeguarding the rights of citizens," Vaishnav told PTI in an interview.

The minister said earlier there was only one template available to the world -- the European data protection rule with high level of regulation -- but Indian rules have attempted to balance the regulation with innovation to safeguard the boom in innovation ecosystem developing among start-ups in the country.

He said extensive consultation has been held with the industry and a digital office is being put in place for registration of complaints, their handling and adjudication.

The minister said the final rules will be placed before Parliament in the monsoon session and all entities handling data digitally will get two years to adapt their system and comply with the law.

"All entities covered under the



Act will have to review existing consent after the rules are in place," Vaishnav said.

He said the rules may be improvised based on the experience of the new data regime.

"As far as possible, minimum prescription has been kept in the rules to ensure simple implementation of the Act. The rules have carefully addressed the large harm that the digital world may pose to the privacy of people, especially that of children," Vaishnav said.

The Digital Personal Data Protection draft rules specify that a parent's verifiable consent will have to be obtained by social media or online platforms before children can create an account.

Parents' identity and age will have to be checked through voluntarily provided identity proof or virtual tokens.

"We have also kept graded penalties to protect the interests of micro, small and medium enterprises. It is to save businesses that may be running using a single computer. However, Big Techs have higher obligations under the rules. Minor breaches will attract small penalties and big breaches will lead to higher penalties," Vaishnav said.

He said the penal provision will be implemented as per the Act and the rules prescribe the way to implement them.

The Act has the provision to impose a penalty of up to ₹ 250 crore on data fiduciaries.

"There is a provision... under the Act where an entity can give voluntary undertaking in respect of any breach to the Data Protection Board which will deal with it as per the Act," Vaishnav said.

As per the DPDP Act, the acceptance of the voluntary undertaking by the Board shall constitute a bar on proceedings under the provisions of this Act as regards the contents of the voluntary undertaking.

If a person fails to adhere to any term of the voluntary undertaking accepted by the Data Protection Board (DPB), it will be deemed as a breach of the provisions of the Act and the board, after giving an opportunity to the person to explain his position, may take action as per the penal provisions.

The minister said utmost precaution has been taken to protect small businesses as per the basic principle laid down in the Act.

Vaishnav said the rules for data processing overseas will be implemented while keeping in mind citizen's rights and national interests.

"The country should be able to take benefit of all the new opportunities that are emerging out of the digital economy," Vaishnav said.

However, the rules will not have an impact on existing norms under which news media operate. "Media rights will continue to remain as it is. Press will continue to function as per the current framework," Vaishnav said.

Vaishnav added that the digital platforms will also have to inform and take consent of people in English or any of the 22 Indian languages listed in the Constitution in the language of their choice. (PTI)

## Draft DPDP rules moot parental consent for processing children's data

**New Delhi, Jan 4:** The government has released the long-awaited draft of Digital Personal Data Protection Rules which proposes to make parent's verifiable consent and identification mandatory for creation of child's user account on online or social media platforms, and also moots possible data localisation requirements for specified personal data.

Notably, the draft rules - which are key to operationalisation of the data protection Act - seek to make parental nod essential for processing of personal data of children. Further, parents' identity and age will also have to be validated and verified through voluntarily provided identity proof "issued by an entity entrusted by law or the government", say the draft rules.

A major - and a surprise - takeaway from the draft rules, according to industry experts, is the aspect of localisation and additional oversight on cross-border data sharing in specified cases.

On processing of personal data of child, the draft rules state: "A Data Fiduciary shall adopt appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure that verifiable consent of the parent is obtained before the processing of any personal data of a child and shall observe due diligence, for checking that the individual identifying herself as the parent is an adult who is identifiable if required in connection with compliance with any law for the time being in force in India..."

This would have to be referenced to reliable details of identity and age available with the platform or entity itself, or through voluntarily provided details of identity and age or a virtual token mapped to the same, which is issued by an entity entrusted by law or the government. Citing an example of how this would work, the rules said in case a child's account is sought to be created on an online platform, the said entity will by referencing identity and age details (issued by an entity entrusted by law or the Government) check that the parent is indeed an identifiable adult.

"The parent may voluntarily make such details available using the services of a Digital Locker

service provider," it said.

As per the rules, entities will be able to use and process personal data only if individuals have given their consent to consent managers which will be entities entrusted to manage records of consents of people.

Provision related to data localisation has also caught the industry's attention. Industry watchers pointed out that while DPDP Act largely permits cross-border data sharing, except to blacklisted jurisdictions, the draft rules hint at the possibility of additional oversight.

This, since the draft rules state that: "A Significant Data Fiduciary shall undertake measures to ensure that personal data specified by the Central Government on the basis of the recommendations of a committee constituted by it is processed subject to the restriction that the personal data and the traffic data pertaining to its flow is not transferred outside the territory of India."

Put simply, 'data fiduciaries' are entities that determine which personal data is to be collected and purposes for it to be processed. Significant data fiduciaries, as per the DPDP Act, are to be determined on the basis of the volume and sensitivity of personal data processed, risks to the rights of individuals (data principals), and potential impact on sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the state and public order.

"A Significant Data Fiduciary shall, once in every period of twelve months from the date on which it is notified as such or is included in the class of Data Fiduciaries notified as such, undertake a Data Protection Impact Assessment and an audit to ensure effective observance of the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder," the draft rules have said.

A Significant Data Fiduciary would also have to observe due diligence to verify that algorithmic software deployed by it for hosting, display, uploading, modification, publishing, transmission, storage, updating or sharing of personal data processed by it are not likely to pose a risk to the rights of an individual. (PTI)

## Committed to turning Air India into top-class airline: Tata Sons chairman

**CHENNAI, Jan 4:** Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrabosekar on Saturday said his company is fully committed to transforming Air India into a top-class airline, delivering exceptional service and performance on a global scale.

Tata Group acquired Air India in 2022 after the government had signed a share purchase agreement with Tata Sons for the sale of Air India for Rs 18,000 crore. Chandrabosekar was responding to a query during a free side chat with TVS Supply Chain Solutions Ltd Managing Director Ravi Viswanathan at the Global Alumni Meet of NIT Trichy, here, on what people can expect from Air India following the acquisition made by Tata Group in 2022.

"My commitment is to take every effort to make Air India, an absolute top-class airline in the world. In terms of the hardware, the flight experience, customer experience, technology and in every which way," Chandrabosekar said. On a lighter note, he appealed to the audience gathered at the venue to urge the aircraft manufacturers Boeing and Airbus to de-

liver the aircraft as per the orders made by Air India.

"You all need to help me by pushing Boeing and Airbus to deliver me the planes," he said.

Air India Group has a total order of 470 planes -- 250 from Airbus and 220 from Boeing. In December 2024, Air India placed an order for 100 more additional wide-body A350 and 90 narrow body A320 aircraft including A321 neo.

Responding to another query from Viswanathan on the semiconductor industry, Chandrabosekar said there was a huge opportunity and the exposure of Tata Sons in the semiconductor sector was about \$ 18 billion in precision manufacturing, semi-conductor assembly and testing.

"Our semiconductor fab should be in operational in 2026. So, whether it is in the energy sector or in semiconductor sector, we have taken the lead and a head start. We have to build a whole ecosystem in the semiconductor sector and thousands of companies are coming up in the ecosystem in the next 18-24 months," he remarked. (PTI)

## Govt permits export of 2 lakh tonne wheat to Nepal

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** The government has permitted exports of two lakh tonne of wheat to Nepal, according to a notification issued on Saturday. The export is permitted through National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in the notification.

NCEL is a company set up with cooperative societies as its promoters. Though export of wheat is banned to maintain domestic supply, outbound shipments are allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to certain countries to meet their food security needs and on request.

In a separate notification, DGFT said inputs imported for synthetic knitted fabrics by advance authorisation holders, EOUs (export oriented units) and SEZs (special economic zones) shall be exempted from MIP (minimum import condition). There is a USD 3.5 per kg MIP on synthetic knitted fabrics, to discourage inbound shipments of cheap fabrics. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Devajit Saikia set to take over

As per the election schedule on the board's website, the window to file the nomination application was open till 4:00pm on Saturday afternoon and according to sources, only Saikia and Bhatia have put forth their nominations. (PTI)

## Architect of India's nuclear programme

landscape, it said. He was instrumental in initiating India's indigenous development of supercomputers and conceptualising the National Knowledge Network, which connected research and educational institutions across the country.

An ardent advocate of applying science and technology to national development, Chidambaram established programmes such as Rural Technology Action Groups and Society for Electronic Transactions and Security, and emphasised "coherent synergy" in India's scientific efforts, according to the statement.

He was honoured with prestigious accolades, including the Padma Shri in 1975 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1999. He received honorary doctorates from several universities and was a fellow of eminent Indian and international science academies. The DAE said Chidambaram will be remembered as a "trailblazer, an inspirational leader, and a dedicated mentor to countless scientists and engineers". (PTI)

## Some people trying to spread

to villages. Crores of people in rural areas have benefited from the telemedicine through e-Sanjeevani, he further added. The Prime Minister highlighted the importance of creating economic policies to strengthen the rural economy. He said the vision of his government is to empower rural India by transforming villages into vibrant centres of growth and opportunity. "Our government's intentions, policies and decisions are empowering rural India with new energy," he said.

He noted that through the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, farmers have received approximately Rs 3 lakh crore in financial assistance. Noting that over the past 10 years, the amount of agricultural loans has increased by 3.5 times, he mentioned that now livestock and fish farmers are being provided with Kisan Credit Cards.

In addition, more than 9,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in the country are receiving financial assistance. He further underlined that the government has consistently increased the MSP for several crops over the past 10 years. "When intentions are noble, the results are satisfying," Modi said and added that the country is now reaping the benefits of the hard work done over the past 10 years.

Citing a recent large-scale survey that revealed several important facts, the Prime Minister noted that compared to 2011, consumption in rural India has nearly tripled, indicating that people are spending more on their preferred items. He noted that previously, villagers had to spend more than 50 per cent of their income on food, but for the first time since independence, the expenditure on food in rural areas has fallen below 50 per cent, and are now spending on other desires and needs, improving their quality of life.

Highlighting another significant finding from the survey, which revealed that the gap in consumption between urban and rural areas has decreased, the Prime Minister remarked that it was previously believed that urban individuals could spend more than those in villages, but continuous efforts have reduced this disparity. He noted that these achievements could have been realized during previous governments' tenures, but for decades after independence, lakhs of villages were deprived of basic necessities.

He pointed out that the majority of SC, ST, and OBC populations reside in villages and were neglected by previous governments. This led to migration from villages, increased poverty, and a widening gap between rural and urban areas.

In his speech, Modi also mentioned a recent study by the State Bank of India, which revealed that rural poverty in India has decreased from approximately 26 per cent in 2012 to less than 5 per cent in 2024.

In an apparent jibe at opposition parties, Modi said that while some people have been chanting slogans to eradicate poverty for decades, the country is now witnessing a real reduction in poverty. Speaking at the occasion, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said banks have undertaken saturation drive for 16 government schemes including Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, PM Mudra and PM SVANidhi.

Celebrating Rural India's entrepreneurial spirit and cultural heritage, the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025 is being organised from January 4 to 9 with the theme 'Building a Resilient Rural India for a 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

The Mahotsav, through various discussions, workshops and masterclasses, aims to enhance rural infrastructure, create self-reliant economies, and foster innovation within rural communities. (PTI)

## Leopard tranquilised and captured

forest officials. The forest officials immediately swung into action and tranquilised the animal and put it in a cage. After preliminary medical examinations, the leopard was sent to the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati.

The leopard was suspected to have strayed out of one of the two nearby forest areas, Bamuni or Chowang, the officials said. (PTI)

## BJP has vested interest in

out your absence in the state," he alleged. "We are repeating with utmost responsibility that the BJP has some vested interest to keep the beautiful border state on the boil, with more than 250 innocent deaths and 60,000 being displaced. People are still living in camps for 20 months," Kharage claimed. Even the Supreme Court has said it was the primary responsibility of the Union and the state governments to ensure peace and normalcy, the Congress president noted.

"On December 6, INDIA (bloc) parties in Manipur had made three specific and simple requests to you. Visit Manipur before 2024 ends, but you did NOT. Call representatives of all political parties at your office in Delhi, but you HAVEN'T. Involve yourself directly in Manipur, but it DOES NOT seem that you have," he said.

"Even if you do either of the above, you cannot escape the constitutional culpability of not following rajdharma," Kharage added.

The superintendent of police in Manipur's Kangpokpi district was injured after a mob attacked his office on Friday over the officer's alleged failure to remove central forces from Saibol village, bordering the Imphal East district, officials have said.

Several others, including police personnel and protesters, also suffered injuries during the clash between security forces and attackers. Kuki organisations have been protesting against the alleged baton charge on women by security forces in Saibol village on December 31.

The attackers on Friday threw stones and other projectiles towards the office to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), in the village. (PTI)

## ISRO grows cowpea seeds

camera imaging, oxygen and carbon dioxide concentrations, relative humidity, temperature, and soil moisture monitoring, are available for plant growth and monitoring, the space agency said.

ISRO also posted a separate "selfie video" of the chaser satellite of the space docking experiment that is orbiting the earth at an altitude of 470 km. The chaser satellite is expected to dock with the target satellite in space on Tuesday, a feat that would make India only the fourth country to master this cutting-edge technology after Russia, the US and China. (PTI)

## BJP-Congress should formally

by abusing him in the absence of any achievement that they could talk about. Now, the people of Delhi will decide whether they want those who work or those who only believe in abusing, he said.

"We are presenting our track record of 10 years and our plan for the next five while the BJP offers nothing but abuses," Kejriwal charged.

Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in February. AAP has already announced all its candidates while the Congress and the BJP have so far declared nominees for 48 and 29 seats, respectively. (PTI)

## RBI lifts lending restrictions on Arohan Financial Services

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 4:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the upliftment of the lending restrictions placed on Arohan Financial Services with immediate effect.

In a release issued on Friday, the Reserve Bank said Arohan initiated remedial action and submitted its various compliances to it.

"Now, having satisfied itself based on the company's submissions, and in view of their adoption of revamped processes, systems, and the company's commitment to ensure adherence to the regulatory guidelines on an ongoing basis, especially for ensuring fairness in the loan pricing, the Reserve Bank has decided to lift the aforementioned restrictions placed on Arohan Financial Services, with immediate effect," the central bank added. Furthermore, the leading NBFC MFI is organising health check-up camps in association with an NGO at 16 locations in Assam in January 2025 to improve healthcare access for underserved communities. The initiative aims to provide critical healthcare support to individuals from marginalised communities where access to quality healthcare is limited. Basic health checks, including blood pressure, blood sugar, BMI assessments, etc will be offered across various districts, including Cachar, Kamrup Rural, Hojai, Chirang, Goalpara, Sivassagar, Dhemaji, Golaghat, Biswanath, Lakhimpur, sonitpur, and Charaideo.

Individuals diagnosed with common illnesses will receive prescribed over-the-counter medicines, while those requiring specialised treatment will be referred to district government hospitals for further care.

Arohan is further planning to organise 151 health check-up camps across Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and West Bengal with a focus on the early detection and management of common health issues.

## Ather Energy launches new line with major updates

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 4:** Leading EV two-wheeler manufacturer Ather Energy Limited, on Saturday introduced the 2025 Ather 450 with a host of new updates.

The 450X and 450 Apex scooters now get Multi-Mode Traction Control with three different modes for increased safety and MagicTwistTM for a more convenient riding experience in city traffic.

Ravneet S Phokela, Chief Business Officer of Ather Energy, stressed that the EV manufacturers have continuously strived to improve performance throughout their existence.

"The Ather 450 has been designed with performance at its core. Over the years we have been focusing on improving the performance of the 450 product lineup even further through continuous improvements in both software and hardware. Now, with the 2025 Ather 450, we are improving the safety of the scooters with features like multi-mode traction control which is typically found in high-end motorcycles," he said.

"This feature allows the rider to adapt to different road conditions with better control and stability. We are also introducing MagicTwistTM on the 450 Apex and the Rizta. We expect that these latest updates will offer a much-improved riding experience to scooter enthusiasts across the country," he further added.



The 2025 Ather 450X and Ather 450 Apex models come equipped with multi-mode traction control, a feature designed to enhance rider safety by preventing the scooter from slipping on low-friction surfaces. The traction control system steps in under slippery conditions to synchronise the rear wheel speed with the front, ensuring better stability.

Riders can select from three distinct modes - Rain Mode, Road Mode, and Rally Mode - to suit their control needs, each fine-tuned for specific riding scenarios. The Rain Mode prioritises maximum safety, reducing slip for enhanced grip on wet & slippery surfaces.

The Road Mode strikes a balance between safety and performance, ideal for everyday riding. The Rally Mode is designed for off-road enthusiasts, offering con-

trolled slip. To further improve the riding experience, Ather has focused on maximising range and has introduced multi-compound tyres developed with MRF on the 2025 Ather 450.

Additionally, the optimisation of energy usage through features like MagicTwistTM, which reduces energy loss friction while braking enhances overall range. The result is an improved TrueRangeTM of up to 130 km on the Ather 450X 3.7kWh (IDC Range 161 km) and the 450 Apex (IDC Range 157 km). The 450X 2.9 kWh (IDC Range 126 km) and the Ather 450S (IDC Range 122 km) will also now deliver an improved TrueRangeTM of up to 105 km.

MagicTwistTM, a feature that was earlier launched with the 450 Apex and then Rizta Z will now also be available on the 2025

## Seasoned professional with over 30 years of experience Arnab Maitra appointed new business unit head of NTPC Bongaigaon

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4:** Arnab Maitra has been appointed as business unit head of NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati effective from Saturday.

Prior to his appointment, Maitra served as the head of operations and maintenance (O&M) at NTPC Korba in Chhattisgarh, a station with an impressive generating capacity of 2600 MW.

Maitra takes charge from outgoing Akhlesh Singh, who has been re-assigned to NTPC CGM-OS (Director-Operations Secretariat).

A seasoned professional with over 30 years of experience, Maitra joined NTPC as an Executive Trainee (ET) in 1989, after earning his degree in Mechanical Engineering from REC, Durgapur. Throughout his career, he has gained significant expertise across NTPC's prestigious power stations, including Farakka, Vindhy-



achal, Darlipali, and Korba, where he played a crucial role in ensuring operational efficiency and excellence.

Maitra's long tenure at NTPC has been marked by his dedication to improve O&M performance at various plants, contributing to the

company's growth and success in the power sector. He has also undergone extensive training in diverse areas such as safety, power plant efficiency, preventive vigilance, coal coordination, O&M practices, human resources, disaster management, first aid, CPR

certification, and leadership programs, which highlights his commitment to continuous improvement and operational excellence.

In his new role at NTPC Bongaigaon, Maitra will oversee all activities at the plant, which has a generating capacity of 750 MW (3x250 MW). Under his leadership, NTPC Bongaigaon is poised to further enhance its operational capabilities and uphold the highest standards of safety, efficiency, and sustainability, while continuing to serve the needs of nearby communities.

"NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati looks forward to a future of continued success with Shri Maitra at the helm, ensuring the plant's contribution to the power generation landscape and its alignment with the company's vision of growth and excellence," a PR stated.

## ABSU to stage state-wide sit-in demonstration on January 8

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4:** The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) to stage a state wide sit-in demonstration on January 8 in demand of immediate solution on long-pending educational issues.

The students union expressed displeasure over the failure of state government to address the problem and issues of the educational issues of the Bodo community.

"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) will carry out a

state-wide 3 hours sit-in demonstration on January 8 at every district headquarters in Assam. The demonstration will be held from 11.00 am to 2.00 pm, during which ABSU members and members of the general public will participate in a peaceful protest," the statement 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 pri-

ority. In light of this, ABSU has decided to stage the sit-in demonstration to ensure that the government takes immediate and tangible action on the key demands which include inclusion of Bodo as a subject in the Assam Judicial Service Examinations, inclusion of Bodo as Language 1 in the Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET), establishment of 35 new 'Model High Schools' in the Bodo medium, upgradation of 101 Bodo-medium High Schools to Higher Secondary Schools, along with the recruitment of teachers for these upgraded institutions".

The students union demanded immediate provincialisation of venture schools by implementing of Clause 6.3 of the BTR Accord, recruitment and filling of the vacant Academic Officer post for Bodo medium in the merged 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), recruitment and appointment of a translator for the Bodo language in the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), recruit-

ment of two permanent teachers for each school under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) that offers Bodo-medium education.

The students union has sought to the introduction of Bodo as a medium of instruction in the Model Degree Colleges located in Baksa, Dhubri, and Balipara, introduction and distribution of educational books in the Bodo language at Anganwadi centers, recruitment of one assistant professor for each of the Bodo departments in 10 colleges located outside the

Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), transfer of teachers proficient in reading and writing in Bodo, currently teaching in various schools of different mediums across Assam, to Bodo-medium schools etc.

The ABSU has emphasised that the failure to address these demands has led to widespread reaction within the

Bodo community. The sit-in demonstration is an expression of the community's demand for justice and a call for the government to honour its past assurances and commitments made to the union.

The students union urges all concerned citizens and students to actively participate in this peaceful democratic protest to demand urgent action from the government of Assam.

## Foreigner arrested

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAOON, Jan 4:** One Maqbool Hussain who has been declared a foreigner by Foreigners Tribunal has been apprehended by Morigaon police recently.

Hussain had been missing after he was declared a foreigner by the court based on case number 24/15, which was lodged with the Foreigners Tribunal in 2015.

On Friday night, the police successfully apprehended Hussain after years of evasion.

## Elephant body found

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Jan 4:** A body of a wild elephant was found in Ramthepi, Jenkha area in West Karbi Anglong on Saturday morning. The dead elephant was found dead in a field by a woman who in turn informed the police and forest department. The cause of death of the elephant is yet to be determined.

It may be mentioned that a large herd of wild elephants has been roaming and terrorizing the villages around Kheroni area for the past few months. The presence of a large herd of wild elephants often led to man-animal conflict that often proves fatal for both. The elephants used to deplete the crops, particularly paddy and sugarcane. They sometimes attack villages and target paddy silos of the villagers that lead to destruction of houses and household goods. This has been an annual occurrence in West Karbi Anglong with no solution in sight.

## Poetry collection released

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 4:** A poetry collection by poet Mowsam Hazarika published by Pragya Mediahye has been launched here on Saturday.

The book was officially unveiled by Sahitya Akademi Awardee Poet Sameer Tanti, in the esteemed presence of noted poet Lutfia Hanum Selima Begum and distinguished author and journalist Maini Mahanta.

In his address, Poet Sameer Tanti praised Mowsam Hazarika's evocative use of imagery and his ability to present profound themes in an accessible manner. "Hazarika's poetry captures the nuances of life with remarkable authenticity. His words have a way of resonating deeply with readers," he remarked.

Poet Lutfia Hanum Selima Begum lauded Hazarika's promising literary voice, stating, "This collection is a testament to his potential. I am confident that Mowsam Hazarika will leave a lasting impact on the world of poetry."

Echoing similar sentiments, noted author and journalist Maini Mahanta highlighted the collection's universal appeal. "With its vivid imagery and emotional depth, this book is sure to captivate poetry lovers. Mowsam Hazarika has firmly established his presence in the literary world," she said.

## Awareness on natural disasters such as floods and lightning

### 'Surokkhit Axomor Babe Bator Nat' highlights disaster preparedness in Tezpur

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Jan 4:** The ceremonial inauguration of the awareness campaign 'Surokkhit Axomor Babe Bator Nat', focused on disaster preparedness through street plays, was held on Saturday under the aegis of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Sonitpur, in collaboration with Edupur Society, Tezpur.

The event took place at Tezpur Court Chariali and was inaugurated by the MLA of Tezpur LAC, Prithiraj Rava in the presence of district commissioner cum chairperson of DDMA, Sonitpur Ankur Bharali, superintendent of Police Barun Purkayastha, chief executive officer, Sonitpur Zilla Parishad Karabi Saikia Karan, additional district commissioner cum CEO of DDMA, Sonitpur, Garga Mohan Das, DRR Consultant of ASDMA, Bibek Mahato renowned Assamese actor Arun Nath, renowned Assamese actor and celebrated dancer, Krishna Das Nath, president of Ban Theatre, Bankim



Sharma, wildlife conservationist Saurav Borkataki and other dignitaries. The inaugural programme featured a cer-

emonial performance of the street play and the flagging off of the street play van. The van and the team will tour all five revenue

## District-level training on Incident Response System held in Kokrajhar and KA



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4:** A two-day district-level training Programme on the Incident Response System (IRS), held at the Bodoland Administrative Staff College in Kokrajhar, concluded on Saturday with a Field Simulation Drill (Mock Exercise) at the Bodofa Cultural Complex.

The event was organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Kokrajhar, in collaboration with the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), Guwahati, the training provided hands-on experience in disaster response scenarios.

On the concluding day on Saturday, a Field Simulation Drill (Mock Exercise) was carried out at the Bodofa Cultural Complex, providing practical exposure to managing disaster scenarios.

A Tabletop Exercise (TTE) was also held, where facilitators guided participants on procedures, plans, and policies for disaster management, with a focus on mitigating stress during emergencies. The session emphasized understanding rules, responsibilities, and proto-

cols, particularly for earthquake scenarios. Participants from various line departments were encouraged to contemplate and discuss ways to deal with potential disasters.

Kripal Jyoti Mazumder, program officer (DM) from ASDMA, Guwahati, attended the programme as key resource person.

Kokrajhar additional district commissioners Kabita Deka and Jitiraj Gogoi, along with representatives from various departments such as Land Revenue & Disaster Management (LR & DM), Health & Family Welfare (H & FW), Fire & Emergency Services (F & ESS), CISF, and APRO, actively participated in the training.

The programme aimed to enhance interdepartmental coordination and prepare officials to efficiently handle emergencies, thereby improving disaster resilience in the Kokrajhar district.

Our correspondent from Hamren adds: District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), West Karbi Anglong in collaboration with Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA),

Dispur has started two day Incident Response System (IRS) training and mock exercise in the district on Saturday.

The training was inaugurated by district commissioner-cum-chairperson of DDMA, West Karbi Anglong, Saranga Pani Sharma followed by his speech of the importance of IRS.

All the departments of the district attended the training. The training has been carried out by the resource persons from ASDMA namely Rajiv D Choudhary (Project Officer); Ankur Bikash Dev (Project Officer); Manjit Mahanta, (Project Officer).

As informed by the District Project Officer, Rupjyot Maibangsa, DDMA, West Karbi Anglong, tomorrow the training program includes mock exercise on earthquake and fire by SDRF team, Hamren at New Market, Hamren, basic preparation like

Setting up of incident command post, emergency communication centre, Relief camp, child friendly spaces, animal shelters, camp hospital, etc. under the strict guidelines of Incident Response System.

## State food civil supplies minister reviews activities in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, Jan 4:** The state food, civil supplies, and consumer affairs minister, Kausik Rai, visited Nagaon and held a meeting with the officials of district food, civil supplies and consumer affairs as well as legal metrology department at the conference hall of DC's office on Saturday here.

During the meeting, the minister reviewed the department's activities in Nagaon district.

The minister directed officials to complete the e-KYC process for ration cards before the Magh Bihu festival. He also instructed them to release transportation costs for cooperative societies and asked to conduct regular meetings of the District Price Monitoring Task Force.

The meeting was attended by local MLAs, including Rupak Sarma, Jitu Goswami, and Sashi Kanta Das, as well as officials from the food, civil supplies, and consumer affairs department and the legal metrology department, an official press note added here.

## Measures for ensuing exam in KA

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 4:** The district administration of Karbi Anglong has taken measures to ensure the smooth and peaceful conduct of the "Common Written Test, 2025" (CWT-2025) for the recruitment of sub inspectors (Pa per-) under the Assam State Police Recruitment Board said a release of DIPR. The exam scheduled to take place on January 5, the administration has deployed designated officers to maintain law and order at various examination centers across the district.

Dipankar Bora, ACS, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate, has been assigned to oversee operations at Don Bosco Junior College, Diphu. Similarly, Arunaj Jyoti Baruah, ACS, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate, will supervise activities at Diphu Government College and Diphu Girls College, Dharamnala. For Bokajan College, Sukhanjan, the administration has appointed Meenakshi Borgohain, ACS, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate.

Meanwhile, Champak Sarmah, BDO of Howraghat Development Block, will monitor Thong Nokbe College, Doknoka. These officers have been directed to maintain vigilance and report developments promptly to ensure an orderly examination process. The administration remains committed to facilitating a fair and efficient environment for all candidates appearing for the test. Public cooperation is highly anticipated to uphold peace and discipline during the examination period.

## Operation against illegal sand mining

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Jan 4:** The forest department in West Karbi Anglong carried out a successful operation last night at Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong against illegal sand mining and smuggling.

In the operation two trucks were seized for transporting sand illegally, i.e., without invoices. The vehicles were AS11 CC 0592, a dumper truck and a tractor, AS08 5157. The drivers were not detained and the owners were being tracked.

## Cyber racket busted in Morigaon

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAOON, Jan 4:** The Morigaon police arrested 11 persons in connection to cyber racket from Moirabari, Laharighat, Bhuragaon, Mayong in the district recently.

The cyber criminals posed a serious threat to the financial sector as the accused fraudsters have been committing crimes by using fake Aadhaar card, PAN card, SIM card etc to avail loans. The police have seized numerous fake documents including SIM cards, Aadhaar cards, PAN cards, and bank passbooks from their procession.

## Awareness meeting on Mission Basundhara

**HT Correspondent**  
**MARGHERITA, Jan 4:** An awareness meeting on Mission Basundhara 3.0 was held on Saturday at North Margherita Rangamancha, bringing together representatives from educational institutions, religious organizations, social organisations and residents of the Margherita co-district area. The initiative seeks to provide land patta allotment to institutions such as schools, religious bodies and social organisations.

## Emerging concerns between humans and technology in 2025

Experts say the year 2025 will be even more technology-driven and present even greater challenges. People will have far fewer friends, as relationships are diminishing due to the lack of regular personal contact. I think the somewhat neo-traditionalist intense focus on the couple and the nuclear family will be stifling. Life will be even more technology-driven, bringing even greater challenges. People will develop a greater reliance on rapidly evolving digital tools for good and ill

By: Priyanka Saurabh

Whether one expresses optimistic or pessimistic views about the year 2025, it is true that these thinkers have also expressed their concerns for the near future of humans and digital technologies. Most of their concerns center on the growing power of technology companies that control the flow of information in people's lives and their ability to compromise the privacy and autonomy of individuals. It is highly unlikely that there will be a successful movement anytime soon to change market capitalism and the competitive imperative to make profit a primary priority. Solutions to this problem have a double-edged quality, as the opportunity and challenge are equally present. The spread of falsehoods through social media and other digital platforms will harm social, political, and economic order. Some possible solutions may impede civil liberties. The unstoppable flow of lies, misinformation, and disinformation online is divisive, dangerous, and destructive. The health-monitoring, work-monitoring, and security solutions that could be implemented would expand mass surveillance, threaten human rights, and make more and more regions of the world more authoritarian. The rapid automation of more business systems and processes due to telework is reducing the number of jobs available for humans. Additionally, people's mental health is being affected by such a period of extreme isolation. Who will take action to bring about the positive changes needed to tackle all these obvious issues?

The confluence of deteriorating economic conditions, civil unrest, and uncertain long-term pandemic outcomes seems to me as more likely to lead to technology-related harm and abuse, especially as products come to market with less rigor on threat modeling, risk assessment, etc. Technology will become even more pervasive in our lives, in every aspect. It will enable work, more choices, and better service, but it will come at a great cost. Increased surveillance, loss of privacy, greater risk—both for individuals and political systems. The confluence of deteriorating economic conditions, civil unrest, and uncertain long-term pandemic outcomes seems to me as more likely to lead to technology-related harm and abuse, especially as products come to market with less rigor on threat modeling, risk assessment, etc. Technology will become even more pervasive in our lives, in every aspect. It will enable work, more choices, and better service, but it will come at a great cost. Increased surveillance, loss of privacy, greater risk—both for individuals and political systems.



Women with children have faced a lot of pressure to drop out of the workforce or work part-time to cover the childcare gap that has been created by school closures and their male partner not taking 50/50 responsibility for their children. This will result in lifelong financial impacts and a sense of hopelessness. There is a significant possibility of ongoing disability following a coronavirus infection, given what is coming out about medium- and long-term lung damage and chronic post-viral fatigue. People will have a lot fewer friends because relationships are diminishing because of the lack of regular in-person contact. I think there will be a somewhat neo-traditionalist intense focus on the couple and the nuclear family that will be quite stifling. The monopolies of technology companies will grow; a lot of activity is concentrated in four or five megacorporations. Look at the negative impact of Amazon on the broader retail sector. There is a lot of reliance on these companies' platforms; there will be a screen-centricity for everything, whether it's social life, entertainment, work, or art. There is too much emphasis in society on what technology can do well, i.e., convenience, rather than what it cannot do, such as the level of interaction or quality of experience. Only we can save ourselves. The 'new society' is a society that is more divided than ever in history. We are already recording every breath, every step, every heartbeat. Which will also be quite dangerous. (The author is a Research Scholar in Political Science, poet, freelance journalist, and columnist)

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### Talking Points

## What lies ahead for India in 2025?

By: Narvijay Yadav

As the new year begins, India stands at the threshold of an era defined by technological transformation. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to disrupt industries, redefine workplaces, and influence daily life in unprecedented ways. What began as an experimental technology is now integral to decision-making, automation, and innovation across sectors. The adoption of AI in India is expected to surge this year, with applications ranging from healthcare and education to agriculture and public governance.

Experts predict that 2025 will see AI's influence roaring across industries, driven by advancements in natural language processing, machine learning, and predictive analytics. With increasing government interest and corporate investments, AI is set to enhance productivity, optimize operations, and unlock new avenues of growth. Youth with AI skills will be at the forefront of this revolution, enjoying better opportunities and pay scales, while those who fail to adapt risk being left behind. The narrative, "AI won't take your job, but a colleague who knows AI might," has never been more relevant.

AI-based learning platforms are expected to bridge gaps in education by providing personalized education. Predictive analytics and AI-powered diagnostic tools are already transforming patient outcomes in healthcare. In agriculture, innovative AI-driven tools are helping optimize crop yields and monitor soil health. The government's Digital India initiative, paired with AI's potential, can modernize public governance, from improving traffic systems to enhancing public safety and resource management. However, robust policies, data security measures, and ethical frameworks will be crucial to fully realizing these benefits.

Amid this technological transformation, India's challenges remain palpable. The stock market has been on a bearish streak for seven months, disappointing investors. Even the traditional safeguard of gold faced uncertainties after Trump's US victory reshaped global financial dynamics. Yet, a recent report brings hope: while the stock market delivered a modest 8% return in 2024, gold surged by 20%, and silver followed at 18%. These returns offer solace to investors, even as mutual funds falter alongside the stock market. Infrastructure development offers an

2025 is not merely another chapter but the beginning of a transformative decade. As AI redefines the future and infrastructure projects reshape the present, a more potent, united, and progressive India can emerge

other silver lining. The government's focus on expressways, airports, and expanded rail networks has improved mobility nationwide. However, urban congestion due to the rising number of private vehicles underscores the need for a more efficient public transport system. Sustainable urban development demands attention as unchecked population growth strains resources and dilutes progress.

Political discord has also marred the nation's progress. In 2024, opposition-led protests frequently disrupted parliament sessions, wasting taxpayer money and stalling governance. Environmental concerns, such as Delhi's worsening air

quality and the neglect of stray animals, have been sidelined in the face of political bickering. Stray dogs, cows, and elephants continue to suffer due to inadequate care, reflecting the urgent need for compassionate policies.

Despite these challenges, the promise of 2025 shines through. AI's transformative power, infrastructure advancements, and the collective resolve to address pressing issues can turn this mixed start into a year of significant progress. To make this possible, India must prioritize environmental conservation, humane treatment of animals, and robust investments in AI adoption and education. With rock-solid willpower, India can seize the opportunities of this new era while addressing its persistent challenges.

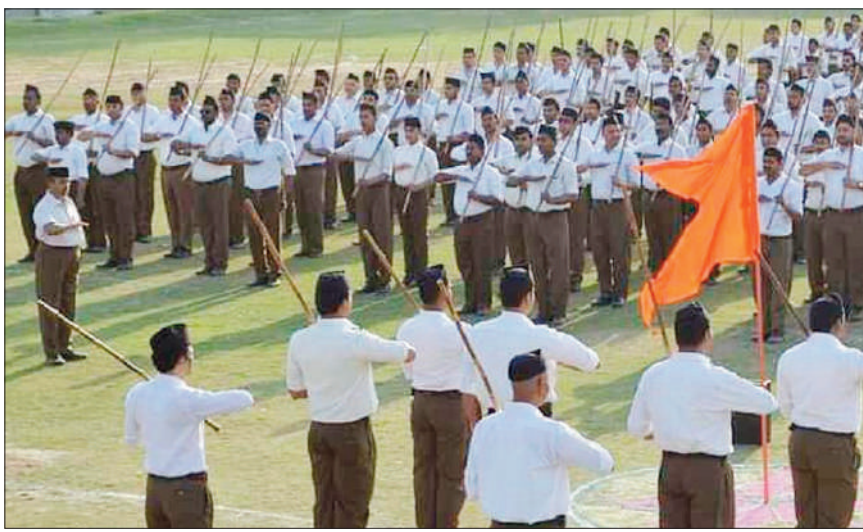
2025 is not merely another chapter but the beginning of a transformative decade. A stronger, united, and progressive India can emerge as AI redefines the future and infrastructure projects reshape the present. Let's embrace this year's promise with optimism, action, and a commitment to building a brighter, more inclusive future. (The writer is the author of "Rock Solid Willpower". Views are personal. He can be reached at newsroomvirtual@gmail.com)

## RSS at 100 - Centenary of the colossal surge of the Sangh

If you missed your chance to reasonably dissect the perpetual existence of an organization that has ever since its inception in 1925 remained a subject of critical scrutiny, appreciation and acceptance, then you have missed an opportunity to understand its veracity, depth and influence today. What we need to develop is an intellectual audacity and frankness to look at the genesis and chronological nurturing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as it has entered its 100th year of a colossal existence this year, a moment that it must be planning to celebrate in an incredible manner. Known for its daily gatherings called Shakhas, the RSS has been pulling millions of volunteers called Swayamsevaks (selfless workers) to areas such as temple-grounds, halls, rooftops and places where they can assemble irrespective of their geographical vulnerability with a focus on national regeneration. Its mission, the social cause, that it has been trying to consistently make the world understand, has never been swallowed without suspicion and disbelief. But its journey through a tumultuous century beginning from pre-independent India to the present moment of India's rise as a global power, seeks our deliberate awareness about its expansion with dignity and decorum.

More tumultuous indeed was its journey after the British left our soil. Founded by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur on September 27, 1925, its fundamental focus was on promoting cultural values by ensuring the Hindu unity. Its founder thought that the unity of the majority was the best and foremost requirement without which, he believed, neither independence nor India's independent survival was possible. Dr. Hedgewar could literally lay the foundation for an organization of his dreams but its future momentum and progress was guaranteed by its second Chief M.S. Golwalkar. With his saintly persona, Golwalkar had given the RSS its socio-political and socio-spiritual makeover. His spiritual exuberance and intellectual insightfulness gained the organization its present enhanced transformation and under his leadership it became a homogenous establishment mobilizing Hindu unity with millions of its members steering its cause.

Along with an ideological unity of the Hindus what Dr. Hedgewar actually conceived was the creation of a nationalist society purely rooted in character and discipline. His belief in this direction made the daily assembly of the



Swayamsevaks obligatory. A daily polishing of the essential instinct of patriotism among the youth, he thought, would give them a clear direction while helping them materialize their long standing desire for freedom. Dr. Hedgewar's social life began with Indian National Congress, chiefly motivated by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and that was probably the platform he began the nurturing of his patriotic instinct. His reformist mind was not satisfied with the movement that the Congress was taking the country through. What had chiseled the reformist in him was an anxiety that he was principally haunted mainly due to India's vulnerability of being confusingly diverse, which he perceived, would fail to consolidate its inner powers to keep the country united. After him came M.S. Golwalkar and his efforts as the chief of the Sangh brought considerable changes in its functioning. He initiated the "Pracharak" system, a non-monastic order of celibates - a bunch of full time workers called "Pracharaks". Swami Chinmayananda famously differentiated between a monastic order and the "Pracharak system". "The difference between a monastic discipline and the Pracharak system is the RSS has white-clad sanyasis while monastic life is in saffron", he said.

A unique quality of the Sangh is its existence without any membership drive. It sustains on the commitment and dedication of its Swayamsevaks who become its volunteers without being officially enrolled through a drive. M.S. Golwalkar or "Gurujee" he is fondly known in the Sangh was a predestined

monk of the Ramakrishna order. He was an ardent follower of the Vivekananda philosophy and his period as the Chief of RSS witnessed the patriotic values that Vivekananda expounded being carried out in principle and practice. Though the Sangh stayed away from politics, its journey through the turbulent political scenario of India compelled its ideological framework to face a revamp with its senior functionaries being deployed to cooperate with a new political party that Syama Prasad Mookerjee sowed the seeds of. This political experiment of Mr. Mookerjee in 1951 was the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Many RSS veterans like Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Lal Krishna Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were deployed to the party. The BJS expanded through the Nehru era providing a strategic political threat to his hegemony and later on the RSS was instrumental in transforming Jan Sangh to its present form the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). For the Sangh, its history has been full of ups and downs.

Its first major jolt was a ban from the Nehru government. The Sangh was banned on February 4, 1948 following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Though the RSS was not directly implicated, Nathuram Godse's past association with the organization forced the government to ban it. The government accused the Sangh for promoting an ideology of violence while justifying its axe on the outfit. The ban was lifted on July 11, 1949. The RSS faced its second ban during the Indira regime. Throughout her monopoly politics that ultimately drove her to declare a state of emer-

gency, Indira Gandhi banned the Sangh on June 26, 1975. The RSS was actively on the forefront opposing her authoritarian regime and continued to propel its opposition from underground while most of its prominent leaders were imprisoned. The ban was lifted as the emergency ended and a new government led by the Janata Party came into force. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 and the communal riots thereof ultimately led the Sangh to face prohibition once again. This was the third in the line. It was lifted in 1993 and that was the moment its political outfit the BJP assumed an active presence in India's political spectrum. Probably, the Congress has continuously failed to register an upward thrust since 1992. For both the parties, the demolition of the disputed structure was a turning point. The BJP's political rise and the Congress's fall began there. India witnessed a saffron surge slowly emerging from the backyard of the Sangh establishment.

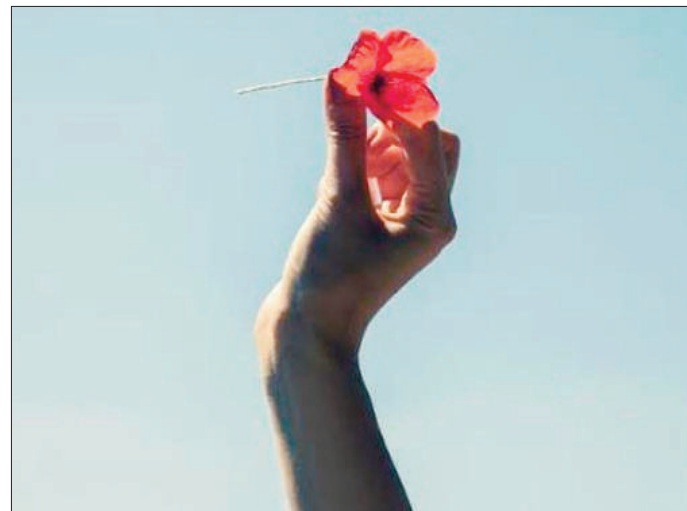
Picking from the RSS history, one of the most celebrated events of its journey, is still pompously remembered by its members. Political climate in India gained more clarity as the RSS activities progressed and the year 1963 witnessed the Sangh volunteers participating in the Republic Day Parade along with the Indian Army upon the invitation of the government. Among the mass movements that the RSS has churned in the country; the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was the most prominent. The movement gained the Sangh and its political enterprise the BJP much acceptance among the Hindus. The rise and political influence of BJP naturally contributed to the expansion of the Sangh. About forty branch organizations of the Sangh sprung from its ideological stem are known as the Sangh Parivar. They have been stretching across the social ambience of India with their outreach activities giving the group its humongous shape and power. Members of the Sangh Parivar literally make it one of the largest disciplined assemblies of volunteers across the world. Unsurprisingly, its immense growth frequently shatters the dreams of its political opposition and the regimes under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, once a Pracharak of the Sangh, have consecutively engraved this concern of the opposition more rampant. While it crosses a significant milestone, a century is a long period of survival and relevance. (The author is a freelance journalist based in Kerala who can be reached at mr\_lalu@30gmail.com)

## Simple ways to make a difference in 2025

By: Satvrat Borah

The beginning of a new year is like the first chapter of a fresh book. It gives us an opportunity to start anew, make positive changes, and embrace habits that contribute to our well-being and the world around us. While it's common to set personal goals, why not also include goals that help society and the environment? Simple actions, when multiplied by many, can lead to significant transformations.

One of the most impactful things we can do this year is to plant trees. Trees are not just beautiful additions to our environment; they are vital for the health of our planet. They provide oxygen, improve air quality, conserve water, and support wildlife. But planting trees is just the first step. It is equally important to nurture them. A tree's growth is not just a matter of time but also care. Regular watering, protecting it from pests, and ensuring it has enough sunlight are necessary to ensure that the tree thrives. Instead of merely discussing global warming and pollution, let us take action. Planting



and caring for trees might seem like a small act, but when done collectively, it can significantly impact our fight against climate change.

This year, we can also shift our focus from excessive celebrations to meaningful contributions to society. While cultural festivities are a significant part of life and bring people together, it's essential to balance them with activities that

address social or environmental issues. Instead of spending hours and resources on elaborate celebrations, we could dedicate some of our time and efforts to helping others. Volunteering at a local shelter, teaching underprivileged children, or organizing clean-up drives can create a ripple effect of positivity. These acts may seem small, but their impact can be profound.

One pressing issue that demands

our attention is the use of plastic. Plastic pollution is one of the most significant threats to our environment. This year, we can make a conscious effort to reduce plastic usage in our daily lives. Avoiding single-use plastics, using cloth bags, and choosing reusable items over disposable ones are simple steps that can make a big difference. Moreover, disposing of plastic waste properly is equally important. Throwing plastic in dustbins and encouraging others to do the same ensures that waste is managed efficiently. When we take care of our environment, we are also taking care of our future.

Another goal we can strive for this year is to reduce the time spent on mobile phones. Technology has undoubtedly made our lives easier, but it has also created a disconnect from the world around us. Spending hours glued to our screens not only affects our health but also takes away precious moments that could be spent with loved ones or in nature. This year, let us resolve to step away from our screens and immerse ourselves in the real world. Taking a walk, exploring a park, or simply sitting under a tree

can be refreshing and rejuvenating. Engaging in physical work or a creative hobby can be a fulfilling alternative to endless scrolling.

Family is the cornerstone of our lives, yet we often find ourselves too busy to truly connect with them. This year, let us make an effort to spend more quality time with our families. A simple conversation, sharing a meal, or enjoying a game together can strengthen bonds and create cherished memories. At the same time, it's essential to take time for ourselves. Whether it's reading a book, meditating, or pursuing a passion, self-care is vital for mental and emotional well-being.

As we step into this new year, let us remember that change begins with us. The actions we take, no matter how small, have the power to create a better world. Planting trees, reducing plastic use, spending time with family, and stepping away from screens are simple yet impactful steps we can take toward a healthier, happier planet. Let this year be a reminder that every small effort counts. Together, we can make a difference, one step at a time.



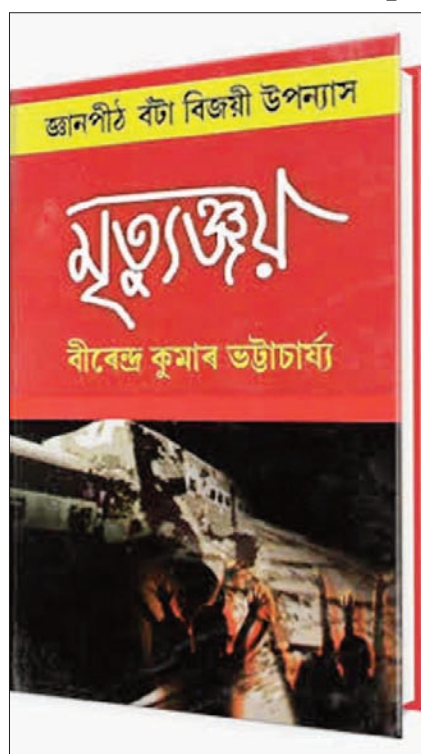
## Contemporary social life in the Jnanpith winning Assamese novel 'Mrityunjay'

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya is one of the Assamese writers who have been engaged in writing novels with dedication and concentration. Bhattacharya's versatility can be traced to the field of literature. Bhattacharya is a poet, storyteller, novelist, playwright, thoughtful writer, journalist and renowned editor. Although he has contributed to various aspects of literature, his fame and name as a novelist is well known. As a novelist, he was recognized for his talent through the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1951. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel 'Yaruingam' and in 1971 received the prestigious Jnanpith Award for the novel 'Mrityunjay'. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's first novel is 'Rajpathe Ringiyaay', the creator of almost a dozen widely read novels. It is through the first novel that he has been able to show his talent. The novel has been written with a revolutionary spirit and a sympathetic approach to the oppressed weak, keeping in mind the ideal of a communist society free from class discrimination, exploitation. In his other novels, the ideals of a socialist, non-exploitative society are hidden behind the storytelling, but in the first novel, the young writer is particularly influenced by idealism and passion. Over time, the author's sense of idealism has been greatly restrained and mitigated, helping to beautify the work. Most of Bhattacharya's stories are set against a struggling background. The characteristics of the characters are reflected in the extraordinary environment. The characters in the novels Rajpathe Ringiyaay, Yaruingam, Mrityunjaya, Pratibad, Kabar aur Phul, Shatagnhita wander in the extraordinary environment of revolution and struggle. There is no equivalent in Assamese literature in writing novels on political and revolutionary backgrounds.

Mrityunjaya is a notable novel by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya written against the backdrop of the Indian Independence Movement, especially the 1942s movement. The novel is set in the vast rural areas of Mayang and Bebeja in Nagaon district of central Assam. The novel is about how a group of freedom fighters led by Daipari Gosai overturned an army train near Mayang.

Literature is the mirror of society. Therefore, literature expresses social



life. Since the novel is a broad literature, this category of literature has more opportunities to express the image of society. The novelist takes advantage of this opportunity to bring to light social events along with political events. As a result, Mrityunjaya has become a social history of the time. The novel Mrityunjaya deals with various aspects of the religious, economic, educational, superstitious and superstitious aspects of Assam at that time. Some of these are discussed below.

One thing I must say is that the religious environment occupies the most space in the novel Mrityunjaya. Most of the characters in the novel are Vaishnavas, followers of the Vaishnava religion. The main character is Mahada Gosai, the satradhikar of Daipara Satra. There are many characters in the novel, including Manik Bora, Ahina-Konwar and others. The novel describes Vaishnavism and the Namghar and Satra established by the poet. Mahada Gosai also viewed the freedom movement from a religious perspective. The novelist has expressed his religious life wherever he has the opportunity. The novelist has expressed his religious life wherever he has the opportunity. They even try to find consolation by singing kirtan pads when

they have to join the violent forests and kill animals. In this novel, the novelist expresses the difference between the followers of Shankara and the followers of Chaitanya.

Mrityunjaya is not only about Vaishnavism. The Mrityunjaya also mentions the idols of Ganesha, the destroyer of obstacles, Mahalakshmi, the late goddess of wealth, and Shalegram. Similarly, tantric worship, sacrifice, etc. were practiced among some people at that time. This system also existed among the Dhanpur families.

The novel Mrityunjaya also expresses the negative aspects of religion - "The real religion has disappeared in this country. There are only rules and regulations that make Brahmins, devotees, clerics and mullahs. The real religion is human religion. There is God among people. "It goes without saying that this human religion and humanistic perspective is one of the reasons for the importance of the novel.

It is not new that Assamese novels reflect the image of tribal life. The novels have been reflecting the tribal society since the days of Rajnikant Bardoloi, Padmanath Gohainbarua and Laxminath Bezbarua. There is also a lot of tribal theme in the novel Mrityunjaya. At the beginning of the novel we meet two female characters - Dimi and her mother Kadam. The novelist describes the ornaments and dress worn by the women of Mikir. The novelist's main female character, Dimi Miki, is married to a Garo youth. The novelist portrays various customs, festivals, beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the Garo society in the context of Dimi being a Garo bride. He describes the festivals of 'Banker', 'Wangala', etc. prevalent in the Garo society. In this context, the dances, songs, gods worshiped, etc. associated with the festival are also described. The Mrityunjaya gives a detailed description of the Wangala festival. There are also descriptions of how young and old celebrate this festival with dancing, singing and joyfulness day and night. The novel describes the Garos' strange technique of killing tigers with mantras, their belief in women as 'arnam' (gods), their belief in turtles or hoods as symbols of misfortune, and their hospitality. More importantly, the picture of the contribution of the tribes to the freedom struggle comes alive through Dimi's service and sacrifice.

The novel is a fascinating and interest-

ing account of the customs, superstitions and superstitions of the Assamese society. The novel depicts the customs of the satra environment of the house of the main character, Mahada Gosai, the head of the Daipara Satra, especially bathing, worship and eating. In the story of Mrityunjaya, Gosani is reluctant to fetch her husband a pill of medicine from the field of Akhal. Society was divided over caste. Mahada Gosai is also dissatisfied with the caste system. "Our people have a bad habit of talking a lot and worrying about caste."

The minds of the people of the Mayang region during the time of Mrityunjaya were filled with superstition. The novelist incorporates the folk beliefs of the Mayang region in tantra and ghosts.

At that time our society was very backward in education and economy. Most of the characters in the novel Mrityunjaya are illiterate and semi-educated. The education of the characters was satra-centric, religious education. Among the educated characters are Rupanarayana and Sarveshwara. They know about the revolutions in France, Russia, China, etc. Dadni is the teacher of the village school. But that school has been closed for four months today. Women's education was still not emphasized. Parents did not feel the need to send their daughters to school. The attitude of the people towards modern and English education was not positive. The economic situation like education was very poor at that time. There was no end to poverty in anyone's family, but the same applies to other boys in the village who could not pursue higher education due to poverty. The Novelist successfully explain the economic condition of the common people at that time. However, the novelist does not fail to hint that a class of people became rich in a short period of time under the pretext of war. Layaram Mahajan is one such character in the novel.

The novel reflects various aspects of our social life, especially caste, superstitions, tribal life, education, economy, etc. Therefore, we can say without a doubt that although it is a political novel, the novel Mrityunjaya has touched many aspects of our social life. (The writer is Cluster Resource Center Coordinator of Nalbari Cluster, Biswanath Educational Block, Department of Education, Assam. He can be reached at 9954812261, 9864539966 or himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Poem

### A Cyclic Confession

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Planting saplings of wrath in greedy men's eyes,  
I rebelled against corruption  
To bring back hope  
To poor men's eyes  
With lots of promises and sunrising dreams;  
Time altered the colours of my sight and insight,  
Rooting out standpoints and highly valued lifestyle  
To let me feel like a stranger  
To the extent of forgetting the real me  
In the very bazaar of buying and selling conscience!

Now I am roaming in the streets of broken hearts,  
Showcasing my bleeding heart  
To weigh its grief  
To console the betrayed ones  
With repentance  
And a vow not to forget the ground wherefrom I try to spring up;  
None should I blame for my unintentional mistakes  
As wild blood in man tries  
To expose its nature  
To misuse power  
Provoking him  
To invoke ill elements  
To blow their own trombones day in and day out...

The chariot of desire will carry me ahead  
With lots of selfish thoughts  
With or without conscience  
Packing bags of satisfaction  
Unboxing the bags of spiritual profit or loss...

### The Glory of Devotion

By: Khemu Parashar

Devotion makes a person the, embodiment of humanity,  
forms the foundation of the future,  
its importance is immense,  
put your life in devotion,  
do not leave even the slightest flaw,  
your life will be special,  
devotion brings welfare to the body of clay,  
follow it,  
bring it home

People have reached the house of God through devotion,  
devotion uproots ego from its roots,  
teaches the lesson of humanity,  
destroys ego,  
becomes a storehouse of positivity,  
it has nothing to do with pain and sorrow

## The problems and prospects of Assamese cinema



By: Mowsam Hazarika

Assamese cinema has been an integral part of the state's cultural identity, reflecting its traditions, struggles, and aspirations. From the golden era of filmmakers like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bhabendra Nath Saikia to the contemporary landscape, Assamese cinema has seen phases of remarkable achievements as well as persistent challenges. The journey of Assamese cinema is one of resilience, with filmmakers and artists striving to balance artistic expression with commercial viability.

The Assamese film industry, often referred to as Jollywood, faces numerous hurdles that hinder its growth. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of infrastructure. With only a limited number of theaters in Assam, particularly in rural areas, the reach of Assamese films remains constrained. This shortage of screens forces many filmmakers to rely heavily on urban audiences, reducing the potential for box office success.

Another significant problem is the issue of funding. Most Assamese films are made on shoestring budgets, limiting the scope for technical advancements, large-scale productions, and marketing efforts. Many filmmakers struggle to secure financing, as private investors are reluctant to fund regional cinema due to uncertain returns. This financial constraint often affects the quality of films, making it challenging to compete with mainstream Indian cinema.

Piracy continues to be a major threat to the industry. With the advent of digital technology, pirated copies of Assamese films are widely circulated online, leading

to substantial revenue losses. This problem is compounded by the lack of stringent measures to curb piracy, further demotivating filmmakers and producers.

The Assamese film industry also faces stiff competition from Bollywood and other regional cinemas. With audiences having easy access to high-budget, star-studded films from across the country, Assamese films often struggle to attract viewers. The language barrier adds to the challenge, as Assamese films rarely receive subtitles, making them inaccessible to non-Assamese audiences.

Despite these challenges, Assamese cinema holds immense potential for growth and recognition. The industry is blessed with talented filmmakers, actors, and technicians who have proven their mettle in regional and national platforms. The growing popularity of independent cinema has opened up new opportunities for Assamese filmmakers to experiment with diverse themes and storytelling styles, catering to niche audiences.

The advent of OTT platforms has been a game-changer for regional cinema, including Assamese films. These platforms have provided filmmakers with a global stage, allowing them to reach audiences beyond the state's borders. Films like Village Rockstars and Aamis have already set a precedent, earning critical acclaim and showcasing the rich storytelling traditions of Assam to the world.

The state government's support has also played a role in promoting Assamese cinema. Subsidies, tax benefits, and awards for regional films have encouraged filmmakers to continue their craft. However, more needs to be done to provide

financial assistance, develop infrastructure, and create platforms for training and skill development.

To ensure the growth of Assamese cinema, there must be a collective effort from all stakeholders. Filmmakers should focus on creating quality content that resonates with audiences while embracing modern technology to enhance production values. Encouraging collaborations with other regional and national industries can also help Assamese cinema gain wider recognition.

Promoting Assamese films internationally is another area of untapped potential. Film festivals and cultural exchanges can serve as platforms to showcase the uniqueness of Assamese storytelling and foster global appreciation. Additionally, subtitled films in multiple languages can help Assamese cinema transcend linguistic barriers and reach a broader audience.

Assamese cinema is at a crossroads, where challenges and opportunities coexist. While the problems are significant, the prospects are equally promising. With concerted efforts, Assamese cinema can emerge as a vibrant and influential force in India's cultural landscape, preserving the essence of Assam's identity while embracing innovation and change. The road ahead may be tough, but the spirit of Assamese filmmakers and artists ensures that the industry will continue to thrive and inspire. (The author is a poet, Science Journalist, Sustainability Advocate, Former Director, Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency, Ex-Joint Director of Agriculture, Assam. He can be reached at 9435103685 or mowsam2000@yahoo.co.in)

## Book Review

### Freedom Lost in Rights

By Smriti Kumar Sinha, Translated by Ramlal Sinha

By: Dipak Kurmi

Freedom Lost in Rights is an evocative and profound collection of short stories penned by Smriti Kumar Sinha, an eminent writer from the Bishnupriya Manipuri community, and rendered into lyrical English by Ramlal Sinha. This anthology not only captures the essence of a little-known language and culture but also plunges into universal themes that resonate across boundaries of geography, tradition, and time. A harmonious interplay of identity, belonging, and the fragility of a fading language forms the cornerstone of this collection, making it both a literary treasure and a poignant commentary on the cultural tapestry of Northeast India.

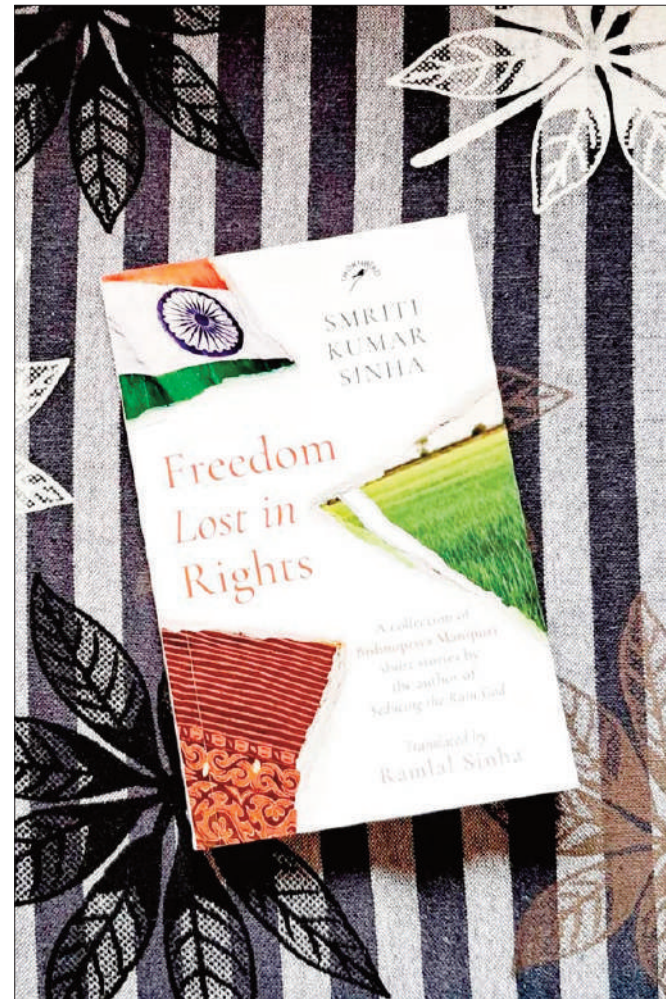
The collection comprises eleven stories, each a vibrant yet delicate thread in the intricate narrative fabric. These tales explore diverse themes, from love and friendship to caste discrimination, spirituality, and independence. Smriti Kumar Sinha masterfully portrays the struggles and joys of everyday life in the Bishnupriya Manipuri community, where ordinary moments are imbued with extraordinary emotional depth.

At its heart, the collection reflects the duality of resistance and hope, a duality that is perhaps most poignantly encapsulated in the language itself—a language endangered yet imbued with resilience. Through characters grappling with their roots, the stories evoke the struggles of a community striving to preserve its cultural and linguistic heritage. The nostalgic yearning of an old man for his native village, the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity experienced by two lovers, and the dreams of children wishing to sing in their mother tongue illustrate this duality with a tender, almost poetic poignancy.

The translation by Ramlal Sinha deserves special mention for its elegance and sensitivity. Sinha's ability to retain the emotional cadence of the original Bishnupriya Manipuri stories while transforming them into graceful English prose is remarkable. His trans-

lation breathes life into the stories, creating a seamless lyrical flow that enhances their immersive quality. The reader is transported into a world where the richness of a syncretic culture comes alive against the backdrop of the

brother Thun Thun's innocent wish. This act of love, though unacknowledged, resonates powerfully, reminding the reader of the silent sacrifices that often go unnoticed. Meanwhile, Akhanda-Prajna: A Love Story transcends the



lush landscapes of Northeast India.

Among the standout stories, Grass or Land touches deeply on the theme of friendship, depicting the innocent yet profound bond between Badan and Minu. Their prioritization of friendship over all else is portrayed with a raw emotional intensity that lingers long after the story ends. Similarly, The Lid offers a moving glimpse into the struggles of poverty, as a household prepares to welcome a guest with unwavering warmth despite their material hardships.

Gidei's Bangles is a tender narrative of sacrifice, where Shanti breaks her treasured bangles to fulfill her little

Smriti Kumar Sinha's prose, as rendered by Ramlal Sinha, is notable for its simplicity and grace. The storytelling is subtle yet impactful, drawing the reader into a world where emotions are palpable, characters are vividly real, and imagery is vibrant. This seamless narrative style ensures that readers remain engrossed, experiencing each story as a journey that enriches their understanding of humanity and culture.

The auditory imagery in the book is another highlight. Sinha's descriptions of sounds—whether it's the rattle of a train, the rhythm of a bangle breaking, or the lub-dub of a heart—add a visceral dimension to the narratives. These details create a sensory experience that heightens the emotional resonance of the stories.

The physical presentation of the book is equally commendable. Designed by Maithili Doshi, the cover reflects the themes of unity, cultural identity, and inclusion. The choice of white as the background color, paired with the Indian national flag and other subtle design elements, conveys a sense of harmony and universality that complements the book's essence.

Freedom Lost in Rights is a remarkable collection that transcends its immediate cultural context to offer a universal exploration of identity, love, and resilience. It is a must-read for anyone who appreciates short stories that are rich in cultural nuance and emotional depth. Whether you are drawn to its themes of tradition and modernity, the struggles of a marginalized community, or the sheer beauty of its prose, this book promises an unforgettable literary experience.

Highly recommended for readers seeking to immerse themselves in a world where the local meets the universal, Freedom Lost in Rights is a tribute to the enduring power of stories to connect us all. Grab a copy, and let Smriti Kumar Sinha and Ramlal Sinha take you on a journey through the soulful landscapes of the Bishnupriya Manipuri world. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

# NSA Sullivan to visit India to finalise important ongoing initiatives: White House

*Sullivan's speech at IIT Delhi will highlight India's importance to US priorities*

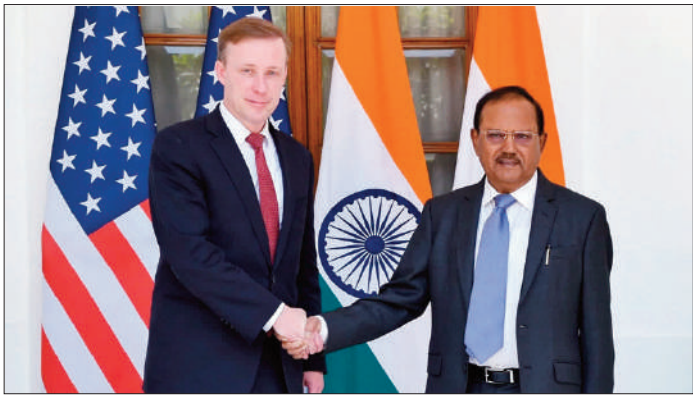
WASHINGTON, Jan 4: Outgoing US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will travel to India on January 5 and 6 for a final round of talks with his counterpart Ajit K Doval and other top government officials on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues and to finalise some ongoing initiatives.

His visit to India comes as the Joe Biden administration prepares to wrap up its four-year term.

Sullivan, 48, the youngest national security advisor when President Biden appointed him on January 20, 2021, would also deliver a major India-centric foreign policy speech at IIT, New Delhi during his last trip to India before leaving office.

Congressman Michael Waltz would succeed him on January 20, when Donald Trump is sworn in as the 47th President of the United States.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will be travelling to New Delhi, India, on January 5 and 6 for a capstone meeting with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on Friday.



"It will span a range of issues across the breadth of our partnership with India, from space, defence, and strategic technology cooperation, all the way also to shared security priorities in the Indo-Pacific and beyond," he said. During the visit, Sullivan will also meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and other Indian leaders. "He will also visit the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, where he will be able to meet with young Indian entrepreneurs and give a speech outlining the significant steps that the United States and India have taken together to

strengthen our innovation alliance under the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, otherwise known as ICET," Kirby said.

This will be Sullivan's final trip to the Indo-Pacific region as National Security Advisor.

"He's very excited and looking forward to these conversations at this critical time," Kirby said.

The main purpose of Sullivan's visit will be a capstone engagement and dialogue with his counterpart, a senior Biden administration official told reporters during a conference call Friday afternoon.

The two national security advisors will take stock of the progress that the two countries have made over the last four years, which has been a historic and transformative period in the bilateral relationship, the official said.

They will also "continue to finalise some ongoing initiatives that were important priorities for us to wrap up to continue our technology cooperation through the end of the administration and to identify new opportunities that we hope with an upcoming team, will continue to take forward," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"From the views of the Biden administration, the US-India relationship has not only been one of the bright points and a real foreign policy priority and an area of legacy achievement for the Biden administration, but it is also a relationship where they have seen continued bipartisan support and momentum from administration to administration in the United States," said the official.

Sullivan's speech at IIT Delhi will highlight India's importance to US priorities in the Indo-Pacific re-

gion and worldwide.

We see this as a partnership that is really not subject to huge partisan swings in the United States but has had a really enduring basis of support that we expect will continue to move forward," said the official.

The US delegation led by Sullivan will also have members from other government departments.

We will have the opportunity to meet with business leaders as well as young entrepreneurs in India, and really emphasise how much the progress that we have made in this relationship under the Biden administration is not only due to the work that has been done at a government to government level, but I think increasingly, due to the fantastic and strong relationships that exist at the people-to-people level, at company-to-company level, between the United States and India, said the official.

Overall, the message that we intend to leave with at the end of this trip is one of real gratitude for the friendship and the close partnership that President Biden and Prime Minister Modi have enjoyed over the last four years," the official said. (PTI)

## Six Indian Americans sworn-in as members of US House of Representatives



WASHINGTON, Jan 4: In a momentous occasion for Indian Americans, six of their leaders on Friday were sworn-in as the members of the US House of Representatives, the largest so far for this minority ethnic community in the United States.

"When I was first sworn in twelve years ago, I was the sole Indian American Member of Congress and only the third in US history. Now, our coalition is six strong! I am excited to welcome even more Indian Americans to the halls of Congress in the years to come!" Congressman Dr Ami Bera said in a post on X.

Bera, the senior most of them, who has been sworn-in for the seventh consecutive term as a representative of the seventh Congressional District of California, also posted a picture of all the six Indian American Congressman from the floor of the House.

Suhash Subramanian, who represents the 10th Congressional District of Virginia is the newest Indian American to be a member of the House of Representatives. "First day of work! Honoured to be sworn into the #119th Congress, and excited to get to work to deliver results for VA10," he said as he posted a picture of him along with his family and House Speaker Mike Johnson.

"Ready to Serve," said Congressman Shri Thanedar who represents the 13th Congressional District of Michigan as he posted a selfie of his from the House floor. All the six Indian American lawmakers are from the Democratic Party and voted for House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries in the election for House Speakership. Republican Mike Johnson was elected as the House Speaker.

Congressman Ro Khanna represents the 17th Congressional District of California and Raja Krishnamoorthi represents the eighth Congressional District of Illinois. Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, representing the seventh

Congressional District of Washington state, is the first ever Indian American woman to be elected to the House of Representatives.

All the three - Khanna, Krishnamoorthi and Jayapal - have been sworn-in for a fifth consecutive term, during which they have emerged as powerful lawmakers in their own way.

Krishnamoorthi is a Ranking Member of the powerful China Committee and also a member of the House Intelligence Committee. Jayapal is leader of the highly powerful progressive group of lawmakers. Khanna is not only a member of several powerful House committees, but also is seen as a potential presidential candidate in the years to come.

All the six Indian Americans constitute an informal Samosa Caucus, a term coined by Krishnamoorthi. When sworn in for the first term in 2012, Dr Bera had then wished to have 10 Indian Americans in the House of Representatives.

Several Indian Americans aspiring to be elected to the House lost elections either during the primaries or in the November 5 general elections. At least three of them were women: Sushila Jaipal, Bhavani Patel and Krystal Kaul.

Dalip Singh Sandhu was the first Indian American to be elected to the House of Representatives in 1957. Also, the first Sikh, he was elected for three consecutive terms. He was from the Democratic Party.

It took nearly five decades for a second Indian American to enter the US House of Representatives. Bobby Jindal represented the First Congressional District of Louisiana from 2005 to 2008.

He later went on to become the two-term Governor of Louisiana, making him the first Indian American to be elected as the governor of a US State. Jindal is the only Indian American to be elected to the House on a Republican ticket. (PTI)

## Biden to present Presidential Medal of Freedom to Hillary, George and Messi

WASHINGTON, Jan 4: US President Joe Biden has named former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, fashion designer Ralph Lauren, football superstar Lionel Messi, former Defence Secretary late Ashton Carter, and controversial investor George Soros, along with 14 others for the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is the Nation's highest civilian honour, would be presented to the awardees at a White House ceremony by Biden Saturday afternoon.

The prestigious award is presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavours, the White House said Saturday.

Biden believes great leaders keep the faith, give everyone a fair shot, and put decency above all else. These nineteen individuals are great leaders who have made America and the world a better place.

They are great leaders because they are good people who have made extraordinary contributions to their country and the world, the White House said.

Clinton made history many times over decades in public service, including as the first First Lady elected to the US Senate. After serving as Secretary of State, she became the first woman nominated for president by a major US political party, the White House said.

Soros is an investor, philanthropist, and founder of the Open Society Foundations.

Through his network of foundations, partners and projects in more than 120 countries, Soros has focused on global initiatives that strengthen democracy, human rights, education, and social justice, the White House said.

Soros, 94, in the recent past has spoken openly against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The ruling BJP believe that he tried to interfere in Indian elections.

In the last session of Parliament, the BJP raised the issue of alleged "links" of Congress leaders with Soros-backed outfits involved in "anti-India" activities, triggering

## Soldier who blew up Tesla at Trump hotel left note, called it 'wake up call' for US

LAS VEGAS, Jan 4: A highly decorated Army soldier who fatally shot himself in a Tesla Cybertruck just before it blew up outside the Trump hotel in Las Vegas left notes saying the New Year's Day explosion was a stunt to serve as a "wake up call" for the country's ills, investigators said Friday.

Matthew Livelsberger, a 37-year-old Green Beret from Colorado Springs, Colorado, also wrote in notes he left on his cellphone that he needed to "cleanse" his mind "of the brothers I've lost and relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took." Livelsberger served in the Army since 2006 and deployed twice to Afghanistan.

"This was not a terrorist attack, it was a wake up call. Americans only pay attention to spectacles and violence. What better way to get my point across than a stunt with fireworks and explosives," Livelsberger wrote in one letter found by authorities and released Friday.

vociferous protests from the opposition.

Congress, however, trashed these allegations.

In 2020, Soros slammed the Modi government while addressing an event at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, saying nationalism was making headway and the "biggest setback" was seen in India.

Lionel Messi is the most decorated player in the history of professional soccer. He supports healthcare and education programmes for children around the world through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, the White House said.

Fannie Lou Hamer, who transformed the struggle for racial justice in America, and Ashton Carter, who served as the 25th Secretary of Defence and devoted his career to making the nation safer for all, are being awarded the Medal of Freedom posthumously.

Robert Francis Kennedy is remembered as an Attorney General who fiercely combatted racial segregation, and as a United States Senator who sought to address poverty and inequality in the country and George W Romney, a businessman who served as the chairman and president of American Motors Corporation, are also being awarded posthumously.

Jose Andres, renowned Spanish-American culinary innovator who popularised tapas in the United States; Bono the frontman for legendary rock band U2 and a pioneering activist against AIDS and poverty; Michael J. Fox, an actor who has won five Emmy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, and a Grammy Award; and Tim Gill, a visionary entrepreneur whose work has advanced LGBTQI rights and equality, are other recipients of the award.

Other awardees are Jane Goodall, a world-renowned ethologist and conservationist; Earvin Magic Johnson, a legendary retired basketball player who led the Los Angeles Lakers to five championships; and Ralph Lauren, a fashion designer who redefined the fashion industry with a lifestyle brand that embodies timeless elegance and American tradition. (PTI)

The explosion caused minor injuries to seven people but virtually no damage to the Trump International Hotel. Authorities said that Livelsberger acted alone.

Livelsberger's letters covered a range of topics including political grievances, societal problems and both domestic and international issues, including the war in Ukraine. He said in one letter that the U.S. was "terminally ill and headed toward collapse."

Tesla engineers, meanwhile, helped extract data from the Cybertruck for investigators, including Livelsberger's path between charging stations from Colorado through New Mexico and Arizona and on to Las Vegas, according to Assistant Sheriff Dori Koren. "We still have a large volume of data to go through," Koren said Friday. "There's thousands if not millions of videos and photos and documents and web history and all of those things that need to be analyzed." (AP)

## Judge sets Trump's sentencing in hush money case for Jan 10, but signals no jail time

NEW YORK, Jan 4: In an extraordinary turn, a judge Friday set President-elect Donald Trump's sentencing in his hush money case for January 10 — little over a week before he's due to return to the White House — but indicated he wouldn't be jailed.

The development nevertheless leaves Trump on course to be the first president to take office convicted of felony crimes.

Judge Juan M Merchan, who presided over Trump's trial, signalled in a written decision that he'd sentence the former and future president to what's known as a conditional discharge, in which a case gets dismissed if a defendant avoids rearrest.

Merchan rejected Trump's push to dismiss the verdict and throw out the case on presidential immunity grounds and because of his impending return to the White House. The judge said he found "no legal impediment to sentencing" Trump and that it was "incumbent" on him to

sentencing Trump prior to his swearing in on January 20.

"Only by bringing finality to this matter" will the interests of justice be served, Merchan wrote.

Trump was convicted in May of 34 counts of falsifying business records. They involved an alleged scheme to hide a hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels in the last weeks of Trump's first campaign in 2016. The payout was made to keep her from publicising claims she'd had sex with the married Trump years earlier. He says that her story is false and that he did nothing wrong.

After Trump's November 5 election, Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed the sentencing so the defense and prosecution could weigh in on the future of the case.

Trump's lawyers urged Merchan to toss it. They said it would otherwise pose unconstitutional "disruptions" to the incoming president's ability to run the country. Prosecu-

tors acknowledged there should be some accommodation for his upcoming presidency, but they insisted the conviction should stand.

They suggested various options, such as freezing the case during his term or guaranteeing him a no-jail sentence. They also proposed closing the case while formally noting both his conviction and his undecided appeal — a novel idea drawn from what some state courts do when criminal defendants die while appealing their cases.

Trump takes office January 20 as the first former president to be convicted of a crime and the first convicted criminal to be elected to the office.

His conviction left the 78-year-old facing the possibility of punishment ranging from a fine or probation to up to four years in prison.

The case centered on how Trump accounted for reimbursing his personal attorney for the Daniels payment. (AP)

## Myanmar releases thousands of prisoners to mark Independence Day

BANGKOK, Jan 4: Myanmar's military government has released more than 6,000 prisoners and has reduced other inmates' sentences as part of a mass amnesty marking the 77th anniversary of independence from Britain on Saturday.

They included just a small proportion of hundreds of political detainees jailed for opposing army rule since the military seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. That takeover was met with massive nonviolent resistance, which has since become a widespread armed struggle. State-run MRTV television reported that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, granted amnesties covering 5,864 prisoners from Myanmar, as well as 180 foreigners who will be deported. Mass prisoner releases are common on holidays and other significant occasions in Myanmar. The terms of release warn that if the freed

detainees violate the law again, they will have to serve the remainder of their original sentences in addition to any new sentence.

In a separate report, it said Min Aung Hlaing had commuted the life sentences of 144 prisoners to 15 years' imprisonment. The report provided no details about them.

The report also said that all other prisoners will have their sentences reduced by one sixth, except those convicted under the Explosive Substances Act, the Unlawful Associations Act, the Arms Act and the Counterterrorism Law, all laws which are often used against opponents of military rule. Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, the spokesperson for the military government, said in an audio note to journalists that those being released included about 600 prisoners who were prosecuted under Section 505(A) of Myanmar's penal code, which makes it a crime to spread comments that create public unrest or fear or spread false news. (AP)

## Japanese woman who was world's oldest person at 116 has died

TOKYO, Jan 4: Tomiko Itooka, a Japanese woman who was the world's oldest person according to Guinness World Records, has died, an Ashiya city official said Saturday. She was 116.

Yoshitsugu Nagata, an official in charge of elderly policies, said Itooka died on December 29 at a care home in Ashiya, Hyogo Prefecture, central Japan.

Itooka, who loved bananas and a yogurt-flavoured Japanese drink called Calpis, was born on May 23, 1908. She became the oldest person last year following the death of 117-year-old Maria Branyas, according to the Gerontology Research Group.

When she was told she was at the top of the World Supercentarian Rankings List, she simply replied, "Thank you."

When Itooka celebrated her birthday last year, she received flowers, a cake and a card from the mayor. Born in Osaka, Itooka was a volleyball player in high school, and long had a reputation for a sprightly spirit, Nagata said. She climbed the 3,067-metre (10,062-foot) Mount Ontake twice.

She married at 20, and had two daughters and two sons, according to Guinness. (AP)

## Senior official of Pakistan's Kurram district injured in firing

PESHAWAR, Jan 4: The Deputy Commissioner of northwest Pakistan's restive Kurram district was injured when assailants fired on his convoy on Saturday, days after a peace agreement was reached between two warring parties in the sectarian-violence-hit district.

According to sources, the incident took place in the Kojalai Baba village near Bagan, when residents opened fire on military vehicles, injuring Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kurram Javedullah Mehsud and three security personnel. Mehsud was in the area to review arrangements for an aid convoy to take food items to the district after the main Peshawar-Sadda-Thal-Parachinar road's opening after 85 days of closure.

Sources said that the firing took place during negotiations between government officials and the protestors who had blocked the main road.

Mehsud was shot three and was rushed to a hospital in the Lower Alizai tehsil for treat-

ment. Three protestors were also injured, official sources said.

We suspect that local spoilers are involved in the attack, said a military official.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that the situation in Kurram is under control. He said all travel and security-related arrangements were in place for the protection of the convoy. The DC is undergoing surgery but his condition is out of danger, said Barrister Saif, who was present at the scene along with the Kohat Commissioner and Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and provincial Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack.

Gandapur condemned the firing and sought a report on the incident from senior officials. He wished those injured in the firing a speedy recovery. (PTI)

## Republican Mike Johnson re-elected House Speaker after dramatic floor vote

*The Louisiana Republican received a renewed nod of support from Trump*

WASHINGTON, Jan 4: Republican Mike Johnson won re-election to the House speakership on a first ballot Friday, pushing past GOP hard-right holdouts and buoyed with a nod of support from President-elect Donald Trump.

A collection of hardline Republicans convened in the back of the House chamber during a tense roll call on the first day of the new Congress, one by one declining to vote or choosing another lawmaker. The standoff sparked fresh turmoil signalling trouble ahead under unified GOP control of Washington.

In the end, however, Johnson was able to flip two remaining holdouts who switched to support him, drawing applause from Republicans.

As the most recent speaker, Johnson's weak grip on the gavel threatens not only his own survival but President-elect Trump's ambitious agenda of tax cuts and mass deportations as Republicans sweep to power.

Newly-elected House lawmakers started casting votes as Johnson's name was put forward for



nomination by the GOP Conference Chair Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich.

No speaker's perfect, she said. But the goal is to make progress toward shared priorities for the country, she said. None of us will get exactly what we want.

Democrats put forward their own leader, Hakeem Jeffries of New York, as the only one with a track record of compromise and achievement in the face of chaos and dysfunction under the GOP majority.

House Democrats are united be-

hind the most powerful legislative leader in this chamber, said Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., of Jeffries, recounting the many times their votes bailed out Johnson to ensure passage of important legislation.

With opposition from his own GOP colleagues, Johnson arrived with outward confidence after working into the night to sway hardline holdouts. A flop by Johnson could throw Monday's congressional certification of Trump's 2024 election victory into turmoil without a House speaker. Even backing from Trump himself, usu-

ally a sure bet for Republicans, was no guarantee Johnson will stay in power.

"We don't have time for drama, Johnson said as he walked into the Capitol. The Louisiana Republican received a renewed nod of support from Trump. A win for Mike today will be a big win for the Republican Party, Trump posted on social media.

What was once a ceremonial day with newly elected lawmakers arriving to be sworn into office, often with family, friends and children in tow, has evolved into a high-stakes vote for the office of House speaker, among the most powerful elected positions in Washington. Vice President Kamala Harris was swearing in the senators.

While the Senate is able to convene on its own and has already elected party leaders Senator John Thune as the Republican majority leader and Sen. Chuck Schumer for the Democratic minority the House must first elect its speaker, a role required by the Constitution, second in the line of succession to the president. (AP)

# Only one solution to Naga political issue from Centre: Deputy CM Patton

**KOHIMA, Jan 4:** Nagaland deputy chief minister Yanthungo Patton, while emphasising that the Centre is willing to offer only one solution to the longstanding Naga political issue, on Saturday urged Naga underground factions and people to come together for a permanent resolution.

Addressing the 175th anniversary celebration of Lhisemia Thino, the amalgamation of different clans of Lhisemia Khel (sector) of Kohima village, Patton said, "The Centre, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is ready to give us a solution only if our Naga factions are united."

Expressing concern over the existence of around 28 underground factions claiming to fight for a common Naga solution, the minister said, "Not every faction is engaged in negotiations with the Centre as some are involved in anti-social activities, including extortion and illegal taxation from the public."

"It is sad to see that our political movement is broken into pieces with about 28 factions running parallel governments today, marred with illegal taxations and extortions, making life difficult for our Naga people and hindering any progressive and sustainable activities," he said.

Reiterating that he is not against any Naga factions genuinely negotiating with the Centre for a final solution, he pointed out that "many of the groups are either for



extortions or for self-interest." The deputy CM wondered, "How can Naga people survive in this kind of situation?"

He added that Naga society, both overground and underground, is "completely shattered and fragmented," noting that Nagas are at a crucial juncture.

"We need a strong and cohesive society for the growth and progress of the state," Patton said, adding that the state government, under the leadership of chief minister Neiphiu Rio, has formed an opposition-less

government, bringing all sixty elected MLAs together under one umbrella, irrespective of political party affiliations, with the aim to bring unity among Naga society and work towards a permanent solution to the protracted Naga political issue.

"Our adversaries may level all sorts of allegations against the opposition-less government, but it was done with greater objectives for good and not for misuse," he asserted.

The Centre has been holding political ne-

gotiations with the NSCN-IM since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 1997 and also inked the Framework Agreement in 2015.

It also entered into parallel negotiations with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGs), composed of at least seven Naga factions, in 2017. They signed the Agreed Position in November 2017.

Negotiations between the Centre and Naga groups were declared to have concluded on October 30, 2019, by the then interlocutor and Governor of Nagaland, R N Ravi.

However, the persistent demand for a separate Naga flag and constitution, as well as the integration of Naga-inhabited areas spread across four states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland—and the neighboring country of Myanmar, has not been accepted by the Centre, thus delaying the final solution.

Nonetheless, the WC NNPGs have declared their acceptance of the solution and continue talks for the remaining demands. But, the final solution remains elusive.

The deputy CM appealed to everyone to spread the message of peace and unity among the Naga society, irrespective of tribe, clan, or region, for the progress and prosperity of the state and for the posterity. (PTI)

## Security forces dominate Kangpokpi following SP office attack



**IMPHAL, Jan 4:** Security was beefed up in Manipur's Kangpokpi district where the SP was injured in a mob attack for failing to "remove" the central armed forces as per the demands of Kuki groups, officials said on Saturday.

A mob on Friday evening attacked the office of Superintendent of Police M Prabhakar, throwing stones and other "projectiles" to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the BSF and the CRPF, in the Saibol village. Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were vandalised. Prabhakar was injured after being hit on the forehead by some projectile, officials said.

A senior officer in Imphal said a huge contingent of security forces have been deployed in the area.

"Situation is now under control and being closely monitored," he added. In a statement, the police said that besides stones, the protestors attacked the SP office with petrol bombs.

"Security forces retaliated against the mob and resorted to the use of adequate force to disperse the mob and the situation was brought under control," it said.

The SP is "fine now and presently leading the joint security forces in tackling the situation," it added.

A few protesters, who sustained injuries during the clashes, were also been admitted to hospital, officials said.

Kuki organisations have been protesting against central forces after women of the community were allegedly baton-charged on December 31 for blocking their

way. Locals claimed that several people were injured in the action by the security forces that happened in Saibol village in Twiching, which is located in the so-called 'buffer zone' between the Kuki-held Hills and Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley.

They said that the local women had gathered to protest what they described as the "forceful occupation" of community bunkers by security personnel.

The security forces had conducted the operation at the village and its peripheral areas following gunfights between armed groups, which injured four people, including a police personnel.

Protesting the December 31 action by security forces, the Kangpokpi-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) blocked the critical transportation route of National Highway 2, disrupting the movement of goods to the Imphal Valley where the Meiteis live.

Meanwhile, the security forces recovered a large cache of arms and ammunition from the Loibol Khunou area of the district on Friday.

Among the items recovered were a modified 7.62 mm sniper rifle, an improvised long-range mortar, locally called 'pumpi', three 9mm pistols with magazines, a 12 bore Gun, an SBBL gun, 10 live rounds of ammunition, three hand grenades, three picket grenades, two tear smoke grenades and a wireless set, police said.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023. (PTI)

## Two arrested in connection with woman's murder in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, Jan 4:** Two persons have been arrested in connection with the murder of a migrant worker in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh, police said on Saturday.

Addressing reporters, Papum Pare Superintendent of Police (SP) Taru Gusa said that the victim was 24 years old and was employed as a housekeeping staffer at a construction site in Lekhi.

Her partially buried body was discovered on December 27 near an under-construction building.

"The body was discovered after locals noticed unusual earth filling at the site. Upon inspection, police found a red wool cloth, which led them to the victim's body. Initial observations indicated strangulation, as a piece of blue cloth was tied around her neck," the SP said.

During investigation, police traced the last call made to the victim's phone on December 26 to a number belonging to a 38-year-old migrant labourer working at the construction site.

Eyewitness accounts and CCTV footage corroborated his presence with the victim on the night of the crime, he said.

The labourer had fled the area after the incident and was tracked to Hosur in Tamil Nadu, where he had recently taken up work as a security guard.

A team of Arunachal Pradesh Police, with assistance from Tamil Nadu Police, arrested him on January 3. He was remanded to police custody for four days for further questioning, the SP said.

Another suspect, a 28-year-old man who was spotted with the accused on the night of the incident, was also arrested and is currently in custody. (PTI)

## Bailey bridge collapses in Sikkim

**GANGTOK, Jan 4:** A 25-year-old bailey bridge in Sikkim collapsed when an overloaded truck was crossing it on Saturday, officials said.

The 200-foot bridge, located over Lachung Chu River, was on the Lachung-Katao Road. No casualties were reported in the incident as the bridge did not fall into the river and the driver of the truck was rescued safely.

An official in the North Sikkim district administration said vehicles are being diverted through an alternative bridge, which can be used by tourists and locals till the collapsed bridge is repaired and restored.

"Officials of the district administration will visit Lachung and assess the damages caused by the collapse and plan repair and restoration work accordingly. All departments and agencies concerned, including Border Roads Organisation and Indian Army, will be consulted before restoration work on the bridge begins," he said.

Tourists need not panic as the alternative route is functional, popular tourist destinations in the area are open and passes are being issued by the tourism department, the official said. (PTI)

## Sikkim Guv visits Doklam, interacts with Army

**GANGTOK, Jan 4:** Sikkim Governor Om Prakash Mathur visited Doklam and interacted with the Army personnel posted there, an official statement said. Located at an altitude of 15,600 feet, Doklam saw a standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in 2017.

Mathur was accompanied by Rajasthan's Forest and Environment Minister Sanjay Sharma during the visit on Friday, according to the statement issued by the Raj Bhavan late in the night.

The governor's visit began with a warm reception at 8th Mile JN Road where he was greeted by locals as well as members of Kyongnosla Gram Panchayat, along with officers and staff of the Forest De-

partment and Sikkim Police, the statement said. Mathur, who hails from Rajasthan, planted an oak tree there. He also held discussions with the panchayat members and locals on development and environmental conservation.

Upon his arrival in Doklam, the governor was welcomed by Major General MS Rathore, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 17th Mountain Division.

Interacting with the Army personnel, he expressed gratitude towards the soldiers' relentless commitment to safeguarding the nation, the statement said.

"He commended the Indian Army personnel by offering words of praise for their bravery, courage,



and unwavering dedication. He applauded the soldiers for their continued devotion, which has been instrumental in safeguarding the country's security and honour," it said.

The governor also visited Kupup, home to the world's highest golf

course. While returning to state capital Gangtok, he stopped at Dichu village where he interacted with locals. During the interaction, the villagers shared their concerns with Mathur who assured them to provide necessary help through the Raj Bhavan. (PTI)

## Arunachal minister Wangsu seeks reforms in agriculture sector

**ITANAGAR, Jan 4:** Arunachal Pradesh agriculture and horticulture minister Gabriel D Wangsu on Saturday said allocating central funds based solely on population metrics is detrimental to the state.

Participating in a virtual discussion on agriculture reforms, chaired by Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Wangsu called for a framework that considers the state's vast land resources and the socio-economic condition of its farmers while allocating central funds.

"Our state's huge potential for agricultural development, combined with the need to uplift the livelihoods of our farmers, must be reflected in the allocation criteria," he pointed out.

Wangsu presented a thorough case highlighting the unique agricultural needs of the state and addressed the specific challenges and opportunities faced by the region. He proposed several reforms aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural development, according to an official communiqué.

Additionally, Wangsu called for a revision of the current funding disbursement model under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). He emphasised that the existing system, which releases funds in four installments, is impractical for a geographically challenging state like Arunachal Pradesh.



This approach, he explained, delayed the timely implementation of agricultural projects, as farming activities cannot be left incomplete due to funding shortages.

To address this, the minister proposed a single-installment disbursement model, which would allow for seamless project execution and efficient resource utilisation.

Addressing the traditional practice of shifting cultivation prevalent in the region, he urged the Centre to support sustainable alternatives such as terrace farming, capacity building and extension services.

These initiatives, he noted, would help mitigate environmental degradation while enhancing agricultural productivity.

Another critical concern Wangsu raised was the burden of farmers' contributions under the PMKSY (Per Drop More Crop)

scheme. He proposed reducing the contribution from 45 per cent to 15 per cent to make the micro-irrigation programme more accessible, especially for small and marginal farmers.

Wangsu drew attention to the strategic importance of Arunachal Pradesh along the India-China border, calling for separate financial allocations under the vibrant village programme (VVP) to ensure holistic agricultural development in these remote and sensitive areas.

The minister also highlighted the growing human-animal conflicts in the state, which pose significant challenges to agriculture and livelihoods. He advocated for an integrated policy framework that combines land-use planning, agricultural strategies and wildlife conservation to promote coexistence between humans and wildlife.

Wangsu emphasised the need for enhanced financial allocations for the horticulture sector, which holds immense ecological and economic potential for Arunachal Pradesh.

"The growth of horticulture is not just an economic necessity but an ecological imperative for our state," he added.

The conference was attended by agriculture and horticulture ministers from across India to share their perspectives on advancing agricultural policies and practices ahead of the budget session. (PTI)

## Akshay Sachdeva to be next DGP of Sikkim

**GANGTOK, Jan 4:** Akshay Sachdeva was appointed as the new Director General of Police (DGP) of Sikkim, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said on Saturday. Sachdeva, an IPS officer of the 1991 batch, was Special DG (Law & Order) in his last posting. He will succeed AK Singh as the DGP.

"Heartiest congratulations to Shri Akshay

Sachdeva, IPS, on his promotion as the Director General of Police, Sikkim," Tamang said in a social media post. "Sachdeva's dedication to public service inspires confidence in his ability to lead Sikkim toward greater progress and excellence. I extend my best wishes for his tremendous success in this important role," he added. (PTI)

## Former Tripura CM accuses BJP of divisive politics

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Jan 4:** Former Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar on Saturday criticized the ruling BJP, accusing it of fostering divisions among Hindus, Muslims, Tribals, and Non-Tribals to divert attention from pressing issues such as rising prices, unemployment, and economic hardships.

Speaking at a blood donation camp he inaugurated in Agartala, Sarkar highlighted the need for more robust efforts by the state government to encourage youth participation in blood donation drives. "While some initiatives have been taken, they remain confined to occasional events. The government must go beyond this and engage clubs, organizations, and communities to actively contribute to such causes," he said.

Sarkar, a CPIM Politburo member, also addressed recent communal tensions following the

vandalisation of idols across the state. He called for stricter government action to prevent such incidents, saying, "If the government is resolute, no one will dare to instigate divisions based on religion and caste. Legal action must be taken against those responsible. Dialogue alone is insufficient—concrete steps are necessary."

He accused political forces of deliberately creating rifts among communities to distract the public from critical issues. "Divisions between Hindus and Muslims are being orchestrated to shift focus from the rising prices of essential commodities, the weakening of the Indian currency, unemployment, and the declining purchasing power of common people," Sarkar alleged.

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Shri Maneswar Das, son of Buddheswar Das, aged about 57 years, resident of Uttar Kamakhya Guri, PO-Kamkhya Guri & PS-Kumargram, District-Jalpaiguri, State-West Bengal, Pin No. 736202 and presently residing at Assam Rifles Training Centre and School, PO & PS-Diphu, District Karbi Anglong, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that in my Sheetroil (FSD) my wife's name has been wrongly recorded as 'Debjani Barman' instead of 'Debjani Das'.

I swear this affidavit before the Notary Public, Diphu declaring the above facts are true to the best of my knowledge and belief and to submit before the concerned authority that my wife's actual and correct name is 'Debjani Das' in support of this affidavit.

### LOST

I, Mr. Ram Laxhan Chauhan son of Shri Rabi Chauhan lost my all Original all HSLC, HS, (Degree B. Sc) Certificates, Music Diploma on 25/12/2024. If any body finds the lost document kindly contact : 8882186604 Name : Ram Laxhan Chauhan Father's Name : Rabi Chauhan Address : Jiribasa Nepali Gaon, Mailoo Bazar District: Karbi Anglong Pin : 782446

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Ratna Barik, D/o late Longkmi Ronghang, aged about 35 years is legally wedded spouse of (as NOK) of No.4375925P, Rank-SEP, name Nityananda Barik by religion - Hindu by nationality - Indian, occupation - House wife, residing at village -2 No. Udali Bakalia, PO & PS- Bakalia, District Karbi Anglong, Assam, have changed my name from Ratna Barik to Ratna Ronghangpi Barik.

That due to inadvertence my aforesaid name has only been recorded and written as Ratna Barik in my husband's service record in place of my actual name Ratna Ronghangpi Barik (proposed new name).

Ratna Barik and Ratna Ronghangpi Barik (proposed new name) denote the name of one and the same person and nobody else. That, I shall always hereafter in all records, deeds and writing and in all proceedings dealing with transactions, private as well as under all occasions whatsoever may be only Ratna Ronghangpi Barik.

## LEADS 2024 Logistics Report: Tripura among four NE states as 'Fast Movers'

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh earned the 'Achievers' title

**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Jan 4:** Tripura has been recognized as a 'Fast Mover' in the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2024 report, alongside Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim. The report was unveiled by Union minister of commerce and industry, Piyush Goyal, during a ceremony in New Delhi on Friday.

The event also featured the felicitation of winners under the "Logistics Excellence, Advancement, and Performance Shield (LEAPS) 2024" initiative.

According to the LEADS



2024 report, states in the North-East displayed varied

performance in logistics. Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

earned the 'Achievers' title, while Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim were named 'Fast Movers.' Manipur was categorized as an 'Aspirer.'

The assessment was based on four key pillars: Logistics Infrastructure, Logistics Services, Operating and Regulatory Environment, and a new criterion, Sustainable Logistics.

The report also showcases initiatives undertaken by different states and union territories across these parameters, while offering tailored recommendations to improve their logistics efficiency and support evidence-based decision-making.

## Cong launches 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign targeting Shah for 'insulting' Ambedkar



**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** The Congress has announced the launch of a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign to press for the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" BR Ambedkar, the principal architect of India's Constitution.

Congress leader Pawan Khera said under the campaign, party leaders will organise 'Chaupals' in every district and tell people how the BJP-RSS has been insulting Ambedkar and demeaning the Constitution for decades.

Launched on January 3, the campaign will culminate on January 26 with a grand rally at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh, the birthplace of Ambedkar, commemorating 75 years of the Constitution and the Republic, Khera said.

"To safeguard his legacy and values, a 'Samvidhan Bachao Rashtriya Padayatra' will be held from January 26, 2025, to January 26, 2026 -- connecting villages and towns across India with a powerful message of unity and social justice.

"We reiterate our demand to sack Home Minister Amit Shah for his derogatory remarks against Dr Ambedkar," Khera told reporters.

The Congress leader also accused the BJP leadership of trying to "normalise the demonisation" of national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, who left an indelible mark in the country's history.

"Make-up artists" cannot replace national icons whose contributions to the nation are immense. Such people have certainly created a name for themselves in the country's history. Icons like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar cannot be replaced," Khera said.

He also said the campaign aims to awaken and tell the people of the country about BJP's actions and the "insult" to Ambedkar.

Replying to a debate on the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha on December 17, Shah had criticised the Congress for repeatedly taking Ambedkar's name.

"It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar... Had they taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven," Shah had said.

"We hoped that the home minister would apologise and the prime minister would intervene in this matter. But Prime Minister Modi supported the home minister and

became a partner in insulting Ambedkar ji," Khera claimed.

The Congress leader said this issue was also raised at the Belagavi meeting where it was decided that the party will launch a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign across the country.

"Under this campaign, we will organise 'Chaupals' in every district and tell people how the BJP-RSS has been insulting Ambedkar ji and demeaning the Constitution for decades," Khera said.

The Congress leader also recalled how on November 30, 1949, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) described the Constitution as "un-Indian" in its mouthpiece 'Organiser'.

"When Ambedkar ji talked about equal rights for women, RSS burnt his effigy at the Ramlila Maidan. Not just Ambedkar ji, but Gandhi ji's legacy is also being attacked today," he alleged.

He also claimed that BJP was confident of changing Ambedkar's Constitution by winning more than 400 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which didn't happen.

"But, had this happened, not only would the Constitution have changed, even Mahatma Gandhi's picture would have been removed from currency notes.

"Mahatma Gandhi, whom the whole world considers an ideal, is slowly being removed by the ruling party of his own country. That is why the Congress is moving ahead and preserving the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi," he said.

Khera also said the BJP cannot roam around speaking about the Constitution while keeping 'Manusmriti' in its armpit.

"BJP not just openly commits injustice against Dalits and Adivasis in the country, it also weakens their laws. The BJP is against constitutional and democratic institutions. It has always insulted Ambedkar ji, but we will not tolerate this anymore," he said.

Khera also released a pamphlet for the 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign, claiming the Congress seeks to reveal with historical background how the BJP has been conspiring against 90 per cent of India's population.

"Insulting Babasaheb Ambedkar or conspiring against him is a violation of the rights of 90 per cent of the people of this country... It is an attack on them," Khera alleged. (PTI)

## Instead of creating infra in Delhi, Kejriwal built 'sheesh mahal': Shah

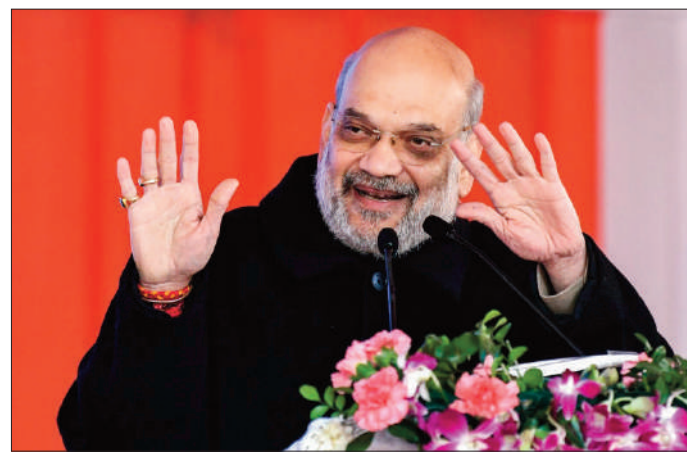
**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday slammed Arvind Kejriwal for building a "sheesh mahal" for himself instead of creating infrastructure in the capital during his nearly 10-year term as Delhi chief minister, saying the AAP convenor will have to give an account for it.

Addressing an event after inaugurating a working women's hostel -- Sushma Bhavan -- of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Shah listed a host of expensive items and appliances used in Kejriwal's official residence as the chief minister, saying he had never heard of some of those things.

When Kejriwal entered politics, he vowed not to take a government car or bungalow, and promised to herald a new kind of politics, Shah said.

But the AAP leader could not be satisfied by one, two, three or four bungalows, and instead built himself a "sheesh mahal" spread across 50,000 square yards of land, costing people of Delhi ₹ 45 crore, he added.

The BJP has been using the term "sheesh mahal", a colloquial Hindi term for an opulent house, to target Kejriwal.



The home minister said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi could not build a system to supply water to the residents, but Kejriwal spent ₹ 14 crore on a water plant for his family of four.

"Kejriwal Ji, you will have to give an account to the people of Delhi. They are demanding answers from you," Shah said.

He alleged that over ₹ 6 crore was spent on designer marbles, ₹ 6 crore on motorised curtains, ₹ 70 lakh on automatic doors, ₹ 50 lakh on carpets and ₹ 64 lakh on smart

TVs at the chief minister's residence when Kejriwal occupied it. Taking a swipe, Shah said he had suggested to Kejriwal on X that he should allow people of Delhi to take a tour of the "sheesh mahal" so that they could see what kind of home their chief minister lived in.

Some young persons had come to see him and when he told them that Kejriwal has done nothing for Delhi, they retorted that he was being unjust as the AAP leader built a "sheesh mahal", the senior BJP leader said in sarcasm.

## Delhi polls: BJP fields ex-MPs Parvesh Verma, Ramesh Bidhuri against Kejriwal and Atishi



**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** The BJP on Saturday released its first list of 29 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls, fielding former MP Parvesh Verma from the New Delhi seat against ex-chief minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal.

It has named another former MP Ramesh Bidhuri from Kalkaji, where Chief Minister and AAP candidate Atishi is in the fray.

The New Delhi seat, held by Kejriwal since 2013, will witness the former chief minister taking on the sons of two other former chief ministers. Verma is the son of Sahib Singh Verma, who had a two-year tenure as chief minister in the 1990s.

Former West Delhi MP Verma started his preparations for contesting from the seat even before he was announced as the official candidate, saying he had been given the go-ahead by national leaders. The Congress candidate from the seat is former three-term chief minister Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit. The BJP's first list features

eight prominent leaders who switched over from the Congress and AAP in recent months.

Former Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely has been fielded from the Gandhi Nagar seat in east Delhi, replacing incumbent BJP MLA Anil Bajpai.

Bajpai had defeated Lovely from the seat in the 2020 polls. Tarvinder Singh Marwah, a three-time former Congress MLA from Jangpura who joined the BJP in 2022, will contest from the same seat.

He is pitted against senior AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia.

Former transport minister Kailash Gahlot has been fielded from Bijwasan.

The two-time Najafgarh MLA resigned as minister and quit AAP to join the BJP in November. Raaj Kumar Anand, who resigned as a minister and quit AAP earlier this year, was fielded from the Patel Nagar seat.

Chhatrapur MLA Kartar Singh, who also switched to the saffron

party from AAP, has been fielded from the same seat.

ND Sharma, another former AAP MLA, will contest as a BJP candidate from Badarpur.

The Badarpur seat was held by the BJP's Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, who was elected to the Lok Sabha from South Delhi earlier this year.

The saffron party has fielded its national office-bearers Dushyant Kumar Gautam and Ashish Sood from the Karol Bagh and the Janakpuri seats, respectively.

BJP national secretary Manjinder Singh Sirsa will contest from Rajouri Garden, which he had won in the 2015 elections.

Former Congress councillor Kumari Rinku is the BJP's candidate from Seemapuri.

The BJP also retained incumbent MLAs OP Sharma (Vishwas Nagar), Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Vijender Gupta (Rohini), Ajay Mahawar (Ghonda) and Jitendra Mahajan (Rohtas Nagar).

The party has not yet announced its candidates for the two other seats it won in the 2020 polls -- Laxmi Nagar and the Karawal Nagar.

Former Delhi BJP president Satish Upadhyay will contest from Malviya Nagar.

The party has fielded former MLA Manoj Shokeen against Delhi minister Raghuvinder Shokeen from the Nangloi Jat seat.

The BJP's city unit chief Virendra Sachdeva said in a statement that the party had fielded "strong" candidates who would act as "catalysts" for change. Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due next month. (PTI)

The Union minister further accused Kejriwal of overseeing a series of corruption scandals, including in Delhi's liquor policy, Mohalla Clinics, CCTV installations, and bus purchases.

Shah also invoked the legacy of late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, whom he described as a "fighting opposition leader" remembered for her service in various key ministries.

Shah emphasised that while Swaraj's contributions to the foreign and health ministries would be remembered in Indian parliamentary history, Kejriwal's legacy would be tainted by corruption and self-interest.

"People of Delhi are smart, and they will not be deceived. Kejriwal must answer for his actions," Shah said, adding that the BJP was committed to providing "honest and accountable" governance in the national capital.

As the Delhi elections approach, the battle for control of the city is expected to intensify, with both the BJP and AAP pulling no punches in their campaign rhetoric.

The Assembly elections in Delhi are expected to take place in February. (PTI)

## Going to Ajmer Dargah with PM's message of brotherhood: Rijiju

**JAIPUR, Jan 4:** Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju on Saturday left for the Ajmer Dargah from Jaipur to offer a ceremonial 'chadar' sent by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the 'Urs' of Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

"The prime minister's message is of brotherhood and that the country should stay united... I am going to Ajmer Dargah with this message," Rijiju told reporters at the airport here before leaving for Ajmer by road.

He was received by the BJP's state minority morcha leaders at the airport.

The minister will present the 'chadar' at the shrine of the Sufi saint and read out PM Modi's message.

"On this auspicious occasion of Urs, we want that a good atmosphere should be created in the country. No one should do anything that can affect the harmony of our country," Rijiju said.

Be it a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Parsi, Buddhist or Jain, everyone is welcome at the dargah, he said.

Lakhs of people visit the dargah and people should not face any problem. The process there should be simple. Something new is being launched for improvements, he said. (PTI)

## MP govt to apprise courts of toxic waste transportation and subsequent protests

**BHOPAL, Jan 4:** Amid protests over planned disposal of 337 tonnes of toxic waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy in the Pithampur industrial town of the Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has decided to apprise the courts of the latest position on the issue and not to proceed ahead till further court orders on the issue.

The decision was taken on Friday night during a high-level meeting to review the situation.

"The state government stands firmly with the people. We will not allow any harm to the public. We will bring the matter before the court and will proceed with any action only in compliance with the court's order, Yadav told reporters after the meeting.

The chief minister has appealed to the citizens not to believe in rumours.

Yadav held discussions with senior public representatives and top administrative and police officials as well as legal experts in the meeting regarding the transportation of the Union Carbide waste and its dumping and disposal near Pithampur.

He said that they have discussed various aspects of the work related to dumping of Union Carbide waste in the presence of deputy chief ministers Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla, senior MP and state president of the Bharatiya Janata Party Vishnu Dutt Sharma, Urban Development and Housing Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, Chief Secretary Anurag Jain, Additional Chief Secretary Dr Rajesh Rajora, Director General of Police Kailash Mak-

wana, Principal Secretary Law and other senior officials in the Chief Minister's Office.

Yadav said "The Madhya Pradesh government is a government that gives top priority to the interests of the public. Therefore, we have always moved forward with the public interest in mind. In compliance with the Supreme Court's instructions and the High Court's order, the Union Carbide waste has been transported to Pithampur."

He said they only transported it while complying with the safety parameters in line with the petitions and orders of the court. The court had given a deadline that the waste should be sent to the designated place before January 4. The court expected its report by January 6.

Yadav said that he took cognizance of the prevailing situation and in such circumstances, if any kind of threat or any sense of fear arises among the public on the parameters of security, then the state government will try to present this subject before the court. Only after this, any further action should be taken, he added.

"Whatever order the honourable court gives, we will be ready to follow it. We will not move forward until the court issues any direction," he stressed.

Earlier in the day, protests rocked Pithampur against the planned disposal of 337 tonnes of toxic waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy, prompting the authorities to clamp prohibitory orders around the premises of the firm where the incineration will be carried out. (PTI)

## AAP will shrink to single digit in Delhi polls due to their misdeeds: Congress' Sandeep Dikshit

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit said the Aam Aadmi Party will face defeat in the upcoming Delhi assembly election as a result of their "misdeeds".

The elections are scheduled for February this year. AAP has already announced candidates for all 70 seats, while Congress has named 48 candidates so far.

During an interview with the PTI, Dikshit, who has been fielded from the New Delhi constituency by the Congress for upcoming assembly polls, also said that they need to highlight what Sheila Dikshit did for Delhi during her tenure.

When asked about Congress not having a chief minister face, Dikshit said, "We do not have any CM face and we never give it. Even when Sheila Dikshit became the chief minister for the first time, it was evident that if Congress will win, she will become the CM, but we never announced her face for it."

This has not been the habit of Congress. It happens sometimes that if there is a big leader, then people believe that he or she will become the CM, but this is not the system of Congress that it will declare CM face, he said.

About election results assessment, Dikshit said that the Congress will do good and the Aam Aadmi Party will be defeated by their misdeeds.

When asked whether the Congress will support AAP again if they get some seats (like five or



ten) and AAP won't get majority, Dikshit mentioned, "You should ask this question to AAP because they will get seven or eight seats not us." He also mentioned that the party has fielded him from the New Delhi constituency.

"I was elected as MP from the East Delhi seat. The party told me that they want to field such a face against Kejriwal that it will give credibility and make the party stand," he said.

"They said that you suit this since you have been associated with Sheila Dikshit. She was an MLA from the seat and people are remembering the work done during her tenure," Dikshit said, adding that the Congress has a good atmosphere.

He further said that he has been criticising the AAP government for the last 10 years claiming that the party does not even work 10 per

cent of the claim they made.

"I have done a lot of work in the constituency and know party workers here. So that the party thought I was a suitable candidate for the seat. This does not matter whether the opponent is easy or not. I feel that for the last 10 years, Kejriwal has worked as an incompetent MLA," Dikshit said, alleging that Kejriwal does not go to the area and does not meet anybody.

You can go to any colony and people will tell you that the 80 per cent work was done during Sheila Dikshit's tenure. They have done one work of installing CCTV cameras, but when I went to four colonies, not even a single camera was functional, he claimed.

"The MLA who did not perform, did not work, and did not go to the public can not be a strong candidate," he claimed.

This government could not do anything unusual or different. They did not do anything in health and education which can be considered as remarkable or special. They could not even maintain the pace that Sheila Dikshit's government had given, he said.

The Congress government opened 150 new schools and they have opened only 20 new schools.

"They said that they have opened 300 to 400 Mohalla Clinics. But there is no facility of operation, and there is no emergency care in those clinics, and several tests are not conducted there," Dikshit said.

"There were 560 dispensaries in Delhi during Sheila's tenure. They have reduced it to 250 or 300. They have closed around 250 to 300 dispensaries and opened 300 Mohalla Clinics, then what have they opened?" he said.

The dispensaries were having facilities to perform small operations, gynecology, and the dispensaries had permanent staff, he said.

During Sheila Dikshit's tenure, 18 new hospitals were formed and not even a new hospital has formed under their regime, he claimed.

When asked about how they will reach out to the first time or young voters, Dikshit said, "We are repeatedly highlighting that it is important to tell how much work was done during Sheila Dikshit's time. I have met several young people who are concerned about their future saying that they should get such a Delhi in which they can live." (PTI)

## Foundation laid for new bridge to aid river navigation

**KOLKATA, Jan 4:** The Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Shantanu Thakur laid the foundation stone for the Single Lane road bridge here on Saturday.

The new RCC bridge is designed to ensure safer transit for commuters and facilitate unhindered river navigation, supporting regional development and connectivity goals. The bridge will support the safe passage of passengers and goods with a capacity of up to 2 tons. The new all-weather bridge will span 64 meters and include 120 meters of approach roads on both sides. As part of efforts to improve connectivity and safety, the existing bamboo bridge at Swarnnagar, which crosses the Ichamati River, is being replaced with this RCC bridge.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency for inland waterways development in the country - under the ministry of ports, shipping & waterways (MoPSW), is building the Single Lane Bridge with an investment of more than ₹ 16 crores.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union minister, Shantanu Thakur, said, "Today is a historic occasion as we lay the foundation for the construction of the bridge at Swarnnagar, a long-awaited wish of the people of the region. This will not only ease accessibility but also unlock value proposition for the region."

He further hailed PM Modi's leadership for the on-going waterways developmental projects.

"Under the dynamic leadership of Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, our government has been working on multiple projects to improve the navigation with dredging at critical stretches along National Waterways 44; i.e. river Ichamati. We remain firmly committed to the development of infrastructure and empowering the rich waterway network of West Bengal towards attaining the vision of Modi ji of a Viksit Bharat," he added.

IWAI has initiated significant efforts to enhance navigability on key river stretches on NW 44. As part of this initiative, water hyacinth, weeds, and waste materials—including both plastic and non-plastic debris, as well as natural and artificial dumped materials—have been cleared from Tentulia (Ch 40 km) to Kalanchi (Ch 63.38 km).

In the first phase, dredging operations have commenced along the 23.38 km stretch from Tentulia to Kalanchi. The goal is to achieve a navigational depth of 1.5 meters (1.2 meters plus 0.3 meters tolerance),



as mandated, and to increase tidal influence in the river.

Navigation aids are also being carried out between the Bansjhari, Mallikpur, to Bashirhat bridge stretch of NW-44. Thakur further added, "Our government has been proactively re-energising waterways so as to enable the efficient economical and ecologically safe mode of transportation to play a key role in the logistics sector of the country. Since 2014, under Honourable PM Modi ji's guidance, cargo traffic on national waterways has witnessed an exponential growth from a mere 18 million tonnes in 2014 to a whopping 133 million at the end of FY2023-24."

He stated, "The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan is yet another revolutionary initiative, in addition to the Sagarmala programme, to smoothen the logistics sector of the country by modernising and mechanising our infrastructure. Our govt is actively considering the construction of a bridge at Tarinapur at ₹ 136.20 crores under the Sagarmala Project. We are committed to empowering waterways as a robust ecosystem capable of nurturing growth, innovation, and ensuring sustainable development."

To ensure effective monitoring, hydrographic surveys are being conducted fortnightly from Bansjhari, Mallikpur to Kalanchi stretch, with updates, further strengthening efforts to enhance waterway connectivity. In a bid to ease traffic congestion at the Ghojadanga-Bhomra and Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Posts (ICPs), India and Bangladesh have formed a Joint Technical Committee. The committee will conduct a feasibility study on the navigability of the Ichamati River and explore its inclusion as a new route under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T).

The proposed Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR) spans 170.38 kilometres, connecting Henna-gar, Kalanchi, and Khedapara.(PIB)



## 5 arrested in Malda TMC councillor murder: Police



**MALDA (WB), Jan 4:** Police on Saturday said they have so far arrested five persons in connection with the murder of Malda English Bazar Trinamool Congress councillor Dulal Sarkar.

Sarkar, described by West Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee as a close associate of hers and a popular leader, was shot dead by miscreants in Malda district on Thursday morning.

Two men were arrested on Friday after apprehending three others on the day of the murder, taking the total number of arrests in the case to five, a senior police officer said. The arrested accused persons were identified by the police as Bihar's Katihar district natives Sameer Akhtar, Mohammad Abdul Gani and Malda residents Tinku Ghosh, Abhijeet Ghosh and Amit Raja.

Sarkar was shot in the head multiple times from close range after chasing him into a shop in English Bazar town's Jhaljhalia More, when he tried to flee the bike-borne assailants, according to the police.

The TMC supremo expressed shock over the killing of Sarkar, who was popular by his nickname Babla.

"My close associate and a very popular leader, Babla Sarkar, has been murdered today. From the beginning of the Trinamool Congress, he (and his wife Chaitali Sarkar) worked hard for the party, and Babla was also elected a councillor," the chief minister said in a post on X on Thursday.

Speaking at a state administrative meeting at Nabanna here, Banerjee blamed the callousness of Malda SP for the murder of the TMC councillor.

"This is a season of festivals, and miscreants are taking the opportunity. This (the killing of Sarkar) happened due to the callousness of the SP," she said at the meeting held on Thursday.

"His (Sarkar's) security was taken away some time ago... Earlier also he was attacked. This is very unfortunate," she said. (PTI)

## Chhattisgarh: 3 detained in connection with Bijapur journalist's murder

**BIJAPUR, Jan 4:** Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder of a 33-year-old journalist whose body was found in a septic tank on a local contractor's property in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Saturday.

Mukesh Chandrakar, a freelance journalist, went missing on January 1, and his body was found on Friday in the septic tank on a property owned by contractor Suresh Chandrakar at Chattanpara Basti in Bijapur town.

"Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder and are being interrogated," an official here said. The police, however, did not disclose their names and said the details would be revealed later in the day.

Mukesh worked as a freelance journalist for news channels, including NDTV, and ran a YouTube channel, 'Bastar Junction', which has some 1.59 lakh subscribers. He had played a crucial role in the release of a CoBRA commando,

## Beed sarpanch murder: Three including absconding accused arrested from two cities

**MUMBAI, Jan 4:** Police arrested three persons, including two absconding accused involved in the December 9 murder of Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh from Pune and Kalyan, officials said on Saturday.

The two wanted men, Sudarshan Chandrabhan Ghule (26) and Sudhir Sangle (23), were picked up from Pune, while one Siddharth Sonawane was held from Kalyan in Thane district.

Ghule and Sangle are named in the FIR for the murder while the name of Sonawane surfaced during the investigation.

Police suspect Sonawane, a resident of Massajog village, kept a tab on the movement of sarpanch Deshmukh and updated other accused, sources said.

Ghule and Sangle were handed over to the special investigation team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is probing the case, a police official said.

Police have so far arrested seven persons while one more accused is still absconding.

A Beed Police team arrested Siddharth Sonawane from Kalyan near Mumbai, a police officer told PTI.

## Delhi airport: 19 flights diverted, over 200 delayed as dense fog hits operations

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** As many as 19 flights were diverted at the Delhi airport early Saturday morning and more than 200 flights delayed as low visibility due to dense fog impacted operations for the second straight day.

The country's largest airline IndiGo had temporarily put arrivals and departures on hold at the airport early in the morning.

An official said 19 flights were diverted at the airport between 12.15 am and 1.30 am due to reduced visibility.

Out of them, 13 were domestic, 4 international and 2 non-scheduled flights. More than 200 flights were delayed and operations have returned to normal now, the official



The police had earlier arrested Jairam Manik Change (21), Mahesh Sakharan Kedar (21), Prateek Ghule (24) and Vishnu Chate (45) in the murder case, while another accused Krushna Andhale is still at large.

Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9 prima facie for attempting to stop an extortion bid on an energy firm operating a windmill project in Beed district. Walmik Karad, an aide of Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde, has been arrested in the extortion case.

Several police teams were deployed to arrest three accused on

the run, and an SIT was constituted.

The probe team interrogated three persons to trace the absconding men, appointed informants and used technical skills to nab the two accused, officials said.

A police official said a "doctor" picked up from Nanded district proved to be a crucial link that led police to two accused in Pune.

"Police monitored movements of Dr Sambhaji Vaybhave after his alleged links with Sudarshan Ghule surfaced during the investigation," sources in Beed Police said.

After questioning, police handed

over Vaybhave to the CID, he said refusing to elaborate.

Police suspect that Vaybhave helped Ghule flee after the murder.

Amid a political blame game over the Deshmukh murder case, BJP MLA Suresh Dhas launched a fresh attack on Dhananjay Munde and alleged that the two men arrested from Pune are just "pawns" while the "key accused" are roaming free.

NCP MLA Prakash Solanke suggested that Munde be ousted from the council of ministers to ensure a fair probe into the murder case.

Solanke is the first Nationalist Congress Party leader and second from the Mahayuti coalition to target Munde, an MLA from Beed district. BJP MLA Suresh Dhas has been criticising Munde, without taking his name, for crime in Beed.

Separately, an all-party march demanding a deeper probe into the Deshmukh murder case was organised in Parbhani city.

Dhananjay Deshmukh, brother of the murdered sarpanch, demanded a transparent investigation and disclosure of the names of people who helped the accused. (PTI)

## Around 1,500 yellow taxis to be phased out by end of next year: Official

**KOLKATA, Jan 4:** Around 1,500 metered yellow taxis in West Bengal would be phased out by the end of next year as commercial vehicles older than 15 years are not allowed to ply in the city, a transport department official said on Saturday.

There are around 4,500 Ambassador metered yellow taxis in the state which will come down to 3,000 by the end of 2026, the official said.

In 2008 the Calcutta High Court had ordered that commercial vehicles older than 15 years would not be allowed to ply in the city, the official said.

The yellow taxis are an integral part of Kolkata's heritage and many taxi unions have urged the Transport department for a viable revival package for the yellow taxis. Taxi drivers union claimed many Ambassador metered yellow taxis are road-worthy and can be allowed to run another five years at least with proper maintenance and change in engine if the transport authorities withdraw the age limit of 15 years.

"From 25,000 in 2019-20, the number of yellow taxis witnessed a steady dip in the city and its neighbourhood. It went down to 8,500 in 2023... By next April the number is further set to come down," INTUC state president and taxi wing leader Pramod Pandey told PTI.

"We wish to know what is the government's line of action to avert the crisis. The transport department has not revised the fares of yellow metered taxis since 2016... The government virtually made the meter taxi system defunct while the app cab system cannot be used by a majority of elderly taxi drivers," he said.

Pandey said around 10,000 people - taxi drivers, family members and those who love the vehicles - will soon send an open letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee highlighting the issue and offer rose to Transport minister Snehasis Chakraborty as a symbolic protest against the state's alleged apathy towards yellow metered taxis.

"From Bollywood filmmakers to Kolkata's icons like Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen everyone had projected yellow taxis in their works. Visitors to the city take snaps of yellow taxi and board this vehicle. If the state don't do anything to save yellow taxi a part of Kolkata's history will go forever," he said.

The senior transport official said the government was in favour of keeping the metered taxi fleet with BS 6 compliant new models and will facilitate bank loans to the owners.

"There is no way we can keep the old Ambassador models after they attain the age of 15 years. We have to abide by the 2008 Calcutta High Court order about commercial vehicles not being allowed to ply in the city after 15 years. Hence we have to follow the alternative ways for the interest of every stakeholder," the official said. (PTI)

## Retest held for select Bihar PSC candidates at 22 centres in Patna amid tight security



**PATNA, Jan 4:** The retest for a select group of candidates who had appeared in the recent Bihar PSC exam, which has been embroiled over allegations of question paper leak, was held on Saturday afternoon at 22 centres here, officials said.

Altogether, 12,000 candidates were scheduled to sit for the re-examination that started at 12 pm and continued till 2 pm, they said.

The 70th Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) held on December 13 has been in the eye of a storm over allegations of leak of question papers, which has been denied by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC), though a fresh test was ordered for 12,000 candidates, who had appeared for the exam at the Bapu Pariksha Parisar centre here.

"The re-exam took place at 22 centres in Patna. Out of a total 12,000 candidates, around 8,200 aspirants had downloaded their admit cards. The authorities concerned will later provide the exact number of students who appeared for the retest," District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh told reporters.

"The retest was peacefully held at all the centres, where adequate arrangements were put in place. The district administration had issued strict guidelines. Unauthorised entry, gatherings and protests within a 200-metre radius of the centres were prohibited," he told PTI after the exam.

The clamour for cancellation of the Combined Competitive Examination held on December 13 by the BPSC has gained strength, as agitating aspirants found support from various political parties. Independent MP Pappu Yadav and Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor.

## Odisha hikes monthly social security pension to ₹ 3,500

**BHUBANESWAR, Jan 4:** The Odisha government decided to enhance the social security pension to ₹ 3,500 per month for elderly people aged 80 years and above and persons with over 80 per cent disabilities.

The state cabinet headed by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved the proposal on Friday to enhance the social security pension with effect from January this year, a senior official said.

Briefing reporters about the cabinet's decisions, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja said the monthly pension for the elderly and the PWDs would be enhanced from ₹ 1,200 to ₹ 3,500.

The government also decided to implement Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar: Muft Bijili Yojana, targeting to cover 3 lakh households across the state under the scheme, he said.

The cabinet approved the proposal of state financial assistance

for installation of rooftop solar panels, which will be completed by March 2027, he said.

He said the state government will provide a subsidy of ₹ 25,000 in addition to the central government's subsidy of ₹ 30,000 for installation of 1 kilo watt (KW) rooftop solar panels.

The cabinet has decided to include all eligible women under its flagship programme, Subhadra Yojana till March 31, 2025. Whoever applied on or before the deadline, if found eligible, would get ₹ 10,000 as first two instalments for the year 2024, he said.

Similarly, the state government has approved an allocation of ₹ 847.14 crore for a period of five years under Mukhyamantri Krushi Udyog Yojana (MKUY), which was introduced in June, 2018 for encouraging agri-entrepreneurs and generating employment, Ahuja said. (PTI)

"The government will listen to us. The administration (officials) came to us on Friday and requested us to discontinue our strike. Everybody knows about the rampant corruption in the recruitment process in the state. Corrupt officers and the mafia are charging Rs 30 lakh to Rs 1.5 crore for different posts in the state and in the BPSC," Kishor claimed.

"We are keeping a close watch on the developments... We will decide our further course of action after completion of today's exam," the DM added. (PTI)

## First successful trial run of train on Katra-Banihal section

**BANIHAL/JAMMU, Jan 4:** Meandering through the Himalayas and snow-capped mountains, the first trial train successfully ran on the Katra-Banihal section on Saturday, in a crucial step towards the final statutory safety inspection next week to determine the commencement of rail services to Kashmir.

The Railways has conducted six trials over the past month on various segments of the track, including major milestones such as India's first cable-stayed rail bridge, the Anji Khad Bridge, and the iconic arch bridge over the Chenab at Kauri - the world's highest railway bridge.

"Under the safety trials, we conducted today's trial. We were part of this run, and it was successful," Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) Sandeep Gupta told reporters.

He said that the Commissioner of Railway Safety would conduct statutory inspections and trials on January 7 and 8.

"After that, the commissioner will submit a report, which will guide further action on starting train services to Kashmir," he said.

"Everything has worked well so far. We will return to Katra at a speed of 75 kmph. When the Commissioner of Railway Safety con-

ducts trials, they will be at 110 kmph. This trial is in preparation for that," Gupta added.

The first train run, conducted between Katra and Banihal, thrilled passengers as it passed through snow-covered mountains, where nature's beauty met engineering marvels.

The train reached Banihal railway station around 1:30 pm, officials said.

Gupta, along with officials from USBRL, Northern Railway, and construction companies, was on-board. The USBRL project aims to provide rail connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country.

The Anji Khad Bridge, featuring a single pylon rising 331 m above the riverbed, is another engineering milestone achieved under the USBRL project.

Described as a "true engineering marvel", the bridge has 48 cables on its lateral and central spans. Construction of the pylon began in 2017, with the structure now standing 191 m above its foundation level.

It is the second-highest railway bridge after the iconic arch bridge over the Chenab at Kauri, which is the world's highest railway bridge at 359 metres above the riverbed - 35 m taller than the Eiffel Tower in Paris. (PTI)

## Delhi man cons 700 woman on dating apps using pics of Brazilian model

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Delhi Police has arrested a 23-year-old man who allegedly scammed over 700 women after befriending them on dating applications by posing as a US-based model, officials said on Saturday.

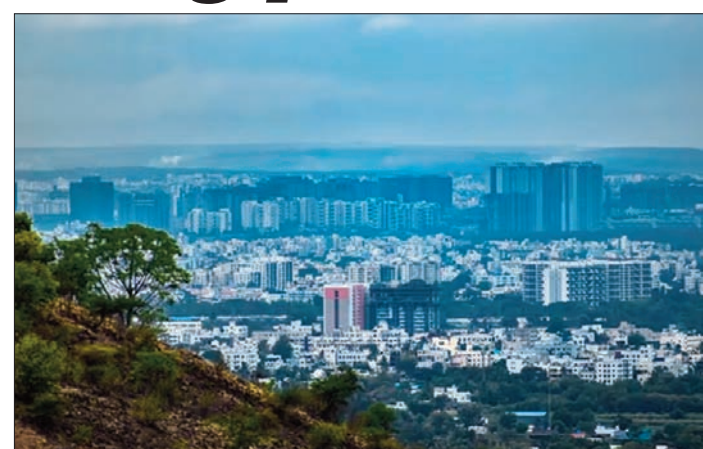
The cyber police station of West district arrested Tushar Bisht on charges of exploiting online platforms such as Bumble and Snapchat to lure his victims, blackmail them using private photos and videos, and extort money, a statement issued by Delhi Police said.

"Posing as a US-based freelance model, the accused created fake identities using a virtual international mobile number and photographs of a Brazilian model," Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Vichitra Veer, said in the statement.

Bisht used the fake profiles to connect with women aged between 18 and 30 years on various online dating platforms.

"His primary targets were users of Bumble, Snapchat and WhatsApp," the statement said.

The DCP said Bisht gained his victims' trust by engaging in con-



versations, and convinced them to share private and intimate images and videos.

"Once he obtained the content, he resorted to blackmail, threatening to leak the sensitive material online, or sell them to dark web unless the victims paid him," the DCP said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused interacted with over 500 women on Bumble and 200 others on Snapchat and WhatsApp, police said.

The accused's mobile phone contained incriminating evidence, including objectionable data of victims, a virtual mobile number, and details of financial transactions involving extortion.

The police also seized 13 credit cards linked to various banks, the statement said.

The matter came to light on December 13, last year, when a Delhi University student filed a complaint with the cyber police station claiming that she had connected with the accused on Bumble earlier in the year.

Posing as a US-based model visiting India for work, he gained her trust through consistent chats.

As their interactions deepened, the accused persuaded her to share private photos and videos on Snapchat and WhatsApp. Despite repeated requests to meet in person, he always evaded with excuses, the DCP said.

"The situation escalated when the accused sent her a private video she had shared, and demanded money. Pressured, the victim made small payments, citing her financial constraints. However, the relentless demands drove her to inform her family and lodge a complaint," the DCP said.

After registering an FIR, a special team was formed which identified Bisht as the perpetrator and tracked him to Shakarpur in east Delhi. A raid was conducted, leading to his arrest, the statement said.

Revealing the modus operandi, the DCP said during interrogation, Bisht admitted to using a virtual international mobile number for over two years, which he obtained through an app. Using this number, he registered on dating and chatting platforms, projecting him-

self as a glamorous model.

His fake profiles included fabricated stories and photographs to make them appear authentic.

Once he established connection with his victims, he persuaded them to share intimate content.

"Initially, he did this for amusement but later he turned it into a calculated scheme to extort money. He confessed to possessing private content of numerous women and blackmailing several of them for financial gains," Vichitra Veer said in the statement.

Bisht hails from a middle-class family based out of Shakarpur. His father works as a private driver, his mother is a homemaker, while his sister is employed in Gurugram.

A graduate with a BBA degree, Bisht was working as a technical recruiter at a Noida-based private firm for the past three years.

Police said the investigation has uncovered chats with more than 60 women from Delhi and nearby areas. Two bank accounts linked to the accused have also been identified, one of which showed multiple transactions from victims, while details of the second account are awaited. (PTI)

## PAYAL KAPADIA'S 'ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT' SECURES SPOTS IN BAFTA 2025 LONGLISTS



**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" continues its remarkable run on the international awards circuit, securing spots on the BAFTA Film Awards longlists in three categories, including Best Director. The British Academy on Friday evening shared the results of the first round of voting across 25 categories for its upcoming awards gala. Kapadia's Malayalam-Hindi movie, which scripted history by becoming the first Indian movie to win the Grand Prix award at the Cannes in May, has made it to three longlists of 10 movies each -- Best Film Not in English Language, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay. Besides "All We Imagine As Light", Sandhya Suri's "Santosh" and Karan Kandhari's "Sister Midnight" are nominated in the longlist for Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer. Indian-origin British actor Dev Patel has also found a mention in the longlist for his directorial debut "Monkey Man". Patel is nominated in the Leading Actor longlist.

According to BAFTA, the films mentioned in the longlists will advance to the nominating stage of voting, which started on Friday and will conclude on January 10. The three nods for Kapadia's movie comes weeks after it picked up two nominations at the 82nd Golden Globe Awards. The Malayalam-Hindi film, which marks Kapadia's feature directorial debut, is nominated for Best Motion Picture Non-English Language and the Best Direction - Motion Picture at the awards gala, which will be held on January 6. The movie was recently named the Best International Film by New York Film Critics Circle and won an award in the same category at the Gotham Awards.

It explores the intertwined lives of two Malayali nurses in Mumbai —Prabha (Kani Kusruti), a straitlaced woman yearning for her absent husband, and Anu (Divya Prabha), her outgoing roommate entangled in a forbidden love affair. Through their friendship, the film captures themes of love, identity, and the contradictions of life in the city. It also features Chhaya Kadam in a pivotal role.

Suri's Uttar Pradesh-set police thriller "Santosh" had its world premiere at the 2024 Cannes in the Un Certain Regard section. It has been named Britain's Oscar entry in the international feature category.

Starring Shahana Goswami and Sunita Rajwar, "Santosh" revolves around a newly widowed housewife as she inherits her late husband's job as a police constable and becomes embroiled in the investigation of a young girl's murder. Kandhari's "Sister Midnight" is a "dark physical comedy" with Radhika Apte playing the lead role. (PTI)

## Diljit Dosanjh tells PM Modi: 'India can host music festivals bigger than Coachella'

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** India has the potential to host music festivals that are bigger in scale than renowned global events like Coachella, Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh said during his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on New Year's Day.

The globally popular singer met the prime minister at his residence on Wednesday where they discussed music, culture, and India's artistic legacy.

During the meeting, PM Modi asked Dosanjh about his experience of travelling outside of India and performing at various global festivals like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in April 2023.

"I feel that they have made festivals like Coachella or any other very big. And I believe we can make it much bigger. People travel from all over the world for such festivals," said the 40-year-old singer.

Diljit said music is embedded in India's cultural fabric and noted how people who are not trained professionally can often display impeccable talent.

"Whether we are eating food in a dhaba or someone is singing in Rajasthani, the song we listen to is so melodious that I feel like I should stop singing. He is singing such a good song. And I sing professionally, this person is not even singing professionally. And he is singing better than me. He has so much art in him. If such a development happens here, people from all over the world will come," Diljit said.

The prime minister told the singer that he had been thinking about the same for many years. "Now I am doing it through Waves," PM Modi said, referring to the upcoming World Audio Visual Enter-

tainment Summit.

The summit, to be held from February 5 to 9, is being touted as a global platform for creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation.

"My idea is that we are such a big country, and most of the world's films are made here. The biggest creative industry in the world is here. So I'm trying to start a big movement here through Waves. Now India will be the centre of the creative world," he said.

The prime minister also recalled a discussion about music with Angela Merkel, the former Chancellor of Germany.

"She asked me about music. I told her that in my country, the music before sunrise is different, and the

music after sunrise is different. I told her that there are different types of music in India," he said.

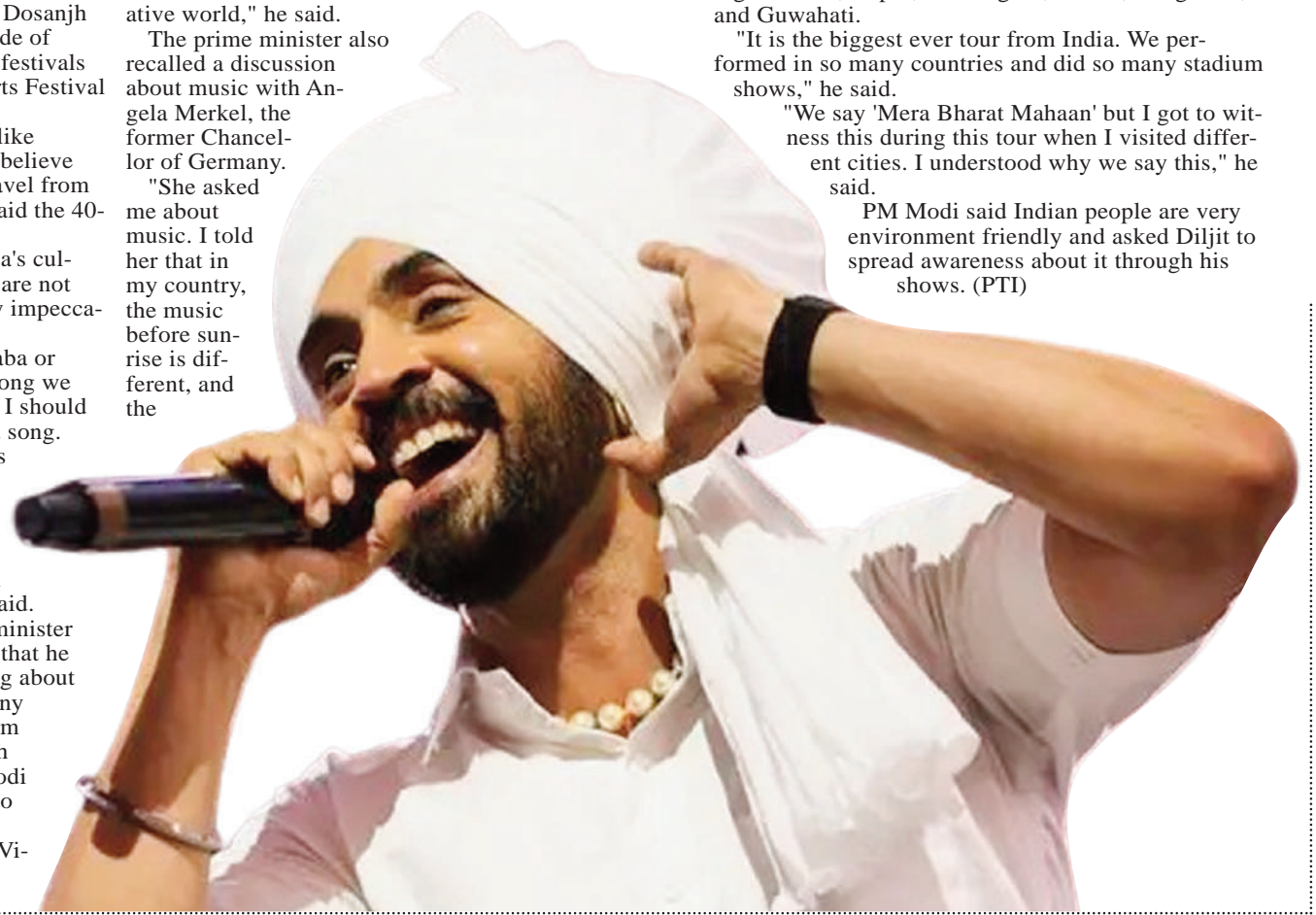
"Then I said whether it is a sad situation or happy situation, there are different types of music. She was very interested," he added.

Diljit also spoke about his successful Dil-Luminati India Tour, which began in New Delhi on October 26 and ended in Ludhiana on December 31. During the two-month tour, Diljit also performed in cities, including Mumbai, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Indore, Bengaluru, and Guwahati.

"It is the biggest ever tour from India. We performed in so many countries and did so many stadium shows," he said.

"We say 'Mera Bharat Mahaan' but I got to witness this during this tour when I visited different cities. I understood why we say this," he said.

PM Modi said Indian people are very environment friendly and asked Diljit to spread awareness about it through his shows. (PTI)



## It's a blessing to work with director Shankar on 'Game Change', says Ram Charan

**MUMBAI, Jan 4:** South star Ram Charan on Saturday said it was an "enriching" experience to collaborate with acclaimed filmmaker S Shankar for his upcoming film "Game Change".

The political action film marks Shankar's debut in Telugu cinema after directing several commercially-successful Tamil titles such as "Indian", "Anniyan", "Sivaji: The Boss", "Enthiran" and "2.0".

At the promotional press meet of "Game Changer", Charan recalled meeting the director at an event for Shankar's 2012 film "Nanban", which was a remake of "3 Idiots".

The actor said he wanted to ask the filmmaker to make a film either with him or his father, superstar Chiranjeevi, but couldn't muster the courage to convey it to him.

"I was sitting next to Shankar sir and I was thinking, 'How do I tell him to make a Telugu film with me or my dad or my contemporary heroes'. But I didn't had the guts to tell him," Charan said.

The actor said during the making of SS Rajamouli's "RRR", producer Dil Raju approached him to be part of a film, which will be helmed by Shankar.

"I don't know how my dad will feel, but I feel blessed that I got to work with him. He should've done it with dad. But I'm very fortunate. It's a blessing to work for five years with Rajamouli Garu and then Shankar Garu, it is so enriching as an actor, there's so much to learn," Charan added.

Charan said Rajamouli and Shankar are both "task masters" and push their actors to give their best.

"They expect a lot from every person working on the film. It's very rare to work with such talent and they keep pushing you. There wasn't a day when you could relax. Even if you've a single shot, there's work," the actor said.

The team of "Game Changer" has been busy promoting the film in India and the US.

Speaking about the pre-release event of the movie in Dallas, Charan said they are "overwhelmed" by the love and support of people for the movie. "Global platform is important especially for an Indian film. We got an overwhelming response in Dallas, I hadn't expected it. It shows global audiences are our true cinema lovers, most of our revenue comes from there. It's not just for me or Shankar sir, they love a good film. I'm blessed to have that kind of response."

Also starring Kiara Advani, "Game Changer" is set to release theatrically on January 10. (PTI)

## Like to shine light on contemporary history: Vikramaditya Motwane on 'Black Warrant' series

**MUMBAI, Jan 4:** Filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane says he adopted a "fly on the wall" approach to show the world that exist within the walls of Tihar jail in his upcoming series, "Black Warrant".

The show is a dramatized adaptation of the book "Black Warrant: Confessions Of A Tihar Jailor" by Sunil Gupta, a former superintendent of Tihar, and journalist Sunetra Choudhury. "I told my crew constantly that, 'you are a fly on the wall', or you are peeping into somebody's room and feel like you are taking vicarious pleasure out of what is happening on screen. That's been the operative mantra throughout," Motwane told PTI in an interview. Based on true events, the prison drama series revolves around Gupta, who with his two trusted fellow jailers, confront Tihar's notorious inmates and the deep-rooted politics in the 1980s. The series will debut on Netflix on January 10.

Motwane, also behind popular OTT series "Sacred Games" on Netflix and "Jubilee" on Prime Video, said he thrives on challenges.

"I'm a student and lover of contemporary history and I like to shine a light on it in an interesting, entertaining and en-

gaging way. That's my approach to everything. I love filmmaking and I'm up for a challenge every time to try something," said Motwane.

In order to show an authentic world of the prison, the filmmaker visited Tihar jail, and talked to Gupta to get insights into the day-to-day operations, including mundane details like how inmates pay for water or how gangs inside prison.

"There is something voyeuristic about looking at a jail. 00.01 per cent of the population of 99.99 per cent will never go inside the jail but there's an intrigue about what happens inside, what are the people like? Are they all criminals? Are there any silver linings?" Motwane said, adding that American filmmaker David Fincher's series "Mindhunter" served as a "minor inspiration".

When he read the book, the equation between Gupta and serial killer Charles Sobhraj was so compelling that he decided to make Gupta, guiding the audience into the prison through his perspective. "The lens was always about Sunil's story and if he is the centre of the wheel, then what are the spokes that are going to go around, so him with his col-

leagues, family and the relationship with prisoners, that's always been the focus of it."

"The world of prison is a closed one and Gupta said he wanted to shed a light on it through his book.

"People should know what is happening inside the jail... For prison managers, it is important they know what the conditions were back then in the 1980s and to take the curative steps on how they can resolve things, much was to be done.

"Certain incidents mentioned in it are very emotional. There were certain things that I wanted to tell to the public like drugs were very prevalent from '81 to '84, there were extortion rackets, inhuman treatment of the prisoners, I was aware of some incidents, which we incorporated in this book," he said.

Choudhury said it was magical to see her words come to life on the screen.

"When you write a book... you always imagine what this world is like and it is up to the readers, they think about it. I think that visualisation, so for me to watch it, it was like, 'Oh my god, we wrote something now it is flesh and blood'."

Crime is an audience favourite genre, said Tanya Bami, director of Series at Netflix India. "Black Warrant" offers a fresh perspective in this space, she added.

"Indian prisons have never been explored, so a fly on the wall sort of view of everything from the gangs to jailors, it's all exciting to see," Bami said.

Sameer Nair, CEO Applause Entertainment, which has backed the series, said "Black Warrant" tells a human story set against a backdrop of violence without glorifying it.

"We were telling a human story, in the telling of that story violence is part of it. Oftentimes you tend to use the tropes and milk them till they are sort of overdone. When you watch the series, it's a story about real people leading their lives; they just happen to be in jail.

"Since it's Tihar jail, there will be some violence but that's not the point of the story. The point of the story is about the period... It also tells you about India as we go along, it tells us how we were before. So, it is not designed to titillate or shock or anything like that, it's a story." (PTI)



# I am not going anywhere, I just stood down from this Test: Rohit

**SYDNEY, Jan 4:** Senior India batter Rohit Sharma on Saturday firmly dismissed his retirement rumours, saying he is "not going anywhere" and offered poor form as the reason for him "standing down" from the ongoing Sydney Test against Australia.

Grappling with modest form, Rohit "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test, handing over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah, sparking widespread speculations about his future.

"I have not retired. I stood down, that is what I would say. Basically the chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple. I am not able to score runs, there is no form, it is an important match and we need a player with form," Rohit told Star Sports.

"As it is, in our batting, the form of the boys is not that good. So you cannot carry a lot of out of form players in the team. This simple thing was going on in my mind. I am not going anywhere," he added.

The 37-year-old said the team management and selectors backed his decision.

"I wanted to tell the coach and the selector that this is what is going on in my mind. They backed my decision. They said that you have been playing for so many years. You know what you are doing."

"So for me, it was difficult to take this decision. But if everything is kept in front, then this decision was sensible. I will not think much further," he added.

In Rohit's absence, Shubman Gill was included in the India



eleven for the crucial fifth match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as India is trailing 1-2.

The Mumbaier endured a tough time in Test cricket in 2024, accumulating just 619 runs in 26 innings across 14 matches averaging 24.76.

Before standing down, he had scored just 31 runs across five innings in three Tests in this series after joining the team following the Perth Test.

Rohit's bold call triggered

speculations that he might pull the plug on his Test career after this series.

"This is not a retirement decision. I am not going to leave the game. There is no such decision. But I am out of this game because the bat is not working."

"But there is no guarantee that the bat will not work after 5 months. There is no guarantee that the bat will not work after two months or six months down

the line," Rohit said.

He hoped for a turnaround in his fortunes sooner than later.

"We have seen a lot in cricket. Every minute, every second, every day life changes. So, I have a belief that things will change."

"But, at the same time, I have to be realistic as well. So, if a person has a mic inside, or a laptop, or a pen, what he writes, what he says, it does not change our life. We have

played this game for so many years.

"So, these people cannot decide when we should go or when we should not play. I am a sensible man. I am a mature man. I am the father of two children. So, I have a little brain to decide what I want in life," he noted.

Asked if he took this decision after the Melbourne Test defeat, Rohit said: "No, I took this decision after coming to Sydney. Because after the match, we had only two days in between. And one day was New Year's eve. So on New Year's, I did not want to tell this to the coach and the selector."

"But it was running in my mind that I am trying and trying. But it is not happening. So I have to accept that it is not happening. And it was important for me to step aside."

"Whenever I am captaining, I don't believe in what is going to happen after 5 months or 6 months. What do you want in the immediate future, it is important to focus on this thing."

"Our entire focus was on these 5 matches. We had to retain the trophy, we had to win. So, when we take such decisions, we do it keeping the team in front of us," he added.

Rohit also heaped praise on Bumrah saying he has been impressed by the latter's leadership qualities.

"The way he (Bumrah) sets standards with the ball, he is absolute class. When I saw him for the first time in 2013, his graph has gone really high ever since and has gone from strength to strength," he said. (PTI)

## Punjab FC eye better show in defense against Kerala Blasters FC



**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Missing important attacking options, Punjab FC will look to defend well when they host Kerala Blasters FC in their Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

Kerala Blasters FC are looking to bounce back from a 2-1 loss to Punjab FC earlier this season.

Punjab FC are on a difficult run, losing their last three ISL matches and conceding three or more goals in their last two games.

Another high-conceding performance would see them create an unwanted record of conceding three or more goals in three consecutive matches for the first time in ISL history.

Punjab FC will also want to improve their recent home form, having lost their last game at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium to Mohun Bagan Super Giant (1-3). A second consecutive home defeat would mark only the second time they have suffered back-to-back home losses in the competition.

They will also be dealing with the absence of their important attacking outlets, i.e. Luka Majcen and Ezequiel Vidal, who are suspended for this match.

Majcen (5) and Vidal (4) have together notched nine of the 20 goals netted by them this season. They are the respective top-scorers for them so far, and Majcen and Vidal have also assisted three and two goals each.

Kerala Blasters FC have their struggles away from

home, having conceded in each of their last 14 away matches, their longest such run. They are 10th in the table currently, with 14 points from as many matches, whereas Punjab FC are positioned eighth with 18 points from 12 matches.

Punjab FC have conceded just six first-half goals this season, the joint-lowest in the league, showcasing their ability to remain compact early in games. Kerala Blasters FC will have to either unravel this defensive organisation at the start or sustain their offensive intensities till the end to crack open the home team's defence.

Ravi Kumar's six saves against Mohun Bagan Super Giant highlighted his importance in goal. Another stand-out performance could be important for Punjab FC's chances, with Noah Sadaoui readying to pounce upon the Punjab FC backline.

Noah Sadaoui's creativity in the final third has been vital, with four assists to his name. His link-up play will be important in unlocking Punjab FC's defence, as he can hover around their backline to explore and maximise scoring opportunities.

The Kerala Blasters FC will need to address their penalty concession issues, having already given away five spot-kicks this season, which is the most among all teams. Conceding fouls inside the 18-yard box puts them back in the proceedings by a yard, something that the visitors will need to correct urgently. (PTI)

## USA Water Polo is staying with Krikorian and Udovicic for the 2028 Olympics

**WASHINGTON, Jan 4:** USA Water Polo is staying with coaches Adam Krikorian and Dejan Udovicic through the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The California-based governing body announced the contract extensions for Krikorian and Udovicic on Friday. It's the first major move for Jamie Davis since he took over as CEO of USA Water Polo on Oct. 1.

Los Angeles is the epicenter of American water polo, and the U.S. teams are expected to contend for gold on their home turf.

While Udovicic's return seemed like a formality after he guided the U.S. men to bronze at the 2024 Olympics, there was some question about Krikorian's situation following a heartbreaking finish for the women's team in Paris.

"Adam's accomplishments are unparalleled, and under Dejan's leadership in Paris last summer our men won the program's first Olympic medal since 2008," Davis said in a release. "We have big goals on the journey to LA28 and I'm confident that Adam and Dejan will position us well for victory." Since Krikorian, 50, took over in 2009, the U.S. women's team has won three Olympic gold medals and six world championships. The program was considered the sport's dominant power before it went 4-3 at the Paris Games and finished fourth.

The U.S. had been the only team to medal in each women's water polo tournament at the Olympics since it started in 2000. Speaking right after a last-second loss to the Netherlands in the bronze-medal game in August, Krikorian openly wondered if it might be time for a coaching change. In the end, Krikorian and USA Water Polo decided to give it another go.

"I am thrilled to continue to be a part of a program that has given so much to me personally and that has had such an enormous positive influence on the sport throughout our country and the world," Krikorian said in a release. (AP)

## Bellingham's late goal gives 10-man Real Madrid comeback win at Valencia

**MADRID, Jan 4:** Jude Bellingham missed a penalty but scored a late winner and Vinicius Jr. was sent off as 10-man Real Madrid fought back in the most dramatic of fashions to beat Valencia 2-1 and return to the top of La Liga.

Luka Modric's 85th minute equalizer and Bellingham's stoppage time winner ensured that Madrid avoided back-to-back defeats in La Liga for the first time since 2019.

The win took it to 43 points, two above city rival Atletico, albeit having played a game more.

The match at the Mestalla pitted second from bottom against second from top and it was the struggling home side which took the lead after 27 minutes. Hugo Duro stabbed the ball into the empty net after it came back off the post.

Madrid came into the game more in the second half but it looked like it would be a frustrating night for the capital club.

Kylian Mbappé won a penalty after 55 minutes but Bellingham's shot hit the post and moments later the Frenchman himself saw a goal disallowed after a video review.

Things got worse for Real with 11 minutes remaining when Vinicius pushed goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski and the referee, after a long video review, showed the Brazilian a red card.

However, Real is never out of it and Carlo Ancelotti's late changes turned the game around.

Modric came on in the 80th and it took the 39-year-old Croatian just five minutes to make his mark, dancing through a sea of defenders and poking home the equalizer.

Even with a man less there was a sense of inevitability as Real



pushed goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski and the referee, after a long video review, showed the Brazilian a red card.

However, Real is never out of it and Carlo Ancelotti's late changes turned the game around.

Modric came on in the 80th and it took the 39-year-old Croatian just five minutes to make his mark, dancing through a sea of defenders and poking home the equalizer.

Even with a man less there was a sense of inevitability as Real

range shot came back off the post. Valencia stayed second from bottom.

Pontevedra slays another giant in CopaEarlier, fourth-tier club Pontevedra dispatched high-flying La Liga side Mallorca 3-0 to move into the last 16 of the Copa de Rey.

Dalissson de Almeida scored from almost 40 yards to make it 1-0 after 21 minutes, Yelko Pino doubled the lead with a cracking volley four minutes into the second half, and then Rufo rounded off the perfect night with 18 minutes left after a shocking defensive lapse.

The Galician side knocked out Villarreal in the last round.

In the night's other games, top-tier clubs Rayo Vallecano and Getafe progressed.

Getafe needed extra time to beat second-division Granada in southern Spain. After a goalless match, Borja Mayoral got the only goal in the 93rd minute to put the visitor through.

Rayo Vallecano made swift work of second-tier Racing Ferrol. Alfonso Espino and Jorge de Frutos put the visitors 2-0 up before halftime and Frutos grabbed a third on the hour mark. (AP)

## It's an answer to all those who made fun of me: Para shuttler Nithya on Arjuna Award

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** Paralympic bronze medalist and Arjuna Award winner Nithya Resu Samuthy Sivan still remembers those tearful days at school when relentless bullying left her devastated and depressed.

Now a successful shuttler, the 19-year-old believes the prestigious award has come as a just reward for those days of turmoil.

"When I was in 6th or 7th standard, there was not much growth in me. In schools, there was bullying. I used to be very sad. I used to cry for every small thing. So, yeah, it's kind of an answer to them that I can also do something and achieve big," Nithya told PTI.

Reflecting on her achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious."

"It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me. A recognition of my hard work, dedication to the

game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined."

Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. Her father and grandmother became her unwavering support system, with her brother standing by her side as a constant companion.

"I used to stay inside the house a lot. So just to get me out, my dad was continuously pushing me to play. Badminton has helped me. I feel really free now. Before taking up badminton, I actually wouldn't speak much. Now, I'm able to speak to many people," said Nithya, who won three bronze medals at the 2022 Asian Para Games.

Her father, an avid sports enthusiast, and her brother, who played cricket at the district level, introduced Nithya to the world of sports. Cricket was initially her first love.

"My dad used to play cricket with a big team every Sunday, and I would go with him to watch. My

brother was a district player, and I also accompanied him to his academy. Sometimes, we played cricket on the street. However, when I considered taking up cricket, there were no female athletes," said Nithya.

She watched badminton for the first time during the Rio Olympics, and everything changed. The racquet sport soon became her chosen sport, turning into an all-consuming passion.

"My brother took up badminton for fitness, and I joined him. Watching Sindhu in 2016 inspired me, and my friends and I started playing badminton in the streets. This sparked my interest in training, and I started practicing twice a week, gradually increasing to daily sessions."

"When COVID hit, I couldn't train, but once it was over, I resumed and discovered Para badminton. That's when I moved to Lucknow (under Gaurav Khanna, Head Coach of Team India) for training," added Nithya, who has recently started training at the

Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) due to its proximity to her hometown.

A fan of Chinese legend Lin Dan, Nithya discovered the world of Para-Badminton in 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 and started competing in international events from 2021.

"Looking ahead to 2025, the Asian Championship will be one of the key Paralympic events this year. Next year, we have the World Championship. My target is to peak by 2028 Los Angeles Games, so there are no shorter goals now only focusing on the World Championship each year leading up to 2028," said Nithya.

Recently, there was a controversy when two-time Paris bronze medalist shooter Manu Bhaker's name didn't figure in the initial list of nomination for the national award due to lapses in applying on time.

Asked about her opinion, Nithya said the government should recognise them without athletes having to apply. (PTI)

## Senthil, Revathi to lead home challenge in Delhi's first ITF World Tennis Tour J300 Event

**NEW DELHI, Jan 4:** India's top junior players, Senthil Kumar and Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi, will lead the country's challenge in the boys and girls categories, respectively, at the ITF J300 event, starting January 6 at the DLTA complex here.

Apart from Senthil, who made a number of finals on the ITF junior circuit in season 2024, India's other top-5 players, Hitesh Chauhan (R3), Arnab Paparkar (R4), and Varun Verma (R5) -- have also secured their places in the main draw of the boys' tournament.

From among the players from abroad, Nikita Bilozertsev, the world number 87 from Ukraine and Turkey's Haydar Cem Gokpinar (R11) will also vie for the top honour.

World number 51 Yoana Konstantinova from Bulgaria, world number 71 Eleajah Inisan from France and her compatriot Daphnee Mpetshi Perricard (R73) are the top draws in the girls' singles event.

Ada Kumru (R74) and Petra Konjikusic (R75) are the other top-100 players to feature in the tournament.

Rishita Reddy Basireddy is the only other Indian player in the girls' singles main draw while sev-

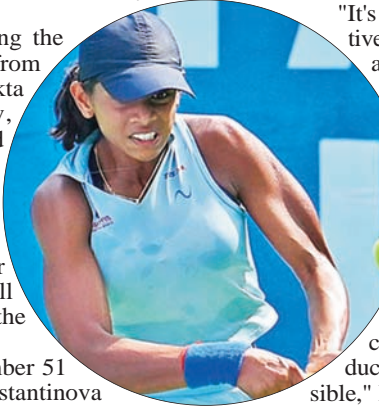
eral others will strive to make their way from the qualifying event.

"It is our endeavour to give Indian players enough opportunities to earn ranking points. DLTA has hosted a number of J200 events but for the first time we are hosting a J300 event, which is the second highest in the order after J500 and I believe this event will be a great way to bring more and more opportunities for the India players," Rohit Rajpal, Delhi Lawn Tennis Association (DLTA) president, said.

"It's a highly competitive field that features a number of top-100 players in the junior women's event. It will be good exposure for Indian players. Indian tennis needs a lot of tournaments and we are committed to conduct as many as possible," Rajpal said.

The wild cards for the main draws have been awarded to Shanker Heisnam Samarth Sahita, Aarav Chawla and Rian Sharma in boys category and Aishwarya Jadhav, Mahika Khanna, Riya Sachdeva and Aishi Bisht in girls main draw.

The qualifying tournament is offering eight places in the main draws is currently underway. (PTI)



# Decisive Sydney Test heads for exciting finish after Pant's breathtaking fifty

**SYDNEY, Jan 4:** Staying true to his aggressive style of play, generational talent Rishabh Pant conjured up a spectacular 33-ball-61 to somehow keep India afloat even as Australia remained in driver's seat in the fifth Test, which is poised for an intriguing finish.

It was largely due to Pant's breathtaking knock that India finished the second day at 141 for 6 for an overall lead of 145. Pant entrained the packed SCG with four monstrous sixes and six boundaries.

His back-to-back sixes off Mitchell Starc into the heritage Ladies Members Stands were for posterity.

Pant's knock prevented Indian second innings from falling apart with the visitors top and lower order struggling to negotiate Aussie attack on a track that was aided seam and bounce.

This was after unheralded bowling duo of Prasidh Krishna (3/42) and Nitish Reddy (2/32) complemented Mohammed Siraj (3/51) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/33) to shoot Australia out for 181.

On a difficult track, Virat Kohli (6) and his top-order colleagues found Scott Boland (3/38) too hot to handle.

Kohli lost his wicket on outside the off stump line for the eighth successive time in this series.

The match is certain to end on the third day but if India will be able to defend the total will very much depend on whether skipper Jasprit Bumrah is fit to bowl full tilt.

Bumrah underwent precautionary scans for an unspecified injury after he left the field in the post-lunch session in which he bowled just one over.

If even a half-fit Bumrah bowls, it won't be easy for Australia to chase even a 175-run target on a track with variable bounce and widening cracks.



was exhilarating stuff.

Pant rode on bounce and hit Webster over point but the two sixes off Starc do take the cake. It was understood that Pant was mentally not in frame due to unsolicited sermons from a coaching staff member, who despite knowing the dashing southpaw's game told him to play otherwise. At one point, a clueless Pat Cummins was forced to put six fielders near the boundary ropes. The skipper himself who saw the back of Pant, inducing edge from a ball that rose. Indian and Australian fans gave a standing ovation to the diminutive southpaw.

In the post lunch session, Prasidh and Reddy more than made up for skipper Bumrah's absence as India took 51 overs to bowl out the hosts.

Steve Smith's (33) dismissal off Prasidh just before lunch disturbed Australia's rhythm.

Post lunch, Prasidh came from round the wicket from the Paddington End and removed Alex Carey (21) with an angled-in delivery. Carey was looking good but once Karnataka speedster found his length, he was literally unplayable.

Debutant Webster (57) justified his selection with a half-century but it was Reddy, coming for his second spell, sparked a collapse with wickets of Cummins and Mitchell Starc, both done in by subtle movement off the surface.

The final blow was dealt by Prasidh. He used the uneven bounce and cracks off the surface to get one bounce awkwardly at Webster and Jaiswal snaffled the catch.

Siraj was menacing during his first spell, grabbing two wickets with perfectly pitched outswingers before Prasidh sent back in-form Smith after he was involved in a nice little 57-run stand for the fifth wicket with Webster. (PTI)

Having curbed his natural instinct to attack during a sedate 40 in the first essay after being torn to shreds by the most important member of the Indian coaching staff for indiscreet shot selection at the MCG, Pant perhaps cleared his mind about what he needed to do.

He came in at a time when not just Boland but even debutant Beau Webster was getting the ball to move a proverbial mile off the deck.

There was steep bounce available at the Randwick End (far end) where Kohli got out. Boland pitched it on hard length and got both seam and bounce. The result was a now familiar dab towards slips as Kohli's future beyond 123 Tests looks doubtful.

This was after both KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal got a couple of rippers.

However once Pant came out, he was a man-on-a-mission as the first ball disappeared into the long-on stand. The fallen pull shot also came out of the closet. It

## AAI-RSCB-NER to host All India Inter Zonal Cricket Tournament from January 6

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 4:** To boost the sports culture among its officials, AAI RSCB, NER under the aegis of AAI - Sports Control Board, CHQ New Delhi is organising the 'All India Inter Zonal Cricket Tournament 2024-25' in Guwahati, covering 16 matches in 5 days starting from January 6 - 10. Involving six regional teams of AAI, all of whom reaching Guwahati a day ahead on January 5, the matches will start after the inauguration of the tournament on January 6 at 7:30 am at Judges Field, here by the chief guest M. Raja Kishore, Regional Executive Director, North Eastern Region, Airports Authority of India, Gyan Batra, Vice President, RSCB -

NER, Pabitra Das, Regional Secretary, Airport Authority Employees Union, NER.

Besides, Judges Field, a few matches of the tournament will also be played at Railway Stadium, Maligaon, Guwahati simultaneously. Further, some matches will be played under Flood Light at night apart from day matches in the Judges Field. The final will be played at the Judges Field in the morning of January 10 followed by the closing ceremony in Hotel Kiranshree Grand in the evening. The purpose of the cricket tournament is to promote sports culture, brotherhood, physical & mental health amongst the employees of AAI.



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## THE INDIAN NAVY

**INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION IN EXECUTIVE (INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY) – JUN 25 COURSE**

Applications are invited from unmarried eligible men & women candidates for grant of Short Service Commission (SSC) in Information Technology (Executive Branch) of Indian Navy under Special Naval Orientation Course for course commencing Jun 2025 onwards at Indian Naval Academy (INA) Ezhimala, Kerala. Candidates must fulfil conditions of nationality as laid down by the Government of India.

BRANCH	VACANCY	QUALIFICATION	GENDER	AGE
SSC Executive (Information Technology)	15	A candidate must have minimum 60% marks in English in class X or XII and one of the undermentioned educational qualification with minimum 60% overall qualifying marks, in either or a combination of the following: - (a) MSc/BE/B Tech/M Tech (Computer Science/Computer Science & Engineering/Computer Engineering/ Information Technology/Software Systems/Cyber Security/System Administration & Networking/Computer Systems & Networking / Data Analytics/Artificial Intelligence), OR (b) MCA with BCA/BSc (Computer Science / Information Technology).	Men & Women	Born Between 02 Jul 2000 to 01 Jan 2006 (both dates inclusive)

**Date of Opening - 29 Dec 2024 • Last Date - 10 Jan 2025**

**For more details visit - [www.joinindiannavy.gov.in](http://www.joinindiannavy.gov.in) and**

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