

6 NATION 7 NORTHEAST • Judicial inquiry ordered into Leh violence fulfils Ladakh's demand, says chief secretary • As security forces gain upper hand, Maoist leader urges cadres to surrender • NDPP merges with NPF in major political shift • North East Integration Rally 2026 pre-launch held in Shillong

Charge-sheet to be filed within 90 days: SIT head Zubeen death case: Assam Police team ready for Singapore visit

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: A team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Assam Police has completed preparations for its visit to Singapore from Monday in connection with the death case of cultural icon Zubeen Garg. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the CID, which is probing the death of Garg while swimming in the sea in the Southeast Asian country on September 19, is on track to submit its report to the court within the specified time, Special DGP Munna Prasad Gupta, who is heading the 10-member SIT, told reporters here on Saturday. "Investigation is underway... Statements are being recorded. We are working round-the-clock and the probe is in the right direction," Gupta said. He said that the SIT will submit its report to the court on time. Gupta had earlier said that the charge-sheet would be filed within 90 days. Asked about SIT's Singapore visit, which Gupta will lead, the senior officer said, "We are pre-



pared for the visit and we will be going as per the schedule of the Singapore authorities, and take forward our investigation." The SIT on Saturday recorded statements of people associated with Garg, including Hitesh Baruah, in whose hospital Garg was last treated, and musician Digantha Bharati. Speaking to reporters later, Baruah said all close to Garg were aware of his epilepsy and knew that he should be kept away from fire and water. Taking him to a foreign country, then to the sea and later allowing him to swim were major mistakes by those with the singer-composer, Baruah claimed. Garg was in Singapore to attend the 4th North East India Festival (NEIF), when the incident occurred. The SIT has so far arrested seven persons in the case - NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, Garg's manager Siddhartha Sharma, his cousin and state police officer (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BPF becomes NDA ally; Charan Boro joins Himanta cabinet

BPF joining NDA milestone for the development of BTC areas: CM

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: The Assam Cabinet was expanded on Saturday as Bodoland People's Front (BPF) MLA Charan Boro took oath as a minister. The development comes after the BPF, which had been supporting the ruling BJP-led coalition in the assembly without being a constituent of it, swept the recently held Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections. With the induction of the legislator into the state Cabinet, the BPF now joins the NDA. The Cabinet now has 15 members of the BJP, including the CM, two of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and one each of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) and the BPF. Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office and secrecy to Boro, the second-time MLA from Majbat constituency. Boro filled the last vacant position in the state council of ministers in the fourth expansion of the



Sarma-led Cabinet. This Cabinet expansion is likely to be the last one as the assembly polls are due next year. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, his Cabinet colleagues, Union minister Pabitra Margherita, BPF president and BTC chief Hagrama Mohilary, and other dignitaries were present at the swearing-in ceremony held at the Raj Bhavan. Talking to reporters, Boro said he was happy to get the opportunity to serve in the state ministry. "Even though I was inducted into the cabinet at the end of the government's term, I am happy to get this opportunity. I will be a minister for five to six months," the BPF legislator said. He thanked the chief minister

and the BPF president. Asked about the portfolio he could be entrusted with, Boro said, "Now, I don't know. Whatever responsibility I get, I will fulfil with complete dedication." On Cabinet expansion, Sarma told reporters, "When the BPF won the BTC elections, we had said that they will be welcomed into the NDA. The BPF joining NDA today is a milestone for the development of BTC areas." The ministry expansion has the support of the BJP's central leadership, he added. Sarma thanked the BPF and its leadership for the support to the government in the assembly so far, including floor coordination and voting for its candidates during the Rajya Sabha polls. He pledged to work together for the welfare of BTC areas and said a meeting between his Cabinet members and executive members of the autonomous council will take place soon to take forward developmental (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Man held for 'unsolicited' social media post on Zubeen's death

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: A 27-year-old man has been arrested in Assam's Nagaon district for allegedly posting a controversial video with inflammatory remarks on social media related to the death of singer Zubeen Garg, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday. The accused had used a clip from an OTT platform and added inflammatory remarks to it, he said. Sarma, in a post on X, said, "One Md Injamul Hoque (27 years) of Telia Bebejia in Nagaon has been apprehended for posting a controversial video on his Facebook page under the name 'SK Ahmad' on October 15 relating to the death of Garg". Garg had died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Statehood of J&K to be restored at appropriate time: Shah

PATNA, Oct 18: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday promised restoration of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir at "an appropriate time" and a "good resolution" of demands raised by people of the Union Territory of Ladakh. Speaking at a media conclave in Patna, he also claimed that after the abrogation of Article 370, terror-infested Jammu and Kashmir has "taken a U-turn" and "no local terrorist has been recruited in the last nine months". "This is a qualitative change that Jammu and Kashmir, where separatism had been festering since the 1990s, witnessed. Earlier, Pakistan felt no need to send terrorists from across the border.



They used to place arms in the hands of our children. Now the situation has changed. The people of Jammu and Kashmir feel they belong to the entire country and the entire country belongs to them," Shah said at the conclave organised by ABP News and Hindustan. "Today, democracy has been restored in Jammu and Kashmir.

Panchayat and municipal polls have taken place, and so have elections for the legislative assembly. Rajya Sabha elections will also take place at some time," the home minister added. He was asked about a statement by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who spoke of a "gulf" remaining in between Jammu and Kashmir and New Delhi on account of statehood not being restored even after a year of his swearing in. Shah replied, "He (Abdullah) may be saying this out of political compulsions. But statehood would be restored at an appropriate time. And it will be done following discussions with him." About the recent agitations in Ladakh, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

7 illegal immigrants 'pushed back': CM

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said seven illegal migrants have been "pushed back" to their native place. He did not specify to which country they were sent back to, but the Assam government have been "pushing back" illegal immigrants to Bangladesh, with which it shares a border. "As they say, Thala for a reason... As Diwali knocks on the door, we have cleaned our house and removed 7 unwanted elements, who have been PUSHED BACK to their origins," Sarma said in a post on X. "This Swachhata Abhiyan will continue in the days and months to come. Time's up for all illegals," he added. (PTI)

Baksa violence: Nine people in police net

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Nine people have been arrested so far in connection with violence during the shifting of five accused in Zubeen Garg's death case to a jail in Assam's Baksa district. Several others involved in the violence have been identified, and a search operation is underway to arrest them, Baksa Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Ujjal Pratim Baruah said on Saturday. "We have arrested nine people so far. More have been identified. Some of the accused are absconding but we will apprehend them soon. We have taken this investigation very seriously, and a team is taking it forward. The media, local people, all are helping us," the SSP said. Baruah also said the local people

were even providing food to the security personnel on duty. Violent protests had erupted near the Baksa jail on Wednesday when five accused in Garg's death case were brought there after a court in Guwahati remanded them to judicial custody. The SSP maintained that "true fans of Garg have nothing to worry as those who incited the violence in the guise of being fans have been identified", adding that a "number of history-sheeters, involved in bike-lifting, cattle-lifting and such crimes, are among those who were found guilty". "A WhatsApp group has been found where discussions centred around creating unrest. Updates from the media on the movement of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Golaghat lauded for tribal development

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Golaghat has been recognised by the Centre as among the top-performing districts in the country in tribal well-being and development, the chief minister's office (CMO) said here on Saturday. The efforts in the district in this field were recognised during the Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan 2025 national conclave on Friday. "Golaghat district brings pride to Assam, being honoured among the best-performing districts in the country at the Aadi Karmayogi Abhiyan 2025 national ceremony in New Delhi -- a recognition of its remarkable efforts in advancing tribal excellence and inclusive development," the CMO said in a post on X. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt transfers 36 police officers, several districts get new SSP

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: In a major reshuffle in the state's police ranks, the Assam government transferred 36 senior officers, according to a notification. Sribhumi's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Partha Pratim Das was transferred to Cachar in the same post. Dhubri SSP Leena Doley will replace Das in Sribhumi, while Cachar SSP Numal Mahatta was sent to Kokrajhar, according to the notification issued on Friday. Commandant of Assam Police's 4th Battalion Debasish Borah will be the new Dhubri SSP, while Jorhat SSP Shwetank Mishra will replace him. Mishra was also given the additional charge of the SSP of Special Branch (Research and Analysis Cell). Sivasagar SSP Subhrajyoti Bora will take over Mishra's earlier role as Jorhat SSP. Karbi Anglong SSP Sanjib Kumar Saikia will be the new Kamrup SSP, replacing Ranjan Bhuyan, who will take over as SSP (Anti-Human Trafficking) of CID. Dima Hasao SSP Mayank Kumar was named the SSP of Tinsukia, while Ripunjoy Kakati, the Assistant IGP (AP), will replace him. Tinsukia SSP Abhijit Dilip was transferred to Dibrugarh, replacing VV Rakesh Reddy, who was posted as (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

State to hold special tribute to Dr Bhupen Hazarika

CM reviews preparations as part of centenary celebrations; districts to host musical tributes on Nov 5 HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday reviewed preparations for the statewide observance of the death anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika, which will be held on November 5 in a special manner as part of his birth centenary celebrations. Chairing a video conference from Dispur with Guardian Ministers, the Chief Secretary, Deputy Commissioners, and senior officials, the Chief Minister said the State Government is observing Dr Hazarika's birth centenary with yearlong programmes across Assam. He said the death anniversary of the Bard of the Brahmaputra would be synchronised with these celebrations and marked through coordinated events in every district. The Department of Cultural Affairs presented a detailed plan for commemorating the occasion at the district level. Dr Sarma announced that special programmes will be organised in all districts on November 5, featuring performances by leading local artists and renditions of Dr Hazarika's songs, including the iconic "Manuhe Manuhor Babe." Eminent personalities from the fields of music and culture will also be invited to the events. To encourage public participation, the Chief Minister directed that the programmes be held at prominent venues in each district. He suggested that larger districts may organise additional events in their sub-divisions, if required. Dr Sarma instructed the Deputy Commissioners to coordinate closely with their respective Guardian Ministers to ensure smooth and successful observance of the programme. Finance minister Ajanta Neog, cooperation minister Jogen Mohan, public health engineering minister Jayanta Mallabarua, power minister Prasanta Phukan, labour welfare minister Rupesh Gowala, several guardian ministers, chief secretary Ravi Kota, and additional (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM reviews preparations for FM's visit in Nov

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday reviewed preparation for Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit next month. He directed officials to ensure preparations are completed in a coordinated manner. "@himantabiswa today chaired a high-level preparatory meeting in Dispur to review arrangements for the forthcoming visit of Hon'ble Union Minister Smt @nsitharaman to Assam on 7th and 8th November, 2025," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X. It said Sarma "took detailed stock of the programmes and events scheduled during Hon'ble Minister's visit and directed officials to ensure that all preparations are carried out in a timely and coordinated manner". (PTI)

'Conclave a stage for young innovators, startups and researchers to showcase innovative solutions'

ESTIC to bring together innovators, scientific minds from Nov 3-5

NEW DELHI, Oct 18: India's top scientific minds, innovators and policymakers will gather here next month for the flagship Emerging Science, Technology, and Innovation Conclave, (ESTIC-2025) which is likely to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The ESTIC, scheduled to be held at Bharat Mandapam from November 3-5, will feature plenary addresses by global experts and Nobel Laureates, thematic technical discussions with S&T leaders, women entrepreneurs and deep-tech startup CEOs. The conclave will also seek to showcase disruptive innovation, including an exhibition by deep-tech startups and a poster forum for young scientists, faculty and engineers. Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh called on Presi-



dent Droupadi Murmu and briefed her about the conclave, the upcoming India International Science Festival and developments in his home state of Jammu and Kashmir. Designed as an outcome-oriented forum, ESTIC-2025 aligns research, standards-readiness and scale-up mechanisms to accelerate the lab-to-market journey. "The conclave is a stage for young innovators, startups and researchers to showcase innovative solutions, find mentorship and connect with industry and stakeholders," Singh said.

"ESTIC brings together India's scientific community, industry and startups on a single platform to turn ideas into impact. By connecting efforts across ministries and aligning with national priorities, the conclave strengthens translation pathways from laboratories to scale," said Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India. "Through eleven thematic sessions and high-level panels, ESTIC-2025 will chart a comprehensive roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047, enabled by a whole-of-government approach," said Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science & Technology (DST), emphasising ESTIC's role in advancing collaborative pathways that translate science into societal and economic impact. ESTIC-2025 is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Every inch of Pak territory within BrahMos range, Op Sindoor only a trailer: Rajnath

LUCKNOW, Oct 18: Every inch of Pakistan's territory lies within range of BrahMos and what happened during Operation Sindoor was just a trailer, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here on Saturday, in a stern warning to Pakistan. The operation proved that victory has become a habit for India, he said. The Union minister, along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, flagged off the first batch of BrahMos missiles manufactured at the BrahMos Aerospace unit in Sarojini Nagar here. Singh described BrahMos as a symbol of India's rising strength. "BrahMos is not just a missile, it

is proof of India's strategic confidence. From the Army to the Navy and the Air Force, it has become a key pillar of our defence forces," he said. Singh asserted that India's defence capabilities now serve as a powerful deterrent. "Every inch of Pakistan's territory lies within range of BrahMos. What happened during Operation Sindoor was just a trailer. It made Pakistan realise that if India could create Pakistan, then if the time comes... I need not say more, you all are wise enough," he said. Operation Sindoor proved that "victory is not just a small incident for us but it has become a habit", he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Shah, Nadda join Guv, CM in wishing people on Kati Bihu

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: As Assam observes 'Kati Bihu' on Saturday, an occasion to pray for agricultural prosperity, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP president JP Nadda extended their greetings to the people of the state. "On the occasion of 'Kati Bihu', I pray before the holy 'Tulsi' for the well-being of the people of Assam," Acharya said in a post on X. "May the earthen lamp lit before the Tulsi plant illuminate the Assamese society. May the verdant fields bring prosperity for the farmers of the state," the governor added. Shah, also in a post on the social media site, prayed for the "well-being and prosperity of all my sisters and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Trade talks on in cordial atmosphere with US; farmer, MSME interest will be protected: Goyal

**NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said talks between India and the US on a proposed bilateral trade agreement are progressing in a cordial atmosphere and New Delhi will protect the interests of farmers, fishermen and MSME sectors.

"Bharat ke kisanon ka, machhuvaaonon ka, Bharat ke MSME sector ka, jub tak desh hiton ko puri tarah se hum sambhalen nai, tab tak koi agreement kiya nai jata (No agreement can be made until we take care of the interests of India's farmers, fishermen and MSME sector)," he told reporters here.

He was replying to a question about the progress of talks between the two countries on the proposed pact and by when it will be concluded.

"Talks are going on in a cordial atmosphere," he said.

The remarks are important as the US is seeking concessions in India's agriculture sector.

The Indian official team, headed by Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, was in Washington this week to hold trade talks with their US counterparts.

The three-day talks ended on October 17. The team is on its way back from the US.



An official said that the talks were positive during this visit between the two sides and a number of issues have been resolved in earlier rounds of negotiations also.

In February this year, leaders of India and the US directed officials to negotiate a proposed Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

They have fixed a deadline to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall (October-November) of 2025. So far, five rounds of negotiations have been completed.

Last month, Goyal led an official delegation to New York for trade

talks.

These deliberations are important as the relations between the two countries have been reeling under severe stress after the Trump administration imposed a steep 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods. It includes a 25 per cent additional import duty for buying Russian crude oil.

India has described these duties as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable".

However, the recent phone conversations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President

Donald Trump have raised hopes of a positive outcome from the ongoing negotiations for the trade deal.

After a brief gap, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch held talks with Indian officials in New Delhi on September 16. In that meeting, both sides agreed to push for an early and mutually beneficial conclusion of the agreement.

The proposed pact aims to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from the current USD 191 billion.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports).

It accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in the country's total merchandise trade.

India's merchandise exports to the US declined by 11.93 per cent to USD 5.46 billion in September due to the high tariffs imposed by Washington while imports increased by 11.78 per cent to USD 3.98 billion during the month, according to the commerce ministry data. (PTI)

## HDFC Bank Q2 results 2025: Net profit rises 10.8% to ₹186.4 billion

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Oct 18:** HDFC Bank Limited has reported a 10.8 percent year-on-year rise in net profit to ₹186.4 billion for the quarter ended September 30, 2025.

Profit before tax for the quarter stood at ₹244.2 billion.

The bank's net revenue for the period grew 10.3 percent to ₹459.0 billion, compared to ₹416.0 billion in the same quarter last year.

The total balance sheet size as of September 30, 2025, was ₹40,030 billion, up from ₹36,881 billion a year earlier.

Average deposits during the September 2025 quarter rose 15.1 percent to ₹27,105 billion from ₹23,540 billion in the corresponding quarter of 2024, and 2 percent from ₹26,576 billion in the June 2025 quarter.

Net interest income for the quarter increased 4.8 percent to ₹315.5 billion from ₹301.1 billion in the year-ago period.

The bank's net revenues for the half year ended September 30, 2025, stood at ₹990.7 billion, up from ₹821.0 billion in the first half of 2024.

Gross non-performing assets accounted for 1.24 percent of gross advances as of September 30, 2025.

As of the end of the quarter, HDFC Bank's distribution network comprised 9,545 branches and 21,417 ATMs across 4,156 cities and towns, compared to 9,092 branches and 20,993 ATMs in 4,088 locations a year earlier.

The bank said that 50 percent of its branches are located in semi-urban and rural areas.

## LG unveils 'Essential Series'



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Oct 18:** LG Electronics India Ltd. (LGEIL) on Saturday launched the LG Essential Series, a new line of home appliances developed specifically for Indian consumers.

The series, built entirely on local insights, marks the company's first major consumer initiative following the public listing of LGEIL and underscores LG's renewed commitment to the Indian market.

Introduced under the campaign "Har Ghar Appliances, Har Ghar Happiness," the new range aims to make innovation more accessible to households across the country while meeting their growing aspirations.

The products have been designed after engaging with more than 1,200 families across India, representing diverse demographics and lifestyles.

Embodying the twin philosophies of "Made in India" and "Made for India," each appliance in the Essential Series is tailored to suit local needs, offering a combination of performance, durability and thoughtful design at affordable prices.

The series includes a double-door refrigerator, a fully automatic top-load washing machine, a room air conditioner and a convertible oven.

The double-door refrigerator features frost-free technology and a 20 percent larger vegetable storage compartment compared to earlier models.

It is equipped with a Smart Mode that automatically adjusts cooling based on seasonal variations.

The fully automatic top-load washing machine incorporates Low Pressure Fill technology for effective washing even under low water pressure, and a ProShield motor with a BMC cover to protect against dust, insects and moisture.

It also has an IPX4-certified control panel designed for humid conditions.

The room air conditioner includes Energy Manager+ and Diet Mode+ features, allowing users to control power consumption and cooling levels for greater comfort and energy efficiency.

It is suited for small to medium-sized spaces such as bedrooms or study rooms.

The convertible oven offers auto-cook menus for traditional Indian dishes like ghee, paneer and dal, along with air-fry and convection modes for healthier and more versatile cooking.

"The LG Essential Series marks a new chapter in our commitment to Indian consumers, following the successful market listing of LGEIL," said Hong Ju Jeon, president of LG Electronics India Ltd. "Designed from the ground up with insights from thousands of households, this series brings together premium design and everyday reliability. It addresses the real needs of Indian families with appliances built for local conditions—enhancing convenience and enriching daily life."

The nationwide rollout of the LG Essential Series will begin in November 2025.

Prices will start at around ₹18,000 for entry-level models, with availability at authorised LG brand stores, multi-brand retail outlets and major e-commerce platforms across India.

## IPSA Group hosts grand dealers meet in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Oct 18:** IPSA India, a leading company in the architectural and furniture hardware sector, hosted its Grand Dealers Meet in Guwahati, bringing together dealers, sub-dealers, and channel partners from across the North East region.

The event was attended by IPSA Chairman Anil Kumar Aggarwal, Managing Director Rajit Aggarwal, and Director Ankit Aggarwal, who addressed the gathering and shared insights on the company's growth journey, vision, and future roadmap.

The programme began with a silent tribute to late Assamese artist Zubeen Garg, honouring

his contribution to the state's culture and music.

A presentation highlighting IPSA India's upcoming innovations, product expansions, and performance milestones was also conducted during the meet.

The company officially launched its Diwali Scheme 2025, which drew an enthusiastic response from channel partners.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman Anil Kumar Aggarwal thanked all partners for their continued support, saying that the dealers and sub-dealers formed the backbone of IPSA India and had played a key role in the company's nationwide expansion.

Director Ankit Aggarwal said that the North

East was a rapidly growing market and the event reaffirmed the company's commitment to empowering dealers through innovation and new opportunities.

Managing Director Rajit Aggarwal underlined IPSA's focus on innovation, trust, and quality, and said the company was strengthening its manufacturing capabilities and introducing new product lines in line with the Make in India initiative.

The evening concluded with a gala dinner, networking session, and a live musical performance, celebrating the festive spirit of Diwali and strengthening the bond within the IPSA family.

## Dhanteras gold buying kicks off, record prices may dampen volumes by 15pc

**MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** Gold and silver buying on the auspicious occasion of Dhanteras kicked off on Saturday with jewellers expecting higher footfalls, though record high prices of the yellow metal could dampen demand by 15 per cent in volume terms compared with a year earlier.

Dhanteras, the most auspicious day in the Hindu calendar for buying items ranging from precious metals to utensils, is being celebrated over two days until 1.45 pm on Sunday, with jewellers expecting more footfalls in both online and offline stores.

Gold prices have surged 65 per cent to Rs 1,34,800 per 10 grams of 24 karat, inclusive of all taxes, in the national capital, compared with Rs 81,400 on Dhanteras last year, which was celebrated on October 29, 2024.

Silver prices are currently at Rs 1,77,000 per kilogram.

"We are expecting the momentum to pick up after the muhurat

time. Since the festival falls on a weekend we have geared up for a robust Dhanteras," All India Gem And Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokde told PTI.

GJC expects gold sales to increase by 40-45 per cent in value terms on a year-on-year basis, he said.

Suvankar Sen, Managing Director and chief executive of Senco Gold and Diamonds, said high prices will affect sale volumes by 12-15 per cent, but in value terms there will be growth of 20-25 per cent on Dhanteras.

While some consumers are still buying gold jewellery even at high rates, many are shifting towards silver buying, especially bullion.

Saiyam Mehra, former chairman of GJC, said volume-wise, gold jewellery sales are expected to witness a decline of 10 per cent on Dhanteras.

He said silver prices surged due to scarcity of the white metal since

last month because of a ban on imports of jewellery, though silver prices have now started seeing a correction.

Sachin Jain, regional CEO for India at the World Gold Council, said Dhanteras and Diwali are the top gold-buying occasions in India.

"Despite gold prices reaching multiple historic highs through 2025, witnessing an approximate 51.2 per cent year-to-date increase in rupee prices by end-September, consumer sentiment and demand for the yellow metal have been positive," he said.

Retailers, who had been cautious about their inventories in recent months, are now well-stocked and optimistic, with seasonal and wedding-related demand further fuelling purchases, suggesting a vibrant festive season for gold sales.

Consumer buying is expected to be strong across various gold purchases, from higher caratage gold jewellery to investment products

like digital gold, coins and ETFs.

"This positive outlook is strongly supported by India registering positive gold ETF flows of USD 902 million in September, along with overall gold imports reaching a nine-month high in August 2025," Jain said, adding that gold demand is expected to continue through the Diwali period and until the end of the year due to the wedding season.

Kama Jewellery Managing Director Colin Shah said while demand dynamics are likely to remain consistent, consumer preferences are rapidly shifting toward lightweight jewellery.

"The festive season is expected to see a significant surge in demand for jewellery in the 9 to 18 carat segment. ... we foresee a festive surge of 18-20 per cent in overall sales," Shah said.

India is the world's second-largest gold consumer and one of the largest importers globally, after China. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## BPF joins NDA

issues. Sarma said talks on making a consolidated strategy for the 2026 state polls will commence soon, and a clear picture will emerge by December-January.

On continuing alliance with the UPPL, which is the arch-rival of BPF in BTC, the chief minister said, "The alliance with UPPL was forged in 2021. For the 2026 elections, we will have talks anew with AGP, UPPL, and the BPF. The strategy for 2026 has not been finalised yet."

Sarma said that he has an old personal relationship with Mohilary, which is being reflected in the coordination now.

Mohilary, also talking to reporters after the oath-taking ceremony, said, "The BPF has always been working for the development of BTC and for that, we have to work closely with the government (in Dispur). Our only agenda is development, and for it, we have joined hands with the NDA."

Refusing to comment on UPPL's performance in the autonomous council area for the last five years, Mohilary said, "I only want to say that BPF, along with the NDA, will bring unprecedented progress to BTC areas."

Notably, the UPPL lost the latest BTC elections to the BPF.

He maintained that the induction of Boro into the state Cabinet was a "routine process" as the BPF, as an NDA partner, was set to get a place in the ministry.

"We will also give the BJP two executive members and the deputy speaker position in BTC. Everything is a give and take relation," Mohilary added. (PTI)

## Charge-sheet to be

Sandipan, his two band members Sekharjyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta, and his two PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya. All are currently in judicial custody after their police remand ended. (PTI)

## Baksa violence: Nine

convoy carrying the accused were shared in this group. A person sitting in Bangalore, who is the admin of the group, was inciting the members to hurl stones. He has been identified," the officer added.

Forty police personnel, including senior officers, were injured in the violence, and many sustaining serious wounds are recovering now, he said.

"Additional forces have been deployed in the violence-hit area and the situation is now under control," Baruah added. Besides police personnel, media persons were injured when the protestors hurled stones at vehicles carrying the five accused and torched several other vehicles.

Police had to baton-charge and fire tear gas shells to control the situation.

Internet and mobile data services were suspended in the district, following the unrest, but were restored on Friday, as the situation returned to normal.

Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, remain in force in Mushalpur town, where the jail is located, and adjoining areas.

Security has been tightened in and around the jail, where the accused have been lodged following the court order. Garg had died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on September 19. He was there to participate in the 4th North East India Festival (NEIF).

NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddhartha Sharma, his cousin and police officer Sandipan Garg and his personal security officers Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya are lodged at Baksa jail. Two others arrested in the same case -- Garg's band members Shekharjyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta -- were also remanded to judicial custody by the Kamrup (Metro) chief judicial magistrate on Friday. The two have been taken to Hailong jail in Dima Hasao district.

A 10-member special investigation team (SIT) of CID of the Assam Police is probing the death of the singer-composer. (PTI)

## Statehood of J&K

Shah said the Union government is "in talks with the committees of Leh and Kargil".

"We urge the people to have patience. There will be a good resolution of all their just demands," he said. The allusion may have been to the combined leadership of Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, which represent Ladakh's political and civil society groups.

The union home minister was also asked about the possibility of the release of Sonam Wangchuk, educator-turned-activist, who is in jail after being accused of inciting protests that led to the torching of the BJP office in Leh and vandalisation of some other public buildings.

Shah replied, "I can speak of the demands of the people. Not about any individual. As far as his (Wangchuk's) case is concerned, the matter is before the court, which will take a decision on the basis of evidence at hand".

The home minister also said the government was carrying out "a ruthless campaign" against Maoist insurgency, accusing the ultra-Left ideology of "the sin of forcing tribal areas to remain undeveloped".

"In the 11 years since Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in power, we have demolished at least 600 Maoist camps, dried up their finances and blocked their access to weapons. I would like to declare that Maoism will be completely wiped out by December 31, 2026", asserted Shah. (PTI)

## Man held for 'unsolicited'

September 19. A 10-member special investigation team of the state police's CID is probing his death. Seven people have been arrested so far in connection with the singer's death. During interrogation, Hoque admitted that he uploaded the video, Sarma said.

"He (Hoque) stated that he had obtained the original clip from an OTT platform, after which he added inflammatory remarks through editing before posting it," the chief minister added. (PTI)

## Golaghat lauded for

It extended congratulations to all officials, employees, district coordinators, trainers, block-level trainers, village coordinators, Aadi Saathis, Aadi Sahayogis, and to the people of the district for the success.

The certificate of recognition was presented at the national conclave on Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan 2025, commemorating Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh, in New Delhi under the aegis of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (PTI)

## Assam govt transfers

SSP of Hojai. In the Guwahati Police, Shambhavi Mishra will be the new DCP (Central), Amitabh Basumaty the new DCP (West), and Jagadish Das the new DCP (Border).

The reshuffle was made with a few months left for the assembly elections in the state, due to be held early next year. (PTI)

## State to hold special

chief secretaries Ajay Tewari, B Kalyan Chakravarthy, and KK Dwivedi, among other senior officials, attended the meeting both physically and virtually.

## Shah, Nadda join

brothers of Assam". "May this festival bring happiness and abundance into everyone's lives," he said. Nadda also extended his wishes to the people of Assam on the occasion of 'Kati Bihu'.

"My heartfelt greetings to all my sisters and brothers of Assam on the auspicious occasion of 'Kati Bihu'. May this festival fill every home with new hope, prosperity and good health," the BJP national president said.

Sarma highlighted the significance of the festival in praying for a bountiful harvest in this agrarian state. "This evening, people of Assam will light a diya (earthen lamp) in front of Maa Tusu to pray for a bountiful harvest in the coming days, and for everyone's safety and prosperity. It is a solemn occasion to remember the contributions of our farmers and our close ties with nature," Sarma said in a post on X.

He also thanked Shah and Nadda for their wishes and added that the farmers of the state are prospering and thriving with the blessings of Goddess Kamakhya and the interventions of the central government.

Sarma said that the state is working towards being self-reliant in the agriculture sector. (PTI)

## Every inch of Pak

Hailing Operation Sindoor, Singh said it instilled a new confidence among Indians and proved BrahMos' effectiveness to the world.

"Maintaining this confidence is now our collective responsibility," he said. "The entire world now recognises India's capability. BrahMos has strengthened our belief that India can turn its dreams into reality," he said.

Under Operation Sindoor, Indian defence forces targeted terror infrastructure and defence installations in Pakistan in May, following an attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgalam on April 22 that claimed 26 lives.

Indigenously developed BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles were used by India to destroy Pakistan's air bases during the operation.

On the manufacturing of BrahMos at the Lucknow unit, Singh said the project symbolises India's growing confidence and capability in defence manufacturing.

"Lucknow is not just my parliamentary constituency, it resides in my soul. Today, it has become a city of technology and industry, apart from culture and tradition.

"The successful production of BrahMos missiles here shows that what was once a dream has now become a reality. The project represents patience, hard work and determination," he said.

Assuring direct employment to hundreds of people, Singh said that it is estimated that around 100 missile systems will be provided annually to the Army, Air Force and Navy from here. In the next financial year, the turnover of this unit will reach ₹ 3,000 crore, which will generate GST revenue of ₹ 500 crore.

Highlighting the capabilities of BrahMos, he said that BrahMos is not just a missile, but a symbol of India's growing indigenous strength.

While appreciating Adityanath, he said that "We all know that Uttar Pradesh was once identified with gangsterism and broken law and order. People lived in an atmosphere of fear and investors were afraid to come here. But today, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, this situation has changed. His firm leadership and policy decisions have restored confidence in the state." (PTI)

## ESTIC to bring together

envisaged as an outcome-oriented forum that celebrates stakeholder contributions while fostering collaborations among researchers, entrepreneurs, industry and funding bodies.

The conclave's discussions and showcases are structured to identify actionable next steps and measurable follow-ups so that momentum continues beyond the three event days.

The India International Science Festival (IISF-2025), a four-day event beginning December 6 at Panjab University, Chandigarh, will celebrate the theme "Vigyan Se Samridhhi-Science to Prosperity." (PTI)

## Guv attends NE Education Conclave valedictory session Calls for merging tradition with innovation in academic reforms

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the valedictory session of the North East Education Conclave 2025 at Pragjyotishpur University, calling it a symbol of collective commitment to shaping India's academic future.

Organised to mark the university's foundation, the conclave brought together educationists, policymakers and academics to discuss educational transformation in line with the National Education Policy 2020.

In his address, Governor Acharya emphasised the relevance of the conclave amid the country's push towards a knowledge-driven, self-reliant economy. Quoting Sri-manta Shankardev, he spoke of the transformative power of education and recalled India's ancient centres of learning like Nalanda and Takshashila, while lamenting the cultural and educational decline

during colonial rule.

The Governor highlighted the need for experiential, technology-driven education and praised Assam for pioneering NEP implementation by introducing field-based, project-oriented learning across universities. He noted that about 20 percent of coursework in disciplines like arts, commerce and social sciences now addresses local societal needs.

Acharya urged universities to embrace India's intellectual heritage—including Vedas, Yoga and Ayurveda—not as a nostalgic exercise, but as a means to fuse tradition with scientific progress. He called for campuses to become hubs of innovation and social impact. The session was attended by key dignitaries including Tripura Education Minister Kishore Barman, Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita and Pragjyotishpur University Vice Chancellor Prof Smriti Kumar Sinha, among others.



## All-Assam Kachari Samaj demands CM post

Kachari community seeks 70% reservation and exclusive claim to top leadership post in Assam

**HT Correspondent**  
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 18: Amid growing discontent across Assam, particularly in Upper Assam over recent remarks by the Chief Minister, the All-Assam Kachari Samaj (AAKS) has reiterated its demand that the Chief Minister's post be reserved exclusively for a person from the Kachari community.

Speaking to this correspondent, AAKS president Dr Phukan Chandra Boro, former chairman of the Volunteer Force during the ABSU-led separate state movement, stated that the Chief Minister of Assam should be from the Kachari-origin communities. Though Boro did not list specific groups, it is widely known that Boro-Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Tengal Kachari, Sarania Kachari, and Deuri are among those classified as Scheduled Tribes in Assam.

Boro said the Kachari people have faced po-



litical, economic and social suppression since the arrival of invaders in the 13th century. He alleged that these communities were delib-

erately denied equal rights and opportunities and were instead included in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list, where they receive only limited benefits such as 10 percent reservation.

He argued that the Kacharis, as indigenous people whose kings once ruled Assam, should not be lumped into a general ST category but should be recognised separately. He demanded 70 percent reservation in jobs and political representation for the Kachari community, citing their historical and demographic significance in the state.

Boro claimed that for 76 years since Independence, the ST communities in Assam, particularly the Kacharis, have been systematically deprived. He stressed that the government of India must acknowledge the distinct identity of the Kacharis and ensure their rightful share in governance, including appointing a Chief Minister from the community.

## Phulaguri Dhewa memorial day

**HT Correspondent**

NAGAON, Oct 18: The 164th anniversary of the historic Phulaguri Dhewa was observed in Nagaon with solemnity and reverence, honouring the farmers who sacrificed their lives resisting British colonial rule. The memorial ceremony, held at the Phulaguri Dhewa site, was attended by local MLA Shashikanta Das and Nagaon Deputy Commissioner Debashish Sarma. The event began with the national flag hoisting, a moment of silence, and the lighting of ceremonial lamps in tribute to the martyrs. In his speech, MLA Das recalled the significance of the Phulaguri uprising, emphasising the resistance against colonial oppression, including bans on afghani cultivation and excessive taxation on riverine lands. DC Sarma highlighted the need to preserve the historical site and educate the youth about its legacy.

## ABSU demands CBI probe into Zubeen Garg's death

**HT Correspondent**

KOKRAJHAR, Oct 18: The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has expressed deep resentment over the Assam government's silence and inaction regarding the mysterious death of beloved artist and cultural icon Zubeen Garg, who passed away in Singapore on September 19.

During a condolence and tribute programme held on Friday evening at the main entrance of Bodoland University in Debargaon, ABSU president Dipen Boro lit a ceremonial lamp before Zubeen's portrait and paid homage to the artist, calling his untimely demise tragic and heartbreaking.

Boro raised serious doubts over the circumstances of Zubeen's death, questioning whether it was an accident or a pre-planned murder. He criticised the slow pace of

the investigation and demanded justice on behalf of the people of Assam.

Stating that ABSU has no confidence in the Special Investigation Team (SIT) currently handling the case, Boro demanded that the probe be extended beyond Assam to Singapore, where the incident occurred.

He urged the government to hand the case over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to ensure a transparent and impartial investigation.

He described Zubeen as a guardian figure for the people of Assam and said that emotions across the state remain deeply tied to him. ABSU warned that unless Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ensures justice, it will continue its democratic movement across Assam with

support from the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the general public.

Referring to the recent violence in Baksa district jail, allegedly linked to the Zubeen Garg case, Boro called it an unfortunate incident and blamed government negligence and flawed policies for unrest in the otherwise peaceful Bodoland region. The incident in Nikashi, Baksa, was condemned by ABSU, which held the Assam Home Department accountable for its failure.

The tribute programme was attended by Bodoland University Vice-Chancellor B L Ahuja, AASU Central Vice-president Navjyoti Roy, ABSU General Secretary Khanindra Basumatary, Vice-president Khwrmwmdao Wary, and a large number of university students.

## Asam Sahitya Sabha remembers Lion Man of Assam

**HT Correspondent**

TEZPUR, Oct 18: The Assam Sahitya Sabha commemorated the 125th birth anniversary of Radha Govinda Baruah, popularly known as the Lion Man of Assam, with deep reverence at the Bhagawati Prasad Baruah Bhawan, the Guwahati office of the Sabha on Friday.

The programme began with the ceremonial lighting of a lamp in front of Baruah's portrait by the Principal Secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Debajit Bora. In his address, Bora paid rich tribute to the legendary reformer and visionary, praising his immense contributions to the formation of Assamese identity and cultural awakening.

"Assamese is a unique community that sings songs of harmony and unity even in a crematorium, as witnessed at the funeral of late artist Zubeen Garg," said Bora, while drawing parallels with Baruah's legacy of unity and cultural pride. He described Radha Govinda Baruah as a true nationalist and cultural icon who helped shape modern Assam.

Noted actor and Jyotirupa working president Dilip Baruah also paid homage to the visionary, recalling his vital role in Assam's cultural renaissance. Dr Sanjit Kumar Sarma, secretary of the Guwahati office of the Sabha, highlighted Baruah's multifaceted contributions and appealed to the Government of India to posthu-

mously confer the Bharat Ratna upon him. He also urged that the under-construction flyover at Chandmari-Dighalipukhuri be named after Baruah.

Veteran journalist and organiser Naren Hazarika also spoke briefly, remembering Baruah's far-reaching impact on Assamese society.

The event was attended by several prominent personalities, including Padma Shri awardee Dr Roman Sharma, actors Tapas Dutta, Arati Kalita, Ranjan Sarma, Girish Sharma, Pradeep Thakuria, Dulu Das, playwright Mala Sarma, and singers Jayashree Devi and Chandan Mishra, all of whom offered floral tributes to the iconic son of Assam.

## Web talk marks 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anglo-Kuki war

Event highlights unity, cultural pride, and role of women in Kuki resistance

**HT Correspondent**

DIBRUGARH, Oct 18: To commemorate the 108th year of the Anglo-Kuki War (1917-1919), the Assam Kuki College Professors' Association (ASKCOPA), in collaboration with the Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO), Karbi Anglong, organised an interactive web talk under the theme "Rekindling the Spirit of the Anglo-Kuki War: Inspiring Unity, Identity, and a Shared Destiny."

The online session brought together academicians, research scholars, doctors, community leaders and other distinguished personalities from across Assam. It was hosted by Dr Paominthang Haokip, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Tinsukia College.

The event began with a tribute to late music icon Dr Zubeen Garg, followed by an invocation by Rev Dr Sehjalum Doungel. Dr Lamkholal Doungel, president of ASKCOPA and Head of Political Science at DSHK College, delivered the welcome address and emphasised the need to draw lessons from the heroism and unity shown during the Anglo-Kuki War to address present-day challenges.

Key speakers included Dr Hoipi Haokip of Presidency College, Manipur, Pu L Doungel and Pu Thanglun Changsan, former Pres-



ident of Kuki Inpi Assam. The session was moderated by Dr Paochon Tuboi, Head of Sociology, SPP College, Sivasagar.

Dr Hoipi Haokip highlighted the often-overlooked role of Kuki women during the war, pointing to their involvement as transporters, informants and leaders. She stressed the cultural importance of rituals like Changai that celebrate women's contributions to family and society.

Pu L Doungel reflected on the sacrifices of legendary Kuki warriors such as Pu Chengjapao and Pu Tintong, drawing lessons on the importance of community unity and youth empowerment.

Pu Thanglun Changsan discussed modern challenges faced by the Kuki people, particularly the erosion of land identity and cultural memory. He called for a revival of self-reliance and community-driven governance. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Pu Lienging Singson, president of KSO Karbi Anglong, followed by a closing prayer from Pu Z Lutthang Thango, former president of KSO Assam.

The web talk reaffirmed the historical significance of the Anglo-Kuki War and its continuing relevance in promoting unity, identity and cultural pride within the Kuki community and beyond.

## Union Minister slams Cong over Zubeen's death

**HT Correspondent**

NAGAON, Oct 18: Union Minister of State for Textiles and Foreign Affairs, Pabitra Margherita, on Thursday inaugurated the marketing and exhibition centre of international fashion designer Sanjukta Dutta's 'Sanjukta Studio' at Panigaon in Nagaon town.

Praising Dutta's contributions, Margherita said she has taken Assam's traditional textile industry to the global stage and highlighted that the world is now turning towards handloom and handcrafted products, where Assam holds a unique place.

During his address, the minister strongly criticised the Congress party for allegedly politicising the recent death of singer Zubeen Garg. He termed the move inappropriate and urged the party to respect public sentiment. "They can criticise our politics, but using Zubeen Garg's name for political mileage is not acceptable," he said.



Sanjukta Dutta expressed gratitude to the people of Nagaon and said she was excited to open a studio in her hometown. The centre will promote and sell Assamese handicrafts and handloom textiles, many of which are her own designs. The event was attended by local dignitaries, including MLA Rupak Sarma, officials from the Assam Tourism Department and a tourist from Manchester who praised Dutta's work.

## Seminar on indigenous knowledge and sustainability

**HT Correspondent**

MANGALDAI, Oct 18: Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Adarsha Mahavidyalaya (PDDUAM), Dalgaoan, in Darrang district, successfully organised a two-day National Seminar on October 16-17, 2025, focusing on the theme "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Sustainable Development: Tradition, Innovation, and Policy Making."

Sponsored by ICSSR-NERC and supported by the RAHI Foundation, the seminar brought together scholars, policymakers, and academicians to explore the connection between traditional wisdom and modern development.

The inaugural session featured Prof Dinesh Baishya as the Chief Guest, who emphasised the importance of indigenous knowledge in shaping effective policy frameworks. Key lectures were delivered by Dr Shyama Prasad Biswas, retired professor from Dibrugarh University, Prof Hirendra Nath Sharma of Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, and Ashok Barman, IAS (Retd), all of whom provided valuable insights on the contemporary relevance of traditional practices.

Technical sessions chaired by Dr Budhin Hazarika, former Principal of Kharupetia College, included in-depth discussions. Notable attendees included Dr Sachindra Saharia, president of the Governing Body and Sangeeta Mazumdar of the RAHI Foundation.

The second day of the seminar was conducted virtually, with over 100 research papers presented by scholars from across India, offering diverse perspectives on sustainable development.

Convened by Dr Kumar Chandan Jyoti, Assistant Professor of Political Science, with Dr Sufian Ahmed Tapadar and Jinti Kalita as co-conveners, the seminar was held under the patronage of Principal Dr Lakhi Prasad Hazarika. A key moment was the release of an ISBN-numbered abstract volume featuring the academic contributions from the event. The seminar highlighted PDDUAM's active role in fostering dialogue around sustainability and the integration of indigenous knowledge in academic and policy domains.

## Kati Bihu observed with lamps and prayers

**HT Bureau**

DIPHU, Oct 18: Residents of Diphu observed Kati Bihu, also known as Kongali Bihu, by lighting earthen lamps at their gates, a practice adapted in urban areas from the traditional custom of lighting lamps near Tulsi plants in paddy fields.

The festival is marked by prayers for a good harvest during a time when food stocks are low in granaries. This year, Kati Bihu coincided with Dhanteras, a day before Diwali, prompting people to also decorate their homes with colourful lights.

Markets saw people buying sweets, earthen lamps and exchanging sweetmeats as part of the combined celebrations.

## Headmaster Samudra Gupta Das passes away

**HT Correspondent**

DERGAON, Oct 18: Samudra Gupta Das, Headmaster of Sawguri Kanuwa Gaon LP School, passed away on Wednesday. He was 57 years old. Following the news of his demise, members of the school managing committee, various organisations, and local residents visited his residence to pay their last respects before the final rites were performed. Das is survived by his wife, son, daughter and several relatives.

## Two Ganja dealers apprehended by Biswanath police

**HT Correspondent**

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Oct 18: Acting on a tip-off, a police team led by the Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP), Biswanath, in coordination with Sootea Police, apprehended two individuals involved in ganja smuggling and seized 85 kg of the contraband from Mudoj Gaon, Sootea, on Wednesday afternoon.

The police raided the residence of Dipankar Rajkhuwa, a local resident, based on secret information and recovered the ganja hidden in his bedroom. The seized quantity is estimated to be worth around Rs 42 lakh in the market.

Dipankar Rajkhuwa and Suren Bora, a resident of Biswanath and alleged mastermind behind ganja smuggling in the area, were arrested. An investigation is currently underway.

Residents have raised concerns over the growing rate of anti-social activities in the region, including drug peddling, thefts and cattle lifting and have urged the administration to take strict action.

## Rintithe Rongmarjong held pre-foundation day cleaning drive

**HT Correspondent**

BOKAJAN, Oct 18: Residents of Ward No 7, Rintithe Rongmarjong under Bokajan Municipal Board, conducted a cleaning drive in their locality ahead of the 23rd foundation day celebration of the village, scheduled for October 20.

The initiative is part of preparations for a grand daylong celebration. Rintithe Rongmarjong is among the few Karbi villages located within the municipal limits of Bokajan.

Village headman Long Inghe informed that the foundation day celebration will include a drawing competition for children, an open public meeting, cultural performances and a cultural night in the evening. He also invited people from neighbouring villages to join the festivities. The event will be attended by several dignitaries, including Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Surjya Rongphar and Education Board Chairman, Sardili Bey.

## ADC Antara Sen inspires teachers at ECCE training camp

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: Additional District Commissioner (Education) Antara Sen delivered an inspiring and reflective speech at the valedictory session of the five-day zonal-level Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) residential training held at the Ellora Hotel auditorium on Friday.

Sharing her personal educational experiences, Sen contrasted the rote learning of earlier times with today's interactive and child-centric approach. She highlighted how the focus has now shifted to nurturing curiosity, creativity and critical thinking in early learners through activity-based and experiential learning.

## Intrusion detection system to protect elephants

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Oct 18: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has initiated the implementation of an Intrusion Detection System (IDS) to enhance the safety of elephants and ensure smooth train operations in wildlife-sensitive areas.

The IDS, using advanced optical fibre sensing technology, detects elephant movement near railway tracks and generates real-time alerts for train drivers and control rooms, enabling timely preventive measures.

Trial runs of the system have been successfully commissioned across four key sections: Madarihat-Nagrakata (Alipurduar Division), Habaipur-Lamsakhang-Patharkhola-Lumding (Lumding Division), Kamakhya-Azara-Mirza (Rangia Division) and Titabar-Mariani-Nakachari (Tinsukia Division). These installations cover 64.03 km of elephant corridors and 141 km of block sections.

Encouraged by the successful trials, NFR plans to expand IDS coverage to an additional 146.4 km of identified elephant corridors, with full implementation targeted by April 2026.

This initiative underscores NFR's commitment to sustainable development, wildlife conservation and passenger safety, setting a national benchmark for eco-friendly railway operations.

## Rhino poaching attempt foiled, three arrested

**HT Correspondent**

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Oct 18: A coordinated operation by Biswanath, Majuli and Lakhimpur Police on Friday foiled a planned rhino poaching attempt and led to the arrest of three accused individuals.

The arrested were identified as Muhikanta Pegu of Dhenudhara village (Biswanath), Manuj Pathari of Mishamora village and Kiran Pegu of Karatipar (both from Majuli). Based on their input, police recovered a .303 rifle and nine 70 mm 12-bore cartridges from the residence of Debajit Pegu in New Dandi village, Gohpur.

Debajit Pegu, however, managed to escape. Further investigation is underway.

## Four illegal coal trucks seized by Margherita police

**HT Correspondent**

MARGHERITA, Oct 18: During a night patrol on Friday, Margherita police intercepted four trucks illegally transporting coal on NH 315 under Tinsukia district. The trucks were seized around midnight and brought to the Margherita police station along with their drivers and handymen.

The seized vehicles, bearing registration numbers AS 01 S C5036, AS 01 S C6109, AS 01 R C3069, and AS 02 C C9391, were reportedly carrying coal from illegal mining operations in Ledo and were en route to Guwahati.

Sources confirmed that a case has been registered and further investigation is ongoing.

Despite a ban on illegal coal mining in the Margherita subdivision, such activities continue, allegedly under the radar of the police, district administration, Forest Department and the Mines and Minerals Department.

Concerned citizens of Margherita have demanded strict enforcement against illegal coal mining and urged authorities to ensure that all collieries operate legally under Northeastern Coalfields, Coal India Ltd Margherita.

# Kali Puja: The worship of divine power

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Kali Puja is a festival that establishes a deep connection with the profound truths of life. This worship is not merely confined to religious rituals performed in temples or homes. Rather, it is a noble path of confronting the inner fears, ignorance, and attachments of the mind to recognize the inherent divine power within. On the dark night of the new moon in the month of Kartik, when darkness envelops everything, the worship of Goddess Kali takes place. Through this puja, the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, and the path to knowledge through the destruction of ignorance are realized. During this time, when the entire nation sparkles with the lights of Deepavali, the act of worshipping Kali, the deity of darkness, on the same night carries a special significance. This puja teaches that conquering the inner darkness of the mind is as crucial as embracing external light. Through the worship of Kali, the transient nature of life, the cyclical movement of time, and the depth of the universe's energy are comprehended. Through Kali's worship, one confronts the negative emotions, fears, and attachments of the mind, enabling the resolve for a new, pure life. The social, spiritual, and philosophical significance of this puja provides a new direction to life, influencing not only individual existence but also the cultural and moral fabric of society as a whole.

The form of Goddess Kali is deeply intertwined with the fundamental truths of life. She is regarded as the controller of time, in whose hands all things are born and ultimately dissolve. Her dark complexion signifies the void where no form or attribute existed before creation. This dark hue is not merely a symbol of darkness but represents the point of ultimate wisdom from which light is born. Her fearsome appearance—flowing hair, blood-red tongue, a garland of skulls around her neck, and a girdle of severed hands at her waist—though terrifying to behold, conceals profound spiritual meanings. Her unbound hair signifies limitless freedom, unbound by worldly rules or restrictions. The garland of skulls represents the letters of knowledge and the destruction of ego, reminding one of life's fleeting nature. The girdle of severed hands signifies liberation from the bonds of

karma, which keep one trapped in the cycle of birth and death. The blood-red tongue indicates the control and liberation from worldly attachments. Through this form, Goddess Kali reminds one of life's impermanence and the inevitability of death. Her worship enables one to confront fears, fostering the realization that death is not an end but a path to a new beginning. Behind this fearsome form lies a motherly compassion that liberates from all fears and guides toward the path of wisdom. Kali's form teaches that even the difficult and terrifying aspects of life must be embraced, for it is through them that the truth is discovered. Through her worship, the darkness of ignorance and ego is dispelled, and the light of knowledge is attained.

The tantric tradition of Kali Puja holds a special significance. In tantric scriptures, Kali is regarded as the primal energy or the root force of creation. The primary goal of tantric practices is to awaken the dormant Kundalini energy within the body and unite it with supreme consciousness. Through the mantras, rituals, and offerings of Kali Puja, this awakening of energy becomes possible. In tantric philosophy, every aspect of life—whether auspicious or inauspicious—is considered a part of the path to liberation. Kali's practice instills the courage to face life's difficult and uncomfortable aspects. Through this practice, one transcends the distinctions of good and bad, attaining a sense of oneness. Tantrics believe that Goddess Kali removes all delusions and veils of the mind, guiding toward the path of ultimate knowledge. In this path, greater emphasis is placed on the purity of the mind and soul than on external purity. Through Kali's tantric practice, a connection with inner energy is established, and the ability to courageously embrace all circumstances of life is learned. This practice is not only for personal liberation but also a path to becoming one with the entire universe. According to tantric philosophy, Kali's energy is the source of all creation, and through her worship, one connects with this energy to realize life's ultimate purpose. This practice teaches that no part of life needs to be feared, as everything is an integral part of the universe. Through this philosophy, one learns to embrace every experience of life and live meaningfully.

During Kali Puja, the mind, body, and all joys



and sorrows of life are offered to the goddess. Through this surrender, it is realized that everything received in life is a gift of divine energy. The tradition of receiving prasad after offering bhog evokes a sense of renewed energy and purity in the mind. The practice of distributing prasad fosters equality and fraternity in society. Regardless of caste or religion, everyone receives divine blessings through this prasad. This act strengthens social bonds by fostering a sense of unity. This tradition of bhog and prasad teaches that relinquishing all attachments and living a pure, detached life is the path to liberation. Through this surrender, one is freed from ego and worldly delusions, attaining ultimate peace. This tradition also conveys that a divine energy operates behind all aspects of life, and through surrender to it, the true meaning of life is discovered.

On the dark night of the new moon, when people gather for the worship of the goddess, a sense of unity and cooperation awakens in society. The common belief is that Goddess Kali protects from all dangers, diseases, and injustices. This belief instills courage and patience during times of crisis.

Through Kali Puja, awareness of the dignity and importance of feminine power grows in society, as Goddess Kali herself is the symbol of the universe's supreme energy. The organization of this puja fosters joy, enthusiasm, and mutual exchange in society, strengthening social relationships. Through songs, dances, and collective activities during the puja, a sense of unity grows, enriching the cultural and moral life of society. This festival teaches that by staying united, any malevolent force can be countered, and mutual respect and love can be maintained in society.

Goddess Kali is also regarded as the deity of death, reminding one of life's impermanence. Through her worship, it is realized that just as life has a beginning, it also has an end, which is a truth. Kali's practice is a powerful means of liberation from the fear of death. By accepting Goddess Kali as a motherly figure, the fear of death dissipates from the mind, and the ability to live fearlessly is learned. This philosophy inspires one to relinquish attachments to transient things and move toward eternal truth. Through Kali's practice, one learns to embrace all aspects of life—joy,

sorrow, creation, and destruction. Through this acceptance, a new spiritual life is discovered, leading to the path of liberation. Kali's philosophical perspective teaches that every experience in life is a part of the path to liberation. By accepting life's difficult and terrifying aspects, fear and ignorance are dispelled from the mind, and new strength is gained to face life. This puja also teaches that death is not something to fear but a natural part of life. By embracing this truth, every moment of life becomes more meaningful.

The presence of Shiva's corpse-like form beneath Goddess Kali's feet holds a special significance. Shiva is the symbol of stability and consciousness, but without Kali's energy, he remains inactive. Kali's Tandava dance expresses the power of destruction, but through Shiva's stabilizing control, this energy becomes creative. The image of Kali's foot on Shiva's chest signifies the need for a harmonious relationship between energy and stability. Without energy, stability is meaningless, and without the control of stability, energy can become destructive. Through this relationship, the truth of unity within the duality of Kali and Shiva is revealed, underscoring the importance of balance in life. This image teaches that the chaotic energy of the mind must be controlled by consciousness to attain life's ultimate purpose. Through this relationship, the necessity of balance in all aspects of life is realized, and this balance provides the true meaning of life.

In conclusion, through Kali Puja, the profound truths of life are discovered. This puja is not merely a religious ritual but a living expression of life's philosophical and spiritual truths. Kali's worship teaches that darkness and light, creation and destruction, fear and courage—all are integral parts of the universe. Through her practice, one confronts the inner darkness of the mind and attains the light of knowledge. Kali's timeless message inspires connecting with inner energy and living a meaningful life. She transcends time, and through her destruction, the path to new creation is opened. The profound philosophy of Kali Puja teaches one to embrace all aspects of life and fearlessly move toward ultimate truth. Her worship also conveys that every moment of life is an opportunity to purify oneself and find the path to a better life.

## Diwali of happiness: Time to dispel the darkness of the mind

By: Dr Privanka Saurabh

Diwali is a festival of the year that not only symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, but also conveys the message of awakening spiritual light by eliminating the darkness within humanity. It is a day when people decorate their homes, light lamps, wear new clothes, and distribute sweets. But have we ever stopped to think whether the true Diwali is complete only by cleaning and lighting the house? Does the darkness, which this festival is celebrated to destroy, really exist only within the walls and courtyards, or is it also hidden somewhere in our minds and behavior?

Today's society is so engrossed in external glitter that the inner light is dimming. Diwali is now often becoming a celebration of show, expense, and competition. People decorate their homes with thousands of lights on this day, but ignore the darkness that lurks in the recesses of their hearts—jealousy, ego, resentment, and intolerance. The true purpose of the festival was to introspect, nurture relationships, and spread the light of love around us. But today, this spirit is being lost in the noise of the market and materialism.

Diwali is not only a time for the arrival of Lakshmi but also for introspection. When we sweep the dust from every corner of our homes, we should also sweep away the dust from our hearts—old grievances, disagreements, bitterness, and tension. Each lamp reminds us that a single lamp is enough to dispel darkness, provided it is lit with a true heart. A small smile in the family, a gesture of forgiveness, a loving conversation—these are the lamps that illuminate the corners of relationships.

In today's world, this festival also holds great significance for mental health. The fast-paced life, social pressures, work stress, and the hustle and bustle of the digital world are leaving people feeling empty from within. We've even turned festivals into "events"—photoshoots, social media posts, and the tradition of lavish gifts have weakened their spirit. We need to remember that the joy of Diwali lies not just in the external decorations, but in the mental peace we find in belonging, communication, and intimacy.

Today's children and youth find happiness in the glow of firecrackers. But do we have the right to pollute the environment for our own happiness? Every living being, every child and every elderly person, breathing in the smoke-filled and noisy air, is paying the price for this happiness. True joy lies when our lamps do not harm anyone. When we are as sensitive towards Mother Earth as we are towards our homes. Celebrating an eco-friendly Diwali is no longer just an option, it is a responsibility. We can make this festival beautiful by using earthen lamps, decorations with natural colors, and local products—and this beauty is much more last-



*Diwali is not just a festival of lighting lamps, but an occasion to dispel darkness from the mind and fill the soul with light. Today, it is essential that we not make it a celebration of ostentation or pollution, but rather a festival of simplicity, compassion, and love. Only when we share light in the lives of others do we find true happiness and peace. The true meaning of Diwali is peace in every heart, love in every home, and the light of harmony in every society.*

ing than artificial lights. On the occasion of Diwali, another darkness needs to be dispelled—that of loneliness and mental restlessness. The festive season is a time of celebration for many, but for some, it's also a time of memories and sadness. For those who are far away, who have lost a loved one, or who are grappling with economic and social struggles—this light can often sting. It is society's duty to include those around us in this light. The true meaning of Diwali will be realized only when the darkness in someone's home is dispelled by our lamps.

Our scriptures say, "Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamay"—meaning, "We must move from darkness to light." This light is not just that of a lamp, but of knowledge, wisdom, and compassion. When the light of compassion burns in the heart, it radiates more light than thousands of lamps. Diwali teaches us that spreading light in life is not just about lighting lamps, but about walking on the path of kindness, truth, and love.

Festivals aren't just about following traditions. They give us an opportunity to pause and reflect on our journey. Diwali reminds us that the light outside is only lasting if there is also light within. It's when we awaken the Rama within us and burn the Ravana of ego, hatred, and greed that a true Diwali is celebrated.

In today's times, it's also crucial that we make Diwali a "festival of inclusiveness." The walls of social division, caste and religious differences, and economic inequality—

these are the darkness of our age. If each person can spread a little light at their own level—feeding a poor person, supporting a child's education, or supporting a sick person—that Diwali will be the brightest. The true Lakshmi is the one who enters a home in the form of compassion, kindness, and service.

Diwali is also considered a festival of business. It's a time when markets are vibrant and businesspeople's hopes soar. But the business community should also remember that true profit isn't just financial, but also moral. Honesty, transparency, and respect for customers are the lasting assets. Only when the light of trust shines in the marketplace will society prosper.

Our culture also says, "Diwali is not only a symbol of prosperity, but also of restraint." Therefore, true devotion lies in avoiding excessive consumption, ostentation, and competition. This festival teaches us how to find "much in little." Where there is love, contentment, and unity, every day is Diwali.

Today, we need to see Diwali as a spiritual and social movement. Every person should make a resolution in their life—to spread light in some form or another. Some will light the lamp of knowledge, some of help, some of love. When every person becomes a lamp, a light will spread in society that no darkness can extinguish.

Sometimes it's also necessary to celebrate this festival with a moment of peace. A few moments of introspection, spending time with loved ones, and reflecting on our achievements and shortcomings should also be part of Diwali. When we illuminate the path with the light within us, life's direction becomes clear. Diwali not only means "lamp," but also "avali," meaning chain. This chain signifies that light passes from one to another. This is the fundamental message of humanity—one lamp should light another, one heart should illuminate another. Only then will this world be free from darkness.

Ultimately, this Diwali, let us resolve to illuminate not just our homes, but our thoughts, behavior, and society. A Diwali devoid of noise and pollution, filled with simplicity and affection, will truly be a "Deepwali of joy and peace." This lamp will become a symbol of India's culture—where light spreads not just through electricity, but through humanity.

## Diwali's timeless sparkle

By: Satvbrat Borah

As the days grow shorter and a gentle chill creeps into the air, India begins to hum with anticipation for one of its most cherished festivals: Diwali, or Dipawali, the festival of lights. This vibrant celebration, rooted in ancient traditions and stories, transforms the country into a kaleidoscope of colors, sounds, and warmth. It's a time when families come together, homes glow with the soft flicker of oil lamps, and the spirit of joy and renewal fills every heart. Diwali is more than just a festival; it's a feeling, a shared moment of hope and togetherness that resonates deeply with millions, not just in India but across the world where Indian communities thrive.

The essence of Diwali lies in its name, derived from the Sanskrit word Deepavali, meaning a row of lights. This imagery of glowing lamps lined up in homes, courtyards, and streets captures the heart of the festival. It symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. For me, Diwali always brings back memories of my childhood, when my mother would wake up before dawn to clean the house and prepare for the festivities. The scent of freshly washed floors, the clinking of brass lamps being polished, and the excitement of new clothes waiting to be worn created an atmosphere that felt almost magical. Even now, as an adult, the approach of Diwali stirs that same sense of wonder, as if the world is about to be painted in brighter hues.

Diwali's origins are steeped in mythology, with different regions of India weaving their own stories into the festival's tapestry. The most popular tale is from the epic Ramayana, where Lord Rama, after defeating the demon king Ravana, returns to his kingdom of Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. The people of Ayodhya, overjoyed at their beloved prince's return, light up the city with earthen lamps to guide him home. This story resonates deeply, symbolizing the victory of righteousness and the power of love and loyalty. In other parts of India, Diwali is linked to different deities and legends. In eastern India, for instance, the festival honors Goddess Kali, the fierce destroyer of evil, while in the south, it commemorates Lord Krishna's victory over the demon Narakasura. These diverse narratives show how Diwali, while universal in its themes, adapts to the cultural nuances of India's vast landscape.

Preparations for Diwali begin weeks in advance, and there's a certain joy in the flurry of activity that takes over households. Homes are cleaned from top to bottom, not just for tidiness but as a way to invite positivity and prosperity. My grandmother always said that a clean home welcomes Goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth and abundance, who is worshipped during Diwali. This belief transforms mundane chores into acts of devotion. Markets come alive with stalls selling everything from clay diyas to vibrant rangoli powders, marigold garlands, and glittering decorations. Walking through a Diwali market is an experience in itself: the air is thick with the aroma of roasted nuts, fresh flowers, and sugary sweets, while vendors call out to passersby, their voices mingling with the chatter of excited shoppers.

Food is at the heart of Diwali, and every region has its own culinary traditions that make the festival a feast for the senses. In my home, the kitchen becomes a hub of activity as my mother and aunts prepare an array of sweets and snacks. There's the melt-in-your-mouth texture of ladoos made from besan, the crispy delight of chaklis, and the syrupy sweetness of jalebis that leave your fingers sticky and your heart content. I remember sneaking into the kitchen as a child, hoping



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to steal a piece of barfi before it was offered to the gods. Each sweet has its own story, passed down through generations, and the act of making them is as much a ritual as the prayers that follow. Sharing these treats with neighbors and friends is a cherished tradition, a way of strengthening bonds and spreading joy.

The evening of Diwali is when the festival truly comes alive. As dusk settles, families gather to light diyas, small clay lamps filled with oil and a cotton wick. There's something deeply calming about watching the tiny flames flicker against the night sky, their warm glow cutting through the darkness. In my neighborhood, every house would compete to create the most beautiful display of lights, and walking through the streets felt like stepping into a fairytale. Rangoli, intricate patterns made with colored powders, rice, or flowers, adorn doorsteps, each design a unique expression of creativity and hospitality. I still remember my sister and I spending hours perfecting our rangoli, arguing over whether to add more red or yellow, only to beam with pride when guests admired it.

Fireworks are another hallmark of Diwali, turning the night sky into a canvas of sparkling colors. As a child, I'd wait eagerly for my father to bring home a box of crackers, and we'd gather in the courtyard to light sparklers and rockets. The thrill of watching a firecracker soar into the sky, bursting into a shower of light, was unmatched. However,

in recent years, there's been a growing awareness about the environmental impact of fireworks, with many families opting for eco-friendly celebrations. I've seen friends replace crackers with lanterns or focus on lighting more diyas, a shift that feels like a return to the festival's roots in simplicity and light.

Diwali is a spiritual occasion, a time for reflection and renewal. The worship of Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is central to the festival. Families gather for puja, offering prayers, flowers, and sweets to seek blessings for prosperity and success. The rituals are intimate, filled with the soft chanting of mantras and the fragrance of incense. For me, these moments are a reminder to pause and be grateful for the love and abundance in my life. Diwali also encourages acts of charity, whether it's sharing food with those in need or donating to causes that uplift communities. This spirit of giving reflects the festival's deeper message of compassion and unity.

Diwali's significance extends beyond religion, embracing people of all faiths and backgrounds. It's a time when friends visit each other's homes, exchanging gifts and warm wishes. I've always loved how Diwali brings people together, regardless of differences. Neighbors who might not speak all year suddenly drop by with a plate of sweets, and workplaces buzz with festive cheer as colleagues share homemade treats. In the Indian diaspora, Diwali takes on new meanings, blending traditional rituals with local customs. I've heard stories of families in the United States or the United Kingdom hosting Diwali parties, where the lighting of lamps is followed by music and dance, creating a beautiful fusion of cultures.

Yet, Diwali also prompts reflection on its deeper themes. The idea of light overcoming darkness resonates in a world often filled with challenges. It's a reminder to nurture hope, to seek knowledge, and to choose kindness even when it's difficult. In my own life, Diwali has been a time to let go of grudges, to reconnect with loved ones, and to set intentions for the year ahead. The festival's message feels universal, a call to find the light within ourselves and share it with others.

Whether it's the joy of lighting a diya, the laughter shared over a plate of sweets, or the quiet moment of prayer under a starlit sky, Diwali is a celebration of life itself. It's a time to cherish the people we love, to honor the traditions that ground us, and to believe in the possibility of new beginnings. As the lamps glow and the festivities unfold, Diwali reminds us that even in the darkest moments, there is always a light waiting to shine.

# The Crimson Mountain

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The tulip garden of Sonmarg was in full bloom, a riot of colors spilling across the valley like a painter's dream. Rudhi stood amidst the blossoms, her fingers grazing the petals as if they were pages of a forgotten poem. The air was crisp, tinged with the scent of pine and the distant echo of melting snow. She had come to Kashmir seeking solitude, a break from the noise of academia and the ache of a recent heartbreak. What she found instead was Akash.

He appeared like a whisper in the wind—tall, sun-kissed, with eyes that mirrored the sky. Rudhi noticed him first not by sight, but by sound: the soft strumming of a guitar, a tune that seemed to rise from the earth itself. He sat on a rock near the garden's edge, playing a melody that felt both ancient and new. "You play beautifully," she said, her voice tentative.

Akash looked up, startled, then smiled. "Thanks. It's a Kashmiri folk tune. My grandfather taught me." That was the beginning.

They walked together through the tulips, speaking of books and mountains, of music and memory. Rudhi learned that Akash was a travel writer, tracing forgotten trails and stories across the Himalayas. He had trekked through Ladakh, camped near Pangong Lake, and once spent a week with nomads near Nubra Valley. Rudhi, a professor of literature, found his tales intoxicating—like verses waiting to be translated.

The next morning, they set off together toward Zoji-La Pass.

At 3528 meters, Zoji-La was not for the faint-hearted. The road twisted like a serpent, flanked by cliffs and snow walls. Rudhi felt her breath catch—not from altitude, but from awe. The mountains loomed like ancient gods, their silence deeper than any scripture.

Akash walked ahead, occasionally turning back to check on her. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," she said, though her heart raced—not from exertion, but from something unnamed.

They camped near the pass, beneath a sky so clear it seemed unreal. That night, as the fire crackled and the stars spilled across the heavens, Akash

spoke.

"There's a legend about this place," he said. "They say the Crimson Mountain appears only to those who are destined to meet."

Rudhi raised an eyebrow. "Crimson Mountain?"

"Yes. It's not on any map. But sometimes, at sunset, one of the peaks turns red—like blood, or love. The locals say it's a sign."

"A sign of what?"

"That two souls have found each other."

Rudhi laughed, but it was a soft, uncertain sound. "Sounds like a fairy tale."

"Maybe," Akash said. "But fairy tales have truths hidden in them."

The next day, they climbed higher, toward a ridge Akash claimed offered the best view. The air grew thinner, the silence deeper. Rudhi felt her thoughts slow, her senses sharpen. Every step felt sacred. And then, as the sun began to dip, it happened. One of the peaks—jagged, proud—turned crimson. Not orange, not gold, but a deep, burning red. Rudhi gasped. Akash stood beside her, silent.

"It's real," she whispered.

He nodded. "I've seen it only once before. With my grandfather. He said it meant something was about to change."

Rudhi turned to him. "Do you believe that?"

Akash looked at her, his gaze steady. "I do. Especially now."

They didn't speak of love—not yet. But something passed between them, wordless and ancient. A recognition. A promise.

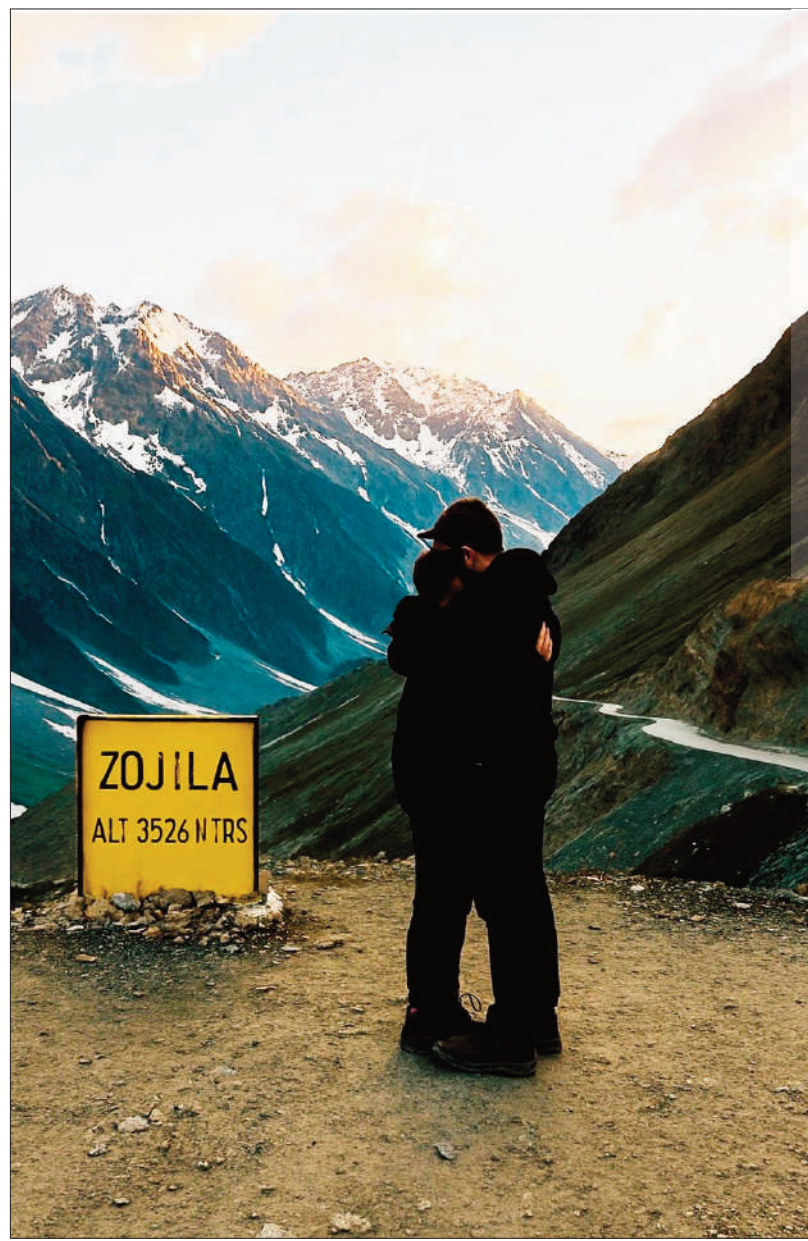
Over the next few days, they wandered through valleys and villages, sharing stories and silences. Rudhi found herself writing again—poems, fragments, dreams. Akash read them aloud at night, his voice weaving her words into the wind.

But the mountains are never still.

On their way back, a sudden storm trapped them near Baltal. The wind howled, the snow fell thick. They took shelter in a shepherd's hut, huddled close for warmth.

"I'm scared," Rudhi admitted.

Akash took her hand. "We'll be okay. The mountains brought us together. They won't let us go so easily."



That night, Rudhi dreamt of the Crimson Mountain. But this time, it was crumbling. She woke with a start. Akash was gone.

Panic surged. She stepped outside, calling his name. The snow was blinding, the wind cruel. And then she saw him—standing on a ridge, staring into the storm. "What are you doing?" she shouted. He turned, his face pale. "I thought I saw something. A figure. Like

my grandfather."

Rudhi reached him, trembling. "You could've died." Akash looked at her, eyes wide. "I had to know. If the mountain was calling." They returned to the hut, shaken. That night, they spoke of fear, of loss, of the fragility of connection. "I lost someone once," Akash said. "A girl I met in Manali. We were supposed to meet again. But she never came." Rudhi touched his cheek. "I'm

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*Rudhi gasped. Akash stood beside her, silent*

here now." He kissed her then—soft, slow, like the falling snow. When the storm cleared, they descended together. The tulip garden was still in bloom, but something had shifted. Rudhi felt it in her bones.

"I have to go back," she said. "To Delhi. My semester starts soon."

Akash nodded. "I know." They parted with no promises, only a shared memory of the Crimson Mountain.

Months passed. Rudhi taught her classes, wrote her poems, but the mountains lingered. One day, she received a package—a book. "The Crimson Mountain," by Akash Sen. Inside was a note: "For Rudhi. The mountain turned crimson because of you." She cried then—not from sadness, but from knowing.

The next summer, she returned to Sonmarg. The tulips were blooming. And Akash was waiting.

Rudhi returned to Delhi with the memory of Zoji-La etched into her soul. The tulips, the crimson peak, Akash's voice reading her poems—it all felt like a dream she wasn't ready to wake from. Weeks passed, and the silence between them grew heavy. She decided to call him—not for closure, but to express gratitude.

She dialed the number Akash had scribbled inside the book he'd sent her. It rang once. Then twice. On the third ring, a voice answered—but it wasn't Akash.

"Hello?" the voice was old, raspy. "Is this Akash Sen's number?" Rudhi asked.

A pause. Then: "Akash Sen passed away last year, dear."

Rudhi's breath caught. "What?"

"He was my grandson. Died in a snowstorm near Baltal. We buried him in Sonmarg, near the tulip garden he loved."

Rudhi dropped the phone.

But... she had met him. Just months ago. They had trekked together. She had kissed him. She called again. This time, the number was unreachable. Shaken, Rudhi returned to the book. Inside the front cover, beneath the dedication, she noticed something new—faint, as if written in fading ink. "If you're reading this, Rudhi, then the mountain chose you too. I'm sorry I couldn't stay. But some meetings defy time." She stared at the words, her heart pounding. The ink shimmered briefly, then vanished. Unable to sleep, she booked a flight to Srinagar and returned to Sonmarg. The tulips were gone—replaced by frost. She walked to the ridge where they had seen the Crimson Mountain.

But Rudhi knew. Love, like mountains, sometimes defies explanation. (International Tagore Awardee Professor Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee is a former Affiliate Faculty Virginia Commonwealth University & President Kolkata Indian American Society also a multi lingual Poet cum Columnist)

## Echoes of a Promise

(CONTD. FROM PREV ISSUE)

By: Chafikhur Rahman

At a corner, a small tea stall had a better view of the road than a palace. Its owner, a woman in her forties with hair in a long braid, smiled and waved him to a bench. "Sa'ab, tea?" she asked. When he nodded, she poured it into a glass that had tiny cracks like an old river map. The tea was hot and sweet. The woman introduced herself as Luiti. She had a brother in the Forest Department and a son in Class Six who wanted to be a drummer more than anything else in the world.

"My husband passed away last year," she said simply. "He had a kind cough. It became unkind. The stall is my drum now. I beat it every day to keep music in the house."

Rudra listened. He did not rush to offer official words. He let her speak.

She told him a small story. It was about the river on the far side of town. "In the month before the rains, the river becomes thin," she said. "We can see stones that are usually under water. The stones are like old turtles sleeping. There is one stone that looks like a doorstep. People say if you stand on that stone and call the name of someone you love, the hills will carry the name and keep it safe. They say when your voice grows weak, the hills will call the name back to you, so you will not forget. My son goes there and shouts his father's name. He says the hills shout it back. Some days I think I hear it too."

Rudra held his glass of tea and looked at the road. A scooter passed, its headlight already on though the sky was not yet dark. A girl with a school bag ran to catch a bus that had almost started. The conductor, kind, waited and held out a hand. The bus pulled away with a sigh.

"I will go to that river," Rudra said softly. He did not know he was going to say it. The words came like water over a stone.

"Go in daylight," Luiti said. "And if you see a thin old man who talks to the water, do not be afraid. He is not mad to the river. The river knows his loss. It listens better than people."

Rudra thanked her and left money on the counter. She tried to push some back. He did not let her. "For your son's drum," he said. She smiled, not with her mouth alone, but with the lines around her eyes, which became like small rays of sun.

By the time he returned to his quarters, the first stars pricked the sky. He sent a short message to Kaberi: Market walk tomorrow at 6? Small tea after? The answer came soon: Yes. Looking forward.

He washed, changed to a light kurta, and sat at the table with an empty notebook. On the first page, he wrote: "Diphu—Day One." He made notes of people he had met—Prakash, Mitali, Biku, Mintu, Luiti. He wrote two lines beside each name, not about work, but about small truths: "Prakash calm, speaks slowly, watches before he decides." "Mitali sharp eyes, tells stories well, respects books." "Biku careful with string, likes to count." "Mintu kind, brings banana flowers, laughs like sun." "Luiti brave, keeps music with tea."

He closed the notebook. He stood by the window again. The bamboo made long shadows. A night insect clicked steadily, like a tiny clock. He felt the same quiet he had felt in the car last evening, but now it was softer, more like a blanket than a fog.

Sleep came easily. And this time, no name woke him. Only a gentle picture floated at the edge of his mind: a temple bell that did not ring, a river that listened, a stone that remembered, and two young people—one with books under his arm, one with a red dupatta—walking toward each other through a world that was green, wide, and full of waiting.

Kaberi's first day was also full and plain, like good bread. She walked through her office with her PA, learning the names of drivers, peons, clerks, and the lady who kept the accounts with a pencil as sharp as a needle. She asked for files on roads, health, and education. She noted which schools had no boundary wall and which health centres had no nurse at night. She planned visits. She drank too much tea and smiled at everyone because it felt right to start with warmth.

In the afternoon, she sat for an hour with a widow from a distant village who had walked for three hours to ask for the correction of her ration card. The woman's hands were cracked. Her saree was faded the way a river stone is—by years of water and work. Kaberi listened and signed a letter that would move the case in a week. The woman touched Kaberi's feet. Kaberi almost pulled back, but then she placed a hand lightly on the woman's head. "I am only doing my work," she said. The woman's eyes filled with tears anyway. She left with soft steps, as if the floor had become a field.

At sunset, Kaberi stood by her bungalow gate. The trees were black lines against a golden sky. She thought of the hill road last evening, of the small shrine with marigolds, of the old man who had called someone "my son," of the silver car she had driven and the white SUV she had followed, of the man inside it whose eyes were brave and quiet. She felt a calm that was not only professional. It was something like trust without reason. She had felt it before, perhaps, in another season, another life. The thought did not frighten her. It only made her lift her hand and ring the bell at the bungalow gate once, softly, for luck.

Before bed, she opened a new notebook and wrote one line: "Two strangers walked the same road and felt it was home." She underlined the word "home," closed the book, and turned off the lamp.

The night in Diphu settled deep and kind. The hills held the town like a mother holds a sleeping child. And in that broad, dark cradle, two new officers, rested and waited for a tomorrow that would carry them one step closer to a river stone, a temple bell, and a story that had been waiting thirty years to be told.

(3)

Morning light fell like quiet dust on the records room. The door was half open. A thin smell of paper and old glue came out, the smell of years folded and tied. Rudra stood at the threshold and waited a moment, as if asking the room for permission. Then he stepped in.

Biku, the peon, was already there with a damp cloth. He wiped the tops of files and moved a small stool from rack to rack. He looked up and joined his palms. "Namaskar, sa'ab."

"Namaskar, Biku," Rudra said. "You made the list?"

"Yes, sa'ab." Biku pointed to a brown folder on the table near the window. "Old unsolved cases. I wrote the case numbers and short notes. The oldest are at the back of the list. Some files are thin. Some are fat. Fat does not always mean important," he added with a shy smile. "Sometimes it just means people tied many papers to hide an empty centre."



Rudra smiled at that. He opened the folder. The first page was neat, Biku's careful handwriting walking in straight lines:

Case 07/1994 — Theft of temple gold bell.  
Case 13/1995 — Double Murder (River bank).  
Case 21/1998 — Missing college student, believed drowned.

Case 04/2001 — Arson at paddy storehouse.  
Case 17/2006 — Poaching near forest edge.

His eyes stopped at Case 13/1995 — Double Murder (River bank). The number rang a small bell inside him. He did not know why. He touched the page, as if feeling the heat of the letters.

"Where is this file?" he asked.

Biku pointed to the third rack on the left, bottom shelf, near the back. "But it is dusty," he said. "We do not open it much."

"I will open it," Rudra said.

He walked to the rack. The metal was cool under his fingers. The bottom shelf was shadowed. He bent, pushed a few bundles aside, and saw a file tied with cotton tape, its edge brown, its label half-faded but still readable: 13/1995. A fine web of dust lay across it like lace. He blew gently. The dust lifted and danced in a shaft of light from the window.

He carried the file to the table. He did not cut the tape at once. He sat for a moment with the weight of it in his hands. The file was not heavy, but it felt heavy. It felt like a small box full of stones that were also stories.

He untied the tape. The top sheet was a cover note in the old style, with boxes for date, place, and officer name. The ink had bled slightly into the paper over the years, like a memory that has softened at the edges. He turned the page.

A photograph fell out and slid like a leaf to the floor. He picked it up carefully. It was a couple's photograph, slightly yellowed, taken in bright daylight near a river. A young man and a young woman stood close, both holding books, both smiling a shy, proud smile. The boy had a sharp jaw, thick hair pushed back, eyes that looked straight at the camera without fear. The girl had a round face, bright eyes, a dupatta pinned neatly, and a way of holding her books like they were dear friends.

Rudra felt the air in his chest stop. The boy in the photo looked like him. Not just a little. A lot. A little thinner, a little softer, but him. The girl looked like Kaberi. Not just the eyes—though the eyes were the first thing—the whole light of her face. He stared. His fingers began to shake.

Biku, who had been dusting quietly near the door, saw the stillness and came closer. "Sa'ab?"

"It's nothing," Rudra said, but his voice was lower. He placed the photograph on the table with care, as if it could break. He took a slow breath and turned the next page.

The case summary was short:  
Case No. 13/1995

Victims: Ratneswar Rahang (Male, 20), Kabita Kathar (Female, 19).

Place: River bend near Borsinga, Diphu.  
Date: 18 August 1995.

## The Drizzle

By: Otteri Selva Kumar

In the rain left away  
I think  
The rain does not only think of me  
The umbrella is also soaked  
Tar roads are also soaked  
Trees are soaked that no one has left  
The shower but only the rain  
Left without  
Burking also  
The earth is soaked....  
Heat reliever with sun  
Simply fine...

## A December Tale

By: Aniruddh Oghori

It's the late December gust  
With the leaves of trees withering  
And dew soaking the grass  
And not a drop of sun coming in.  
The mist covers the air  
The path is unseen.  
And this question pulls him to fear  
Would she still remember him?

Looking through the pane  
Brings him no comfort.  
But only a smile on his face—  
Which could never forth.  
The pictures and portraits,  
Though are empty colours now,  
Could never persuade him to fade:  
Their voices are too loud.

She might still be on the swing  
Or gallivanting around the garden,  
Or she'd be on the mirrors smiling,  
Like she used to, far then;  
With stars fastened upon her hair,  
The sun shining through her eyes  
And the sapphire sky, up there,  
Makes the scene all fine.

She, be halfway across the world,  
Yet he will remember her.  
She's gone, never to return  
Yet, in him she will surrender.



# 'This decision reflects government's commitment to justice and transparency'

## Judicial inquiry ordered into Leh violence fulfils Ladakh's demand, says chief secretary

**LEH/JAMMU, Oct 18:** Ladakh Chief Secretary Pawan Kotwal has said that the home ministry ordering a judicial inquiry into the September 24 Leh violence fulfils the demand of the people of the Union territory seeking a fair and transparent probe into the incident.

Addressing a key demand of the protesting Ladakh groups, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday announced a judicial inquiry headed by a retired Supreme Court judge into last month's violent clashes in Leh.

The clashes between security forces and protesters -- who were demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for the Union territory -- left four civilians dead and 90 injured, escalating a month-long agitation.

"This decision reflects the government's commitment to justice and transparency," he said.

Providing an update on the injured, Kotwal said five individuals, including an ex-serviceman, are currently undergoing treatment at the SNM Hospital.

"Doctors performed life-saving surgeries on 11 injured on the day of the incident. One of the injured will require a longer recovery period," he said.

The chief secretary said most of those arrested during the violence have been granted bail, while the remaining 30 are in judicial custody and are expected to be released in due course on completion of legal procedures.

Appealing to people for calm, Kotwal urged the community leaders to maintain peace and avoid large gatherings or protests, espe-



cially after the government's decision to hold a judicial probe.

"The protests (on September 24) began peacefully but later went beyond the control of the organisers," he said.

Kotwal also warned against any future disturbances and sought cooperation from the public in maintaining peace, particularly during the ongoing examination season.

"We must ensure a calm environment conducive to learning," he said.

The official also highlighted the adverse impact of unrest on tourism, and urged for collective efforts to revive the sector, which is vital for Ladakh's economy.

Reaffirming the Centre's commitment to dialogue, he said the government of India will continue its engagement with the high-powered committee (HPC) to address Ladakh's concerns through peaceful means.

"The people of Ladakh are known for their patriotism and

sense of responsibility. I thank everyone for their cooperation, and urge continued support in restoring normalcy across the region," Kotwal said.

He added that the situation in the Union territory is returning to normal following the unfortunate incident on September 24.

On the law and order front, Kotwal said, "Several individuals were arrested, most of whom have been released. At present, 30 persons remain in judicial custody, and their release lies within the jurisdiction of the court. Once the court grants bail, they too will be released."

Referring to the protest, he said, "People had assured that the agitation would remain non-violent, and peace would prevail, as Ladakh is known for its harmony and calm. However, the violence broke out unexpectedly. Community leaders later acknowledged during their meetings that the situation had gone beyond their control."

Stating that people's demand for

a judicial probe into the incident has now been met, Kotwal said, "We immediately ordered a magisterial inquiry led by an IAS officer, which is underway."

"However, we repeatedly received requests that the matter should be investigated under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge so that the full truth comes out."

"Taking those requests into account and after consultations with the concerned leaders, the government of India has ordered a judicial probe to be conducted by a former Supreme Court judge, who will be assisted by an IAS officer and a local judge."

According to a notification issued by the MHA, the judicial probe, to be headed by Justice B S Chauhan, a former judge of the Supreme Court, is mandated to investigate the "circumstances leading to the serious law and order situation, the police action and the resultant unfortunate deaths of four people".

Retired district and sessions judge Mohan Singh Parihar will function as judicial secretary, while IAS officer Tushar Anand will be the administrative secretary of the inquiry commission.

Kotwal also said that talks on various issues, including safeguards for Ladakh, are underway. "We are confident that the community leaders will prevent any mass assembly," he said.

He also said that discussions on compensations were in progress, but emphasised that "a peaceful environment is necessary for the talks to move forward". (PTI)

# As security forces gain upper hand, Maoist leader urges cadres to surrender



**GARIABAND, Oct 18:** Amid a wave of mass surrenders that has gripped Naxal strongholds in Chhattisgarh, a senior leader has issued a letter appealing to the cadres to lay down their arms and join the mainstream, citing the crippling blow to the network due to the relentless push by security forces.

Police have acknowledged the letter and appealed to Naxal cadres to shun violence.

The one-page communication in Hindi claimed that Sonu Dada (Mallojula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi) and 60 cadres laid down their arms in Gadchiroli of Maharashtra on October 16, while another senior leader, Rupesh, surrendered with 209 cadres in Bastar on October 17.

All the surrendered Maoists handed over their weapons to authorities, it stated.

Bhupathi, a top Maoist strategist, carried a ₹ 6 crore bounty on his head, according to police.

The letter further stated that Sonu Dada had released a booklet admitting that the armed campaign under current conditions was no longer feasible due to the growing pressure from security forces.

He (Sonu Dada) also acknowledged that organisational errors and missed opportunities had weakened the Naxalites' ability to sustain guerrilla warfare.

Gariaband Superintendent of Police Nikhil Rakhecha has welcomed the letter, being shared with the media, that was issued in the name of Maoist leader Sunil of the Udanti Area Committee.

The police officer has appealed to all active Naxal cadres to join the mainstream and live a peaceful life.

The Udanti Area Committee is active in parts of Gariaband and adjoining regions along the Chhat-

tisgarh-Odisha border.

The statement said that Sonu Dada (Mallojula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi) and 60 cadres laid down their arms in Gadchiroli of Maharashtra on October 16, while another senior leader, Rupesh, surrendered with 209 cadres in Bastar on October 17.

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The Udanti Area Committee is active in parts of Gariaband and adjoining regions along the Chhat-

batis (SDK) and Sitanadi areas to follow the suit.

"We have already lost many important comrades. It is time to make the right decision before it becomes too late," the letter said and called on cadres to surrender and raise issues of people through peaceful movements.

Reacting to the development, SP Rakhecha said, "We welcome this letter. It's a positive initiative. I appeal to active Naxalites in Udanti, Gobra, Sinapali, SDK and Sitanadi areas to surrender at the earliest. They can directly contact me without hesitation. We will ensure their safe return to their families".

The Naxal strongholds in Chhattisgarh, including the dreaded Abujhmad region, are falling apart due to aggressive drives launched by security forces, with the deadline to uproot Naxalism by March 31, 2026, drawing close.

The surrender by Bhupathi has prompted several armed guerrillas to surrender before security forces.

On Wednesday, 28 Maoist cadres surrendered in Sukma and Kondagaon districts of Chhattisgarh, followed by 210 Naxals, including Central Committee member Rupesh and 111 women, in Bastar district. The Bastar cadres carried a cumulative bounty of ₹ 9.18 crore, police said.

The Dandakaranya region, which spans parts of south Chhattisgarh (Bastar) and adjoining areas of Odisha, Telangana, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, has long been a Maoist stronghold.

On October 16, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said 477 Naxalites had been neutralised in the past 22 months, while 2,110 others have surrendered, and 1,785 arrested.

"The goal of making Chhattisgarh Naxal-free by March 31, 2026, is now within reach," the Chief Minister said. (PTI)

# Ensure jailed leader Mehraj Malik can vote in RS polls: Court to J&K govt

**JAMMU, Oct 18:** The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh on Saturday directed the government to ensure Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Mehraj Malik can vote in the upcoming Rajya Sabha election for four seats in the Union Territory.

The state counsel informed the court that the authorities have already dispatched postal ballots to Kathua jail, where the legislator is lodged under the Public Safety Act (PSA) since September 8.

The court order came on an application filed by Malik seeking permission to participate in the upcoming assembly session starting in Srinagar on October 23, and to cast his vote in the Rajya Sabha election scheduled for the next day.

Justice Rajesh Sekhri directed the government to ensure that the detainee is allowed to cast his vote, an Aam Aadmi Party spokesperson.

The AAP leader was represented by senior advocate Rahul Pant, and advocates S S Ahmed, Muzaffar Iqbal Khan, Appu Singh Slathia, Tariq Mughal, and M Zulkarnain Chowdhary.

The counsels stressed that the application must be considered today. (PTI)

# After Oppn, now Mahayuti MLC alleges voter duplication

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, Oct 18:** NCP MLC Satish Chavan on Saturday demanded postponement of the local body elections in Maharashtra till the electoral rolls are rectified, claiming that 36,000 names were appearing twice in the voters' list in an assembly segment in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar alone.

He warned of approaching the court if the corrections were not made. The call for postponement of the polls from the ruling party legislator comes amid a similar demand by the Opposition parties, who allege that the voters' lists were "highly compromised and manipulated". On Wednesday, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena president Raj Thackeray, NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil, and Congress's Balasaheb Thorat met State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare and Chief Electoral Officer S Chokalingam to raise concerns over alleged irregularities in the voters' lists.

The local body polls are likely to be held in the next two months or early next year.

Addressing a press conference here, Chavan, who belongs to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, alleged that 36,000 names of voters in the Ganganagar assembly seat are appearing



twice in the list.

"This is being done deliberately and action should be taken against the booth level officers (BLOs) who have done this. This list should be corrected and the election process should be postponed till the corrections are done," he said.

"The BLOs should check the names of each voter. The election process should be postponed for a period of three to four months till the voters' lists are corrected. If it is not done by the officials concerned, we will go to court as we are running out of time," he said.

The work supposed to be carried out by the Election Commission is being done by the workers of political parties, he said.

"There is duplication of names of a large number of voters in the Ran-

gangaon Shenpunji area of Ganganapur. The name of a sarpanch appears in three different voter lists, which is a serious issue. It seems that this is being done deliberately," he said.

The names of voters who died 13 years ago are still in the list. Several voters' homes are listed as house number zero, Chavan said.

"The list mentions one voter residing in alley number 123 in Gandhi Nagar area in Ranjangaon. But no such alley exists there. As many as 776 voters have the address of a former sarpanch mentioned in the list," he said.

There are over 4,000 bogus voters in Ranjangaon circle itself, the NCP MLC claimed, adding that the district collector has promised to look into the issue. (PTI)

# Durgapur gang rape survivor discharged from hospital

**KOLKATA, Oct 18:** A second-year student of a private medical college in West Bengal's Durgapur, who was allegedly gang-raped on October 10, was discharged from the hospital on Saturday after improvement in her health condition, officials said.

According to a health bulletin issued by the hospital, the decision to discharge the 23-year-old woman was taken after a comprehensive medical evaluation by a team of doctors.

"Our multi-specialty medical board has taken meticulous care of her physical and mental well-being. Following a comprehensive review by our team of expert doctors, she was deemed fit for discharge. This assessment was duly discussed with her parents, and she was safely discharged from the hospital today," the statement said.

The survivor was shifted to the college guest house, where local police were providing security, a senior police officer said.

The officer, speaking to PTI, said the police would seek test identification (TI) parade of the accused on October 22, the next date of hearing on the case.

The woman's father, who was in Durgapur for around one week, returned to his home state Odisha on Friday. (PTI)

# Need for airport agencies to sensitise their officers in prevailing laws: SC

**NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** There is an imminent need for jurisdictional agencies, handling affairs at international airports, to sensitise their officers in the prevailing laws before taking the drastic step of detention and arrest of an international traveller, the Supreme Court has said.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta made the observations while quashing the arrest and criminal proceedings against NRI Rocky Abraham, an Indian citizen settled in Italy for over two decades.

He was detained at the Delhi airport in January 2025 for allegedly carrying a deer horn in violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Abraham was arrested after airport officials found the horn in his baggage and registered an FIR under Sections 39, 49, and 51 of the Act.

He remained in custody for nearly two weeks before securing bail with onerous conditions, including a ban on leaving India.

The top court noted that the article recovered from the petitioner upon DNA analysis was a reindeer horn, which does not infringe any provision of law pertaining to forest or wildlife in India.

"This court feels an imminent

need to require the jurisdictional agencies concerned, handling affairs at the international airports, to sensitise their officers in the prevailing laws before taking the drastic step of detention and arrest of an international traveller.

"Needless to state that any such step should not be taken in haste and must be preceded by appropriate legal opinion and with a pragmatic approach," the bench said.

The apex court said such ill-advised actions tend to bring the reputation of the country to disrepute in the international fora, in addition to bringing the conduct of the concerned officers into breach of the human rights guarantees.

"Consequently, we hereby declare the arrest of the petitioner and so also the FIR and all proceedings sought to be taken thereunder against the petitioner to be unlawful. The same are hereby quashed."

"The writ petition pending before the High Court and the proceedings, if any, pending before the jurisdictional trial court shall also stand closed. The petitioner is given liberty to avail a suitable remedy seeking damages before the appropriate forum," it said. (PTI)

# Prez will travel to the hill shrine in a four-wheel-drive vehicle of the Kerala Police Sabarimala devotees unaffected by controversies surrounding it: TDB president

**PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA), Oct 18:** Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president P S Prasanth on Saturday said that the large number of devotees flocking to the Lord Ayyappa shrine here since October 17 indicates they are unaffected by the recent controversies surrounding Sabarimala.

The hill-top shrine was opened for the 'thulam' month poojas on Friday.

Prasanth said the controversies, including the Sabarimala gold issue, and the functioning of the temple "will go their separate ways".

"The large number of devotees turning up since Friday indicates that the pilgrims are unaffected by the controversies surrounding the shrine," he said.

The TDB president also said that all arrangements for President Draupadi Murmu's visit to the shrine on October 22 have been completed.

He said that the police and security personnel deployment has been increased in view of her



visit and there will be restrictions on 'darshan' by devotees while the President is present at the shrine.

He said that Murmu will reach the temple by noon on October 22 and after the darshan, will rest at the guest house at Sabarimala.

"She will leave for Thiruvananthapuram the same evening," Prasanth said.

He said that after the President leaves, maximum possible number of devotees will be permitted dar-

shan at the shrine.

Murmu will travel to the hill shrine in a four-wheel-drive vehicle of the Kerala Police.

Five four-wheel-drive vehicles of the Kerala Police will form part of the President's convoy, accompanied by an ambulance, along the 4.5-km-long Swami Ayyappan Road and traditional trekking route to Sannidhanam.

President Murmu will arrive in Kerala on October 21 as part of a four-day visit. (PTI)

# 'Mauni Baba' Congress takes dig at PM after Trump repeats Russian oil claim

**NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress on Saturday said the PM suddenly becomes a "mauni baba" whenever US President Donald Trump states that he stopped Operation Sindoor or that India will reduce its oil imports from Russia.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said President Trump has yet again stated that he has been assured by his "good friend" that India will cut back on its imports of oil from Russia.

"But that good friend suddenly becomes a Mauni Baba whenever President Trump says he stopped Operation Sindoor and now when he says that India will reduce its imports of oil from Russia," Ramesh said in a post on X, taking a dig at PM Modi.

Meanwhile, India's trade deficit with China during April-Sep 2025 increased to USD 54.4 billion as compared to USD 49.6 billion in the same period last year, the Congress leader said.

His remarks come hours after the US president repeated his claims that India will not be buy-



ing oil from Russia, saying that the country has already "de-escalated" and is "pulling back".

This is the second time that Trump has made such claims.

India on Thursday said it is "broad-basing and diversifying" its sourcing of energy to meet market conditions, hours after Trump claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured him that New Delhi will stop procuring Russian crude oil.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, responding to Trump's remarks, said it has been New Delhi's consistent priority to safeguard the interests of the Indian consumer in a

volatile energy scenario.

He said India's import policies are guided entirely by national interest, adding India has been looking at expanding energy ties with the US as well.

The Congress on Thursday alleged that Modi is "frightened" of Trump and appears to have outsourced key decisions to America.

The opposition party had also alleged that the foreign policy of the Modi government has "completely collapsed" and said the Centre must take opposition leaders into confidence by either calling an all-party meeting or speaking to them one-on-one.

Washington has been maintaining that India is helping Putin finance the war through its purchase of Russian crude oil.

The relations between New Delhi and Washington have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent additional duty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

India described the US action as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable". (PTI)

# Paid holiday in Bihar on voting days: EC

**NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** The Election Commission on Saturday said voters in Bihar, where polls will be held in two phases next month, are entitled to paid holidays on polling days, and employers who contravene this legal provision can be fined.

It added that voters in eight assembly constituencies across various states, where bypolls are being held on November 11, are also entitled to a paid holiday.

"As per section 135B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, every person employed in any business, trade, industrial undertaking, or any other establishment, and entitled to vote at an election to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of a State/UT, shall be granted a paid holiday on the day of poll," the EC said citing legal provisions.

It underlined that there will be no deduction of wages on account of such a paid holiday.

"Any employer who contravenes these provisions shall be liable to a fine," it cautioned.

All daily wage and casual workers are also entitled to a paid holiday on election day, it said. (PTI)

# Party says unification under NPF will strengthen regional voice and push forward the Naga cause

## NDPP merges with NPF in major political shift

**KOHHIMA, Oct 18:** Nagaland's ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) on Saturday formally adopted a resolution for merger with the Naga People's Front (NPF).

The decision was taken during the party's sixth general convention, in which party president Chingwang Konyak, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, his deputy T R Zeliang, ministers and legislators, and leaders and workers from across the state took part.

The convention, organised at Capital Cultural Hall here, deliberated extensively on the NPF's proposal to amalgamate both parties under the banner of the NPF, one of the oldest regional parties in the country.

After detailed discussions, the house unanimously adopted the resolution in accordance with the NDPP constitution.

Through the resolution, the NDPP "welcomed and accepted the offer of the NPF to amalgamate and merge as one regional political party in the greater interest of the Naga cause and the Naga people".

Termining the NPF's move as "mature and well-calibrated", the NDPP expressed confidence that the merger will create a stronger and unified regional force to represent the voice and aspirations of the Naga people.

Reaffirming its commitment to the Naga political issue, the NDPP said the merger would contribute to achieving a lasting resolution to the Naga political question.

"The merger of the two regional political parties will further cement our dreams and aspirations of a vibrant and developed people," the resolution added.

Acknowledging the leadership of Konyak and Rio, the resolution credited their "sheer dynamism and political presence" for steering the party to its present stature.

The convention extended its "unwavering support and endorsement" to both leaders to ensure a smooth transition of the merger process with the NPF.

The resolution was moved by the NDPP resolution committee comprising K G Kenye (convener), H Chuba Chang, Ahovi Zhimomi, Benjamin Lorin, and Merentoshi R Jamir (member secretary) while the house adopted it by raising hands.

The merger will officially take place on October 21 in the NPF general convention, which also marks the party's 63rd foundation day celebration.

Ahead of the NPF convention, the leaders of both NDPP and NPF are holding series of closed-door meetings to finalise the process of transition and also select the new team of office bearers, sources said.



NDPP broke away from the NPF and was formed by Rio after he was suspended from the party in 2017.

Highly placed sources said that Rio is likely to lead the united NPF.

He has been offered by the NPF leadership "to return and take over the party leadership", they said.

Rio and Konyak described the merger resolution a "historic moment" aimed at

fostering regional unity and strengthening the Naga cause.

The upcoming merger would mark "a new chapter in Naga political history" that embodies reconciliation, unity, and collective strength, Rio said, adding that the move would create a single, strong regional party capable of better representing Naga aspirations and addressing the long-pending political issue.

Lauding NDPP's achievements since its formation in 2017, Rio credited the party's success to "dedicated leadership from the president down to the booth-level workers".

He expressed gratitude to Konyak for his integrity and leadership, while reaffirming the NDPP-BJP alliance as a "political necessity" for maintaining stability and development.

Rio said the dismissal of a deregistration case against the NDPP by the Election Commission had cleared the path for the merger, calling it a "blessing".

He urged party members to uphold the motto 'Deeds, Not Words' and rededicate themselves to peace, progress, and unity.

Earlier, Konyak recounted the party's journey from its inception in 2017 to becoming Nagaland's largest regional political force.

Describing the upcoming merger as a "historic consolidation of regional voices", Konyak said the decision followed detailed deliberations by the party's Central Executive Board on September 12.

Konyak said the merger reflects "a time to come together in the greater interest of the Naga people", expressing confidence that the unified party under Rio's leadership will usher in a new era of political stability and regional strength. (PTI)

## NSCN-K claims responsibility for attack on Assam Rifles post

HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Oct 18:** The NSCN-K (Yung Aung) has claimed responsibility for a pre-dawn attack on a 4 Assam Rifles check post at Hahman village near Manmao in Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, on October 16.

In a released statement, the group said its tactical unit carried out the strike and alleged it inflicted heavy casualties on Indian forces. The statement accused Indian security personnel of sealing the area after the attack to "hide their losses," saying full casualty details cannot be ascertained at present.

The NSCN-K honoured its tactical unit for the operation and reiterated its vow to continue tactical strikes "until the complete withdrawal of the occupational Indian military from our land," accusing Indian authorities of months-long provocations against the Naga movement.

The release also congratulated an allied outfit, claiming an ULFA-I strike on the army's 19 Grenadiers at Kakopathar in Tinsukia district. Authorities' responses to these claims were not included in the group's statement and official verification of the incidents is pending.

## Arunachal's urban transformation driven by central, state schemes: Khandu

**ITANAGAR, Oct 18:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday highlighted the state's significant strides in urban development, underscoring the government's commitment to ensuring dignity, comfort and improved standards of living for every citizen through inclusive and sustainable initiatives.

Sharing an infographic on social media, Khandu said the state's urban transformation is being driven by a combination of flagship central and state schemes, including Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), Ujjwala Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, and the Jal Jeevan Mission.

"From affordable housing to clean cooking, safe drinking water to scientific waste management, our urban development journey is ensuring dignity, comfort, and better living standards for every citizen," Khandu said in a post on X.

The infographic, titled 'PEMA 3.0 - Year of Reforms & Growth: Urban Development', presents key achievements under multiple flagship programmes.

Under PMAY (Urban), the state has covered 6,459 beneficiaries, providing access to affordable housing in urban areas. The PM Ujjwala Yojana and Ujjwala 2.0 have delivered over 49,000 LPG connections, contributing to cleaner cooking practices and improved household health.

On the sanitation front, machinery for material recovery facilities (MRFs) has been deployed across 28 urban local bodies (ULBs) to strengthen solid waste management, while 16 ULBs are set to benefit under the Swachh



Bharat Mission 2.0, promoting hygienic and sustainable urban environments.

The Jal Jeevan Mission has achieved 100 per cent functional household tap connections (FHTCs) for over 2.2 lakh households, ensuring access to safe and reliable drinking water.

Meanwhile, through the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, 4.5 lakh metric tonnes of food

grains were distributed among 8.4 lakh beneficiaries, providing crucial food security support.

"Through schemes like PMAY (Urban), Ujjwala Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 and Jal Jeevan Mission, we are building towns that are cleaner, greener and more inclusive," Khandu said, reaffirming his government's focus on sustainable and equitable growth. (PTI)

## Indian army commemorates battle of Walong

IMPHAL, Oct 18: The Indian Army organised a commemorative lecture on the Battle of Walong at Kumbi College in Bishnupur district, Manipur, to mark Walong Day and honour the valour of soldiers who fought in the 1962 Indo-China War. The lecture highlighted the bravery and sacrifices made by Indian troops during the Battle of Walong, which took place in the Lohit Valley of Arunachal Pradesh from November 14 to 16, 1962. The event aimed to educate and inspire students by shedding light on the operational challenges, leadership and acts of heroism displayed by Indian soldiers in the face of overwhelming enemy forces and harsh conditions.

A short documentary and photo exhibition showcasing scenes from the battle were also presented, stirring emotions and a sense of pride among the audience. The programme concluded with two minutes of silence observed in memory of the fallen heroes. The Army, in its statement, said the event served as a tribute to the "indomitable spirit, courage and dedication" of Indian soldiers and was intended to inspire the youth to embrace the values of patriotism and selfless service.

Describing the Battle of Walong as a symbol of unmatched bravery and commitment to duty, the Army reaffirmed its legacy as an enduring source of national pride. (NNN)

## North East Integration Rally 2026 pre-launch held in Shillong

Tourism Minister backs initiative promoting regional unity, cultural collaboration

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 18:** The pre-launch ceremony of the North East Integration Rally (NEIR) 2026 was held in Shillong on Friday evening, marking the beginning of a movement aimed at strengthening cultural and regional integration across the northeastern states.

The event organised by the NEIR 2026 organising committee, witnessed enthusiastic participation from dignitaries, policymakers and members of civil society who came together to celebrate the spirit of unity in the region.

Speaking at the ceremony, Meghalaya Tourism Minister Timothy D Shira lauded the organisers for initiating such an ambitious and meaningful programme. "It is important for all of us to work together to bring prosperity and development to our region," he said, commending the efforts of KRC Foundation founder Biswadeep Gupta for conceptualising and leading the initiative.

The minister highlighted the vast potential of the people of the Northeast, emphasising the need to nurture skills and channel collective energy toward progress. He also assured support from the Tourism Department for the upcoming rally, which is scheduled to be held in January 2026. "I hope many people from across the Northeast will participate and make this rally a grand success," he added.

MLA and NEIR Patron AL Hek, who also addressed the gathering, wished the organisers success and underscored the importance of such movements in fostering mutual understanding and solidarity among the states of the region.

Other speakers including Joydeep Gupta, co-chairman of FICCI's Assam State Council, Prof (Dr) Sukamal Deb and Col Shanti

Singh (Retd) shared their perspectives on regional cooperation, economic empowerment and the role of youth in nation-building.

Delivering the keynote address, Biswadeep Gupta outlined the concept and vision of NEIR, along with its upcoming campaigns, cultural activities and outreach programmes designed to promote unity and collaboration among the northeastern states.

A message extending best wishes to NEIR 2026 from Prof Ashok Kumar Nagawat, Vice Chancellor of Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University, was also screened during the event. The VC also expressed interest in collaborating with the initiative.

The evening featured a cultural segment that captured the essence of the movement. K Robin from Imphal performed the NEIR theme song, drawing applause from the audience and symbolising the emotional and cultural bonds that tie the region together.

Earlier in the day, the NEIR organising committee met Minister Timothy D Shira at the Meghalaya Secretariat to brief him about the initiative and its planned activities. During the meeting, the minister reiterated his appreciation for the effort, calling NEIR a "meaningful step toward building stronger bonds among the people of the Northeast."

The North East Integration Rally, scheduled for January 2026, aims to serve as a unifying platform that celebrates shared heritage, promotes inter-state collaboration and highlights the collective aspirations of the region.

MEBAAI Group also presented a detailed programme for the Meghalaya chapter.

Youths from the Meghalaya Grassroots Music Project (MGMP) also entertained the crowd with their performances.

## Kaimoi village gears up for eco-tourism after winning state award

HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, Oct 18:** Nestled in the lush green hills of eastern Arunachal Pradesh's Longding district, Kaimoi village remained relatively unknown to the outside world until recently. That changed when the village won the Best Tourism Village Award 2025, presented by the state tourism department on World Tourism Day, September 27.

A visit to Kaimoi reveals its immense potential for tourism development. Led by Zila Parishad Member Rajiv Wangsa of Longchan, the villagers' enthusiasm has grown significantly after receiving the prestigious award. They are now determined to promote Kaimoi at national and international levels.

A Gram Sabha chaired by Gangpan Pansa, GPC of Kaimoi village was held to strategize how to welcome tourists. Key topics included forming village-level tourism development committees, creating women's cultural groups, constructing a welcome gate and signage at key locations like Kanubari Checkpoint, Dibrugarh Airport and Longding town, building homestays, setting up trekking routes for bird-watching, and promoting eco-friendly materials like bamboo cups and mugs.

District Tourism Officer Tanyup Kopak highlighted the importance of preserving the vibrant culture and heritage of the Wancho tribe while ensuring sustainability.

The meeting was attended by several stakeholders, including Rajiv Wangsa, ZPM of Longchan Anchal Block, PHED officials, the village chief, members of various community committees including the Kaimoi Tourism Society, Village Development Committee, Kaimoi Women Society and youth and student unions.

A significant resolution was adopted to protect the village's drinking water catchment area under the Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023 (Act No. 5 of 2023).

To promote cleanliness, the village formed five women's groups, encouraging a spirit of healthy competition. Prizes were awarded to the top three groups—Chingbanza colony, Chingkau colony and Chingke colony—for their outstanding contributions.

## KTU urges support for Th Muivah's homecoming

**DIMAPUR, Oct 18:** The Kuki Tribal Union (KTU) under the NSCN-IM has called for collective support and cooperation for the upcoming homecoming of NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah to his native village Somdal on October 22, 2025.

Describing the event as a "historic homecoming," the KTU/NSCN said it marks the return of the Ato Kilonser, or prime minister of the People's Republic of Nagalim, after more than five decades. The visit will also include stops in Ukhrul and Senapati.

In a statement issued on Friday, the KTU/NSCN hailed Th Muivah's lifelong dedication to the cause of Nagalim and his leadership in advancing the Naga people's aspirations. It also recalled the significant achievement under the leadership of the late Isak Chishi Swu and Muivah with the signing of the Frame-

work Agreement between the Government of India and NSCN on August 3, 2015.

Calling for the fullest cooperation from civil society organisations, churches and student bodies across Nagalim, the KTU/NSCN urged everyone to join in welcoming Muivah and his wife.

The union described the occasion as deeply emotional and momentous, stating it should be observed with gratitude, solidarity and profound respect.

Reverently referred to as Avakharar by the people for his steadfast commitment to the Naga cause, Th Muivah was praised for his vision of a sovereign Nagalim. On behalf of Kuki stakeholders within Nagalim, the KTU reaffirmed its solidarity and support to the NSCN/GPRN leadership in their ongoing pursuit of a peaceful and lasting resolution to the Naga issue. (NNN)

## 121 tuberculosis deaths reported in Mizoram

**AIZAWL, Oct 18:** At least 121 people have died of tuberculosis (TB) and 1,870 have been diagnosed with the disease in Mizoram from January to October 10, according to the state health department. Data accessed by PTI revealed that 97,647 blood samples were tested in the state with 1,870 people, including 744 females, confirmed to have TB. Among these, 121 were diagnosed with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and 211 were found to be both TB and HIV-positive.

The department reported that 82 percent of patients have been successfully treated. Of the total TB cases, 1,761 were patients above 14 years, while 104 were below 14 years.

Health officials noted a gradual increase in TB cases and fatalities since 2020. The number of deaths rose from 31 in 2020 to 136 in 2024. Overall, at least 540 people have died of TB in Mizoram over the last five years.

More than 11,000 TB cases have been reported during this period, with the highest number recorded in 2024 at 2,307, followed by 2,115 cases in 2023.

Officials also highlighted that over 100 people have registered to adopt TB patients or contribute to their care through the online platform "Nikshay" under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyan. (PTI)

## Army honours 1962 war heroes, promotes unity during motorcycle rally in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, Oct 18:** The Indian Army honoured the heroes of the 1962 India-China war and promoted unity during the four-day 'Shaurya Motorcycle Rally', which traversed through rugged terrain and remote valleys of Arunachal Pradesh, retracing the historic routes taken during the conflict, an official said.

The rally, which commenced at Likabali military station in Lower Siang district on October 14, culminated at the under-construction Neelam Tebi War Memorial at Neelam village in Keyi Panyor district on Friday.

The event was organised by the Army to pay solemn tributes to the valour and sacrifice of the soldiers who fought the 1962 war, the Army official said.

A total of 20 riders from the



Indian Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and 12 civilians from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh covered a distance of around 900 km, passing through key locations

including Basar (Leparada), Bora Rupak, Menga, Taksing and Daporijo (Upper Subansiri) and Ziro (Lower Subansiri), the official said.

In Daporijo, the riders also paid

homage at Shere Thapa War Memorial.

The bikers also conducted outreach programmes, interacted with locals and students and felicitated local communities.

They also spread awareness, promoting tribal unity and gave the message of nation-building in the border regions. They also promoted 'No Drugs, No School Dropouts', an initiative of the Arunachal Pradesh government, the official said.

The riders will interact with Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik during the Ziro Honour Run on Sunday.

The run is being organised by the Indian Army's Spear Corps in the run up to the National Solidarity Day on October 20, the official added. (PTI)

## Determined Saurashtra hold off reticent Karnataka to earn draw



**RAJKOT, Oct 18:** Karnataka's reluctance for an early declaration robbed them of the time to bowl out Saurashtra in their second innings as the Ranji Trophy Elite B match ended in a draw on the fourth and final day here on Saturday.

Saurashtra were 128 for five in their second innings on an uneven pitch when the match came to a close.

Just like in the first innings, leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal was Karnataka's star in the second dig too, bagging three wickets to complete a match-haul of 11 wickets.

Chasing an improbable 229 in one and half sessions, Saurashtra were in a spot of bother at 43 for four in the 13th over, and they had 40 overs more to negotiate.

Shreyas did all the damage upfront using the unpredictability of the track to the hilt, and the batters struggled to pick his quick off the surface googlies.

His delivery to dismiss Ansh Gosai underlined that point, as the Saurashtra right-hander looked to play a googly with static feet, but the ball zipped past him to crash on to the stumps.

But Saurashtra's fifth wicket pair of Gajjar Sammar (43 not out, 110 balls) and Jay Gohil (41, 73 balls), the concussion substitute for

Taranggoel, batted resolutely while adding 81 runs.

The stand, which lasted for 26 overs, ensured three points for Saurashtra, and Karnataka would rue their call to bat on well into the second session despite having a handy 180-plus lead.

A bold declaration at that point might have given Karnataka an extra hour to have a go at the hosts' batters, but they preferred to build a safety net

around them with a few extra runs.

Earlier, in their second innings, Karnataka adopted a rather aggressive approach with skipper Mayank Agarwal leading their effort with a 64.

Wicketkeeper batter KL Srijiith gave him good backing with a 30-ball 31.

**Innings win for Goa**

At Porvorim, Goa defeated Chandigarh by an innings and 75 runs despite a fighting 141 from Arjun Azad, who helped his team reach 354 in the second innings after following on.

Goa bagged seven points from the contest.

**Brief scores: At Rajkot: Karnataka:** 372 all out and 232 all out in 74.2 overs (Mayank Agarwal 64, KL Srijiith 31) vs Saurashtra: 376 all out and 128/5 in 43 overs (Gajjar Sammar 43 not out, Jay Gohil 41 not out; Shreyas Gopal 3/43).

**Saurashtra:** 3 points; Karnataka: 1 point.

**At Thiruvananthapuram:** Maharashtra: 239 all out and 224/2 declared in 71 overs (Prithvi Shaw 75, SA Veer 55 not out, Raturaj Gaikwad 55 not out) drew with Kerala: 219 all out.

**Maharashtra:** 3 points, Kerala: 1 point.

**At Porvorim:** Goa: 566 all out beat Chandigarh: 137 all out and 354 all out in 91.4 overs (Arjun Azad 141, AK Kaushik 82; Darshan Mishal 5/124, Mohit Redkar 3/93) by an innings and 75 runs.

**Goa:** 7 points; Chandigarh: 0

**At Indore:** Punjab: 232 all out and 143/5 in 63.2 overs when rain stopped play (Uday Sharan 36, Jaskaranvir Singh Paul 28; Shubham Sharma 3/20) vs Madhya Pradesh: 519/8 declared.

**Madhya Pradesh:** 3 points; Punjab: 1 point. (PTI)

## Afghanistan pull out of tri-series involving Pakistan after killing of Afghan players in Paktika

**KABUL, Oct 18:** Afghanistan has decided to withdraw from the upcoming tri-nation T20I series involving Pakistan, following the death of three Afghan cricketers in what it claimed was a "cowardly attack carried out by the Pakistani regime," the country's cricket board announced.

The series involving Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka was scheduled to be played in Rawalpindi and Lahore between November 17-29.

In a strongly worded statement, the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said it was "deeply saddened" by the "tragic martyrdom" of the players — Kabeer, Sibghatullah and Haroon — who, along with five others from Urgan District in Paktika Province, were killed when they were attacked after returning from a friendly match in Sharana, the provincial capital.

Seven others were injured in the incident. "The Afghanistan Cricket Board expresses its deepest sorrow and grief over the tragic martyrdom of the brave cricketers from Urgan District in Paktika Province, who were targeted this evening in a cowardly attack carried out by the Pakistani regime," ACB said in a statement.

"The ACB considers this a great loss for Afghanistan's sports community, its athletes, and the cricketing family," the board said, while extending condolences to the bereaved families and the people of Paktika Province.

The ACB said its decision to pull out of the series was taken as a gesture of respect to the victims.

"In response of this tragic incident and as a gesture of respect to the victims, the Afghanistan Cricket Board has decided to withdraw from participating in the upcoming Tri-Nation T20I Series involving Pakistan, scheduled to be played in late November."

"May Allah grant the martyrs the highest ranks in Jannah and bless the injured with a speedy recovery," the statement added.

According to reports, Pakistan conducted airstrikes in the Argun and Barmal districts of Paktika province, also halting the ceasefire between the two nations.

Star spinner Rashid Khan condemned the incident, saying he was "deeply saddened by the loss of civilian lives in the recent Pakistani aer-



tal strikes on Afghanistan."

"It is absolutely immoral and barbaric to target civilian infrastructure. These unjust and unlawful actions represent a grave violation of human rights and must not go unnoticed," Rashid said in a statement posted on X.

"In light of the precious innocent souls lost, I welcome the ACB's decision of withdrawing from upcoming fixtures against Pakistan. I stand with our people at this difficult time — our national dignity must come before all else," he added.

Former captain Gulbadin Naib too expressed his strong condemnation of the incident. "We are deeply saddened by the cowardly military attack in Argun, Paktika, that martyred innocent civilians and fellow cricketers.

"This brutal act by the Pakistani army is an assault on our people, pride, and independence, but it will never break the Afghan spirit," said Naib.

All-rounder Samiullah Shinwari said the at-

tack has left the cricketing fraternity and Afghanistan in sorrow.

"I was deeply saddened by the news of the martyrdom of the heroic players of Argoon district of Paktika, who were brutally attacked by the Pakistani military regime after a friendly cricket match.

"The incident is a great sorrow not only for Paktika, but for the entire cricket family and nation of Afghanistan. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families of these innocent players, my friends and the people of Paktika," he wrote on X. "We will never forget their memory and sacrifice."

Opener Sediqullah Atal also supported the ACB's decision to withdraw from the tri-series.

"Deeply saddened by Pakistan's attacks on Afghan civilians, women, children, and young cricketers. Such inhuman acts must not be ignored. I fully support the Afghanistan Cricket Board's decision," said Atal in his social media account. (PTI)

## It'll be a great experience: Mitchell Marsh

**PERTH, Oct 18:** Australia captain Mitchell Marsh on Saturday said playing in "packed out stadiums" against India who will have Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli back in the ranks will be a "great experience" for his group.

With Australia's focus fixated firmly on the Ashes starting next month, they will take on India across three ODIs and five T20Is starting with the 50-overs game here on Sunday.

"Had the privilege of playing against them quite a lot over the journey," Marsh told the media talking about playing against Rohit and Kohli.

"They're obviously legends of the game, Virat is the greatest chaser ever in this format. I think you can see by the ticket sales that a lot of people want to come and watch them." (PTI)

## Jyothi scripts history with World Cup Final bronze medal

**NANJING (CHINA), Oct 18:** Decorated Indian archer Jyothi Surekha Vennam on Saturday became the first Indian woman compound archer to win a medal at the World Cup Final, clinching the bronze with a flawless performance here.

The reigning Asian Games champion was at her imperious best against world No 2 Ella Gibson of Great Britain, shooting 15 perfect arrows to prevail 150-145 and secure her maiden podium finish in the tournament.

The eight-archer World Cup season finale saw the 29-year-old Indian begin with a confident 143-140 win over Alexis Ruiz of the USA in the quarterfinals.

Jyothi, however, went down narrowly to world No 1 Andrea Baccera of Mexico 143-145 in the semifinals after a closely-fought contest.

Jyothi briefly led by one point after the third end (87-86) but Baccera hit three 10s in the fourth end



to edge ahead 116-115 and sealed the final spot by taking the fifth end 29-28, as the Indian fell just short of her best finish.

The 2021 World Championship silver medallist, however, bounced back in style in the bronze medal match, reeling off 15 consecutive 10s across five ends to outclass Gibson and end her campaign on a high.

This was Jyothi's third appearance at the World Cup Final, having earlier competed at the Tlaxcala (2022) and Hermosillo (2023) editions, where she had exited in the opening round.

India had another qualifier in the women's compound section, Madhura Dhamangaonkar, who made an opening-round exit after losing 142-145 to Mariana Bernal of

Mexico.

India, however, had heartbreak in the men's compound section as the country's top-ranked archer Rishabh Yadav narrowly missed out on a bronze medal, losing to former world champion Mike Schloesser of the Netherlands by millimetres in the shoot-off.

Both archers dropped just three points across the regulation five ends to be tied 147-all.

The shoot-off also produced a thrilling finish, with both shooting perfect 10s, but Schloesser's arrow was adjudged closer to the centre, denying Yadav a World Cup Final medal by the narrowest of margins.

Abhishek Verma thus remains the only Indian compound archer to have won medals at the World Cup Final, having claimed a silver in 2015 (Mexico City) and a bronze in 2018 (Samsung) respectively.

No Indian has qualified in the recurve section in this season's World Cup Final. (PTI)

## Nothing has changed in my relationship with Rohit and Virat: New skipper Gill

**PERTH, Oct 18:** India's new ODI captain Shubman Gill says his bond with the Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli is as strong as ever despite contrary narratives floating on social media in recent weeks, insisting that he will not hesitate to approach the two stalwarts, if he is in a fix during a match. Gill replaced highly successful Rohit as India's new ODI skipper. The future of the two legends has become a matter of intense speculation since then. Gill's first assignment is three-match series against Australia, starting here on Sunday.

Standing on the banks of the Swan river — quite an unusual setting for a pre-match media conference — Gill sought to dispel the doubts.

"A narrative is run on the outside but nothing has changed in my relationship with Rohit. He is very helpful whenever I feel I need to ask him anything, may be input on nature of the track," Gill told media on the eve of the series-opener.

"I go and ask 'What do you think? If you would have been leading what would you do?' I have great equation with Virat bhai and Rohit bhai and they never hesitate in giving suggestions," Gill said, seeking to clear the air about the misconception that the two seniors haven't taken the decision well.

The 25-year-old skipper understands that these are "big shoes to fill" and he would need a lot of support from the two former skippers.

"I have had numerous conversations with Virat bhai and Rohit bhai on how to take team forward. What kind of culture they wanted to take the team forward, and those learnings and experience will help us.

"These are big shoes for me to fill in because of the legacy created by Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni), Virat bhai and Rohit bhai, so many experiences and learnings. The kind of experience and skill-set that they bring to the team is massive."



In his growing up years when ODI cricket still ruled the hearts and minds of Indian fans, it was but natural that Gill grew up on a staple diet of hundreds scored by Kohli and Rohit.

So how would it be to lead them? "Obviously, when I was kid, I used to idolise them for the game they played and hunger they had which inspired me. It is a big honour for me to lead such legends of the game.

"When I am in a difficult situation I wouldn't shy away from getting any suggestions from them," Gill said making it clear how he felt about the presence of the two seniors.

When questioned what specific traits would he like to pick from Rohit and Virat, Gill harped on "messaging and communication".

"There are some things I observed and really liked as a player when I played under them. How they converse and what kind of messaging helped me get the best out of me when I played under them.

"That's the kind of captain I would want to be where all my players feel secured, and the job they have to do and communications would be clear." Experience they say can't be bought from a supermarket and that is where exactly the duo stands out.

"They have served Indian cricket for close to 20 years and I have learnt a lot when I played under them, the experience that they bring can't be replicated, the runs that they have scored all over world." On a personal front, Gill believes that more the responsibility entrusted upon him, better he gets as a player.

"I like when I am entrusted with extra responsibility. I thrive under pressure, my best game comes out. But when I bat, I think as a batter and then I take best decisions.

"As a batter, I try not to think like a skipper as then you take more pressure on yourself and you might end up losing freedom of playing your shots and lose the 'X factor'." (PTI)

## Smith to lead Aussies in Ashes if Cummins fails to recover: Bailey

**MELBOURNE, Oct 18:** Steve Smith will lead Australia in this year's Ashes if regular Test skipper Pat Cummins fails to recover from his back injury, confirmed selection chair George Bailey.

The injury has ruled Cummins out of the white-ball series against India beginning with the first ODI in Perth on Sunday.

He is also unlikely to feature in the first Ashes Test, starting November 21 in Perth, and in that scenario former skipper Smith will captain Australia.

"If Pat doesn't play, Smudge (Smith) will captain. That's business as usual for us. That formula has worked," Bailey was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

"Regardless of whether he's playing, Pat's keen to be around because if he's not playing he'll be rehabbing and getting ready and bowling, so he'll be with the team anyway.

"So that information flow and working together as captain and vice-captain will remain the same," he added.

Smith had returned to Australia from New York this week and had started batting at the nets at Cricket New South Wales headquarters the day after his arrival.

Smith will play the next two rounds of Sheffield Shield for NSW in Brisbane and Sydney.

"Steve landed and he was at Cricket NSW the next day batting. So he'll do his thing. We've tried to tailor everyone's prep to suit them and certain obligations around that, but very comfortably he'll be ready to go," Bailey said. (PTI)

## Sporting Club Delhi unveiled, rebranding Hyderabad FC as capital's top-flight team

**NEW DELHI, Oct 18:** The national capital will have a new top-flight club of the country as Sporting Club Delhi was launched on Saturday after the rebranding of Indian Super League side Hyderabad FC.

Last year, Jindal Football Private Limited, a part of BC Jindal Group, acquired Hyderabad FC from the earlier owners, and decided to shift base to Delhi from 2025-26 season.

This marks the return of an ISL club in the national capital after the Delhi Dynamos, which featured in the inaugural edition of the top-tier league in 2014, shifted base to Bhubaneswar in 2019 and rechristened Odisha FC.

Sporting Club Delhi will take the place of Hyderabad FC in the Super Cup in Goa beginning October 25. The fixtures have already been announced and the All India Football Federation is expected to replace Hyderabad FC by the new name of Sporting Club Delhi.

"The unveiling of Sporting Club Delhi marks the beginning of a new chapter for football in the Delhi NCR region and India. The club will represent inclusivity, ambition, and the city's spirit and enthusiasm for the sport," said BC Jindal Group Promoter Bhavesh Jindal at the launch.

"With unity, determination, and revival as its philosophy, the club's long-term vision will be to focus on youth development, community engagement, and grassroots football. Through this initiative, we also aim to facilitate long-term infrastructure development, academies, and local partnerships."

The new club also unveiled its brand-new logo that features a stylised Phoenix, a mythical bird rising from the flames, representing resilience and the rebirth of the sport in the city and its surrounding regions.

"Our new identity shines a spotlight on Delhi rising from the ashes in the absence of professional football in the city and the region. With this move, the capital city, which once had a thriving football culture and stood at the heart of Indian football, will return to the top-tier of Indian football leagues with its own club," said Sporting Club Delhi CEO Dhruv Sood.

BC Jindal Group's Jindal Football had acquired the sporting license for Hyderabad Football Club before the ISL 2024-25.

Hyderabad FC won the ISL title in 2021-22 season. (PTI)