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# THE HILLS TIMES

Voice of the hills people

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Vol .No. XXVI Issue No. 326 RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862 DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025 PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

### 'Justice will be delivered': CM ahead of charge sheet filing in Garg's death case

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 11:** Appealing to people to have faith in the judicial process, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes justice will be delivered in the death case of singer Zubeen Garg.

Sarma made the statement as the police are scheduled to file the charge sheet in the sensational case on Friday.

"The SIT will submit its chargesheet, and the court will examine it. The culprit will be punished by the court," the CM said.

"From tomorrow, the police job will be over, and the court's role will start. I believe that the court will definitely deliver justice," he said, exuding confidence in the entire process.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to that country (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

### Five missing while swimming in Brahmaputra

**GUWAHATI, Dec 11:** At least five people went missing while swimming in the Brahmaputra in Guwahati, officials said on Thursday.

The incident took place at Bhakti Kutir in Kharghuli, where eight persons went for a swim in the mighty river on Wednesday, an official of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said.

"Three of them managed to come out of the water and were taken to the hospital, while five others are still missing. NDRF and SDRF teams have been deployed along with local authorities, and are jointly (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Truck carrying 22 labourers from Tinsukia dist falls into gorge in Arunachal ● One survives, reaches Chipra GREF camp

# 18 killed, 3 missing; rescue ops on

**TINSUKIA/DIBRUGARH, Dec 11:** At least 18 people from Assam's Tinsukia district were killed and three others are missing as the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The accident took place on Hayuliang-Chaglagam Road in Anjaw district in the eastern part of the hill state on December 8 when a truck was carrying 22 labourers from Tinsukia district, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said, citing the lone survivor's version.

The site, approximately 12 km from Chaglagam, lies in difficult terrain with limited connectivity and the accident had not been reported by any local agency, contractor or civil representative until the survivor's arrival, Rawat said



in a statement.

"Eighteen bodies have been sighted and are being retrieved using belay ropes. ADC of Hayuliang has informed SP of Anjaw, who has reached the site, while the District Medical Officer is moving

22 workers from Tinsukia fell off a cliff on the night of December 8.

"The Indian Army has launched a major search and rescue operation in the Chaglagam region of Arunachal Pradesh. The operations were initiated based on information received late on December 10 regarding a vehicle accident along the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road near KM 40," he added.

The Defence PRO said that the Army's Spear Corps on the early morning of Thursday mobilised multiple search and rescue columns, medical teams, GREF representatives, local police, NDRF personnel and the ADC of Hayuliang.

"At 1155 hours, after four hours of intensive search and rope descent, the truck was spotted around 200 metres (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Aware of people's pain due to violence: Murmu

### President on maiden tour of strife-torn Manipur



**IMPHAL, Dec 11:** President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said she is aware of the Manipur people's pain because of the ethnic violence, and assured them that the government is committed to strengthen harmony and ensure security.

Describing the state as a land of resilience and courage, Murmu said that the Manipur people have enriched the nation by contributing immensely to the diverse fields of sports, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Fire at Guwahati complex controlled after nearly 40 hrs

**GUWAHATI, Dec 11:** A blaze that engulfed a commercial complex housing a shopping mall and SBI's premium and commercial banking branches in Guwahati was contained on Thursday evening after 40 hours, with water tenders from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army, and Guwahati Refinery assisting in fire-fighting efforts, officials said.

The fire broke out at Swagata Square Complex in ABC Point around 12.30 am on Wednesday. Besides offices of the PSU lender, the complex also houses shopping



mall 'Soham Emporia'.

"The fire was controlled at 4 pm. However, we will observe the building tonight and do a thorough search during daylight tomorrow," a senior official of the Fire and

Emergency Services (F&ES) told PTL.

The building will be handed over to the owner and government agencies only after a proper safety check by the experts, he added.

The official said altogether 28 fire tenders were pressed into service since the incident, with additional units arriving from Morigaon, Kamrup, Nalbari and Darrang districts.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was also called in with (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Two J&K men held in Arunachal on espionage charges

**ITANAGAR, Dec 11:** Two men from Jammu and Kashmir were arrested in Arunachal Pradesh on espionage charges, police said on Thursday.

Those arrested were identified as Nazir Ahmad Malik and Sabir Ahmed Mir, both natives of Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, they said.

On the basis of intelligence inputs, Nazir was arrested from a rented house in Ganga village in the Chimpu police station area of Itanagar on November 22, they added.

During interrogation, Nazir ad-

mitted to sharing deployment details of the Army and paramilitary forces and information on military installations to Pakistani handlers through Telegram, police claimed.

He also disclosed receiving instructions to place explosives and carry out arson, targeting security establishments, they claimed.

Two mobile phones seized from him contained digital traces linking him to a Telegram channel named "Al Aqsa", which the police described as a conduit for transmitting security-related information.

Based on information provided by Nazir, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Pranab Mukherjee had towering contribution: CM

**GUWAHATI, Dec 11:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday paid tributes to former President Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary and said that the Bharat Ratna awardee had a towering contribution to the nation.

"Former President Shri Pranab Mukherjee's towering contribution to our nation stands as a timeless testament to his vision and statesmanship," Sarma said in a post on X.

"On his birth anniversary, we pay heartfelt tribute to the Bharat Ratna who shaped India's political discourse, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

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DIPR/D/HLT/252/12-Dec-25

# Stock markets snap 3-day slide

## Sensex jumps 427 pts on buying in metal, auto shares

MUMBAI, Dec 11: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Thursday, cutting short a three-day falling streak following buying in auto and metal stocks and a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

Rebounding from its early lows, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 426.86 points or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 84,818.13. During the day, it hit a high of 84,906.93 and a low of 84,150.19.

The 50-share NSE Nifty appreciated by 140.55 points, or 0.55 per cent, to close at 25,898.55. Following initial volatility, the Nifty gradually moved higher and closed near the day's peak of 25,922.80 as most sectors advanced.

Among the Sensex constituents, Eternal, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, Maruti Suzuki India, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Infosys, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and HCL Technologies were the gainers.

However, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, PowerGrid, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and Titan were among the laggards.

"Domestic markets rebounded broadly following the Fed's expected 25-bps rate cut amid high U.S. inflation. The decline in U.S. 10-year yields indicates a moderation in future FI outflows, which



bolstered sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

Nair added that the auto sector excelled due to anticipated stronger demand, while IT gained traction on the prospect of increased spending. Conversely, other Asian markets experienced selling pressure over concerns about AI-driven valuations and rising Japanese yields, which negatively impacted overall domestic sentiment.

Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said buying across IT, auto, metals, realty and banking helped offset recent weakness, supported by a decline in India VIX. Steady domestic sentiment was reinforced by robust equity inflows of ₹ 29,894 crore in November. However, continued weakness in the rupee

capped the momentum he added. Broader markets rebounded, with the BSE midcap gauge rising 0.79 per cent and the smallcap index by 0.51 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Metal rose the most by 1.14 per cent, Auto by 1.08 per cent, Commodities by 0.94 per cent, IT and Telecommunication by 0.89 per cent each, Focussed IT by 0.87 per cent, Consumer Discretionary by 0.86 per cent, Healthcare by 0.77 per cent and Realty by 0.71 per cent.

Oil & Gas was the only laggard. As many as 2,397 stocks advanced, while 1,786 declined and 158 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Indian equities traded higher on Thursday, with the Nifty snapping a three-session slide to end higher, after the US Federal Re-

serve delivered a widely anticipated 25 basis point rate cut, a move investors hope will help temper foreign outflows," Sidhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Khemka added that uncertainty around progress in India-US trade negotiations, continuous foreign institutional investor selling, and the absence of major near-term triggers, with the Fed rate cut now behind, are likely to keep market sentiment somewhat lacklustre.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 benchmark, Shanghai's SSE Composite, South Korea's KOSPI and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower.

European markets are trading higher. Wall Street settled higher in overnight deals on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained the net sellers of equities worth ₹ 1,651.06 crore on Wednesday while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 3,752.31 crore, according to the exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 1.22 per cent to USD 61.45 per barrel.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 275.01 points to settle at 84,391.27, while the broader NSE Nifty fell by 81.65 points to close at a month's low of 25,758. (PTI)

## Sandesara brothers deposit ₹ 5,100 cr; total recovery nearly double of ₹ 5,383-cr fraud

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Fugitive businessmen Nitin and Chetan Sandesara have deposited ₹ 5,100 crore with the Supreme Court registry, their spokesperson said on Thursday, fulfilling the condition set by the apex court for withdrawal of criminal charges against them.

Against the original FIR by the CBI charging the brothers of defaulting on bank loans for ₹ 5,383 crore, the total recovery against the two, whose companies spanned industries from pharmaceuticals to energy, now stands at ₹ 9,799 crore.

"Nitin Sandesara, Chetan Sandesara, and family have deposited ₹ 5,100 crore with the Registry of the Supreme Court of India as per the Supreme Courts order on November 19, 2025. The deposit of ₹ 5,100 crore has been fully made as of 6th of December 2025," a spokesperson for the family said in a statement.

The Supreme Court had set a deadline of December 17 for the siblings, declared as fugitives for fleeing the country after defrauding public banks, to deposit the amount.

The deposit of ₹ 5,100 crore on December 6, the statement said, "comprehensively brings closure to all cases regarding the Sandesara family and their companies pending before multiple judicial forums and government agencies since 2017".

The duo, who figure among 14 designated fugitive offenders under a 2018 law that allows freezing of assets, had fled India in 2017 on Albanian passports.

The CBI FIR of 2017 had put the defrauded amount at ₹ 5,383 crore. In 2020, the lenders offered a court-guided one-time settlement of ₹ 6,761 crore. The family paid ₹ 614 crore, or about 10 per cent of the amount, upfront.

A bankruptcy court NCLT liquidated certain assets and recovered ₹ 1,192 crore. Between 2021 and early 2025, the family paid a total of ₹ 3,507 crore (including ₹ 614 crore paid in 2020).

After considering the ₹ 5,100 crore paid in pursuance of the Supreme Court order of November 19, the amount recovered comes to ₹ 9,799 crore.

The Supreme Court in its November 19, 2025 order said "the amount of default on FIR was ₹ 5,383 crore".

"The one-time-settlement (OTS) with respect to all Indian companies of the petitioners (Sandesara brothers) with the banks was for a sum of ₹ 3,826 crore and for foreign companies being guarantor was of Rs 2,935 crore, bringing the total sum to ₹ 6,761 crore," it said.

"Out of the said amount, the petitioners have voluntarily deposited fraction of total amount under various heads, including as per orders of this court, which comes to around ₹ 3,507.63 crore, leaving the remaining dues to ₹ 3,253.37 crore."

The lender banks have initiated the proceedings under Insolvency Bankruptcy Code, 2016 before the National Company Law Tribunal, wherein recoveries made of worth ₹ 1,192 crore.

"However, out of the total amount as specified in the OTS, which was higher than the amount as specified in the FIR, the remaining unpaid amount comes to ₹ 2,061.37 crore," it said. "As indicated in order dated 18.11.2025 and after consultation with the lending banks, the investigating agencies through learned Solicitor General, in a sealed cover demanded ₹ 5,100 crore against the dues/recoveries which are the subject matter of the FIR and other criminal proceedings." The brothers accepted the offer and have deposited the amount. (PTI)

## LG introduces new range of washing machines with AI DD 2.0 technology

GUWAHATI, Dec 11: LG Electronics India Ltd on Wednesday announced the launch of its latest washing machine line-up, engineered with premium design elements and cutting-edge technology to cater to modern Indian households.

The new range, comprising 10 models across Washer Dryer units, Front Load Washing Machines and Top Load Washing Machines, brings advanced AI-driven features aimed at delivering superior fabric care, intelligent washing and enhanced convenience for users.

With a focus on blending innovation with contemporary aesthetics, the new line-up is designed to simplify everyday laundry routines while offering a premium experience.

The campaign slogan for the new range, "AI Detection. Washing Perfection." underscores the central role of the upgraded AI DD 2.0 technology, which precisely identifies fabric type and requirements to deliver more effective wash cycles with minimal user effort.

LG said the technology is intended to enhance both performance and customer convenience through deeper automation.

Sanjay Chitkara, co-chief sales & marketing officer, LG Electronics India Ltd, said the latest launch rein-

forces the company's commitment to improving everyday living through intelligent solutions.

"At LG, we are committed to making life comfortable for our customers by simplifying their daily tasks through smart technology. The new AI DD 2.0 Washing Machine is a testament to that commitment. With smart technology, powerful performance, and thoughtful design, this range is crafted to deliver convenience, care, and energy efficiency. We are confident that this series will redefine the washing experience and emerge as a preferred choice for customers' daily needs," he stated.

The Front Load Washing Machine range focuses on precision washing supported by modern design and enhanced energy efficiency.

Equipped with AI DD 2.0, the machines detect fabric weight, type and soil level, automatically selecting the most suitable wash cycle to optimise fabric care.

Steam+ technology reduces wrinkles and eliminates allergens to keep clothes fresh and comfortable, while the TurboWash® 360° feature uses multi-directional water jets to clean clothes thoroughly in just 39 minutes.

The eDispense™ auto-dosing system stores detergent for up to 30 washes, enabling hassle-free operation.

LG ThinQ™ connectivity allows users to control and monitor the machine remotely, expanding convenience in daily laundry management.

Additional programs such as Allergy Care, Baby Steam Care and Micro Plastic Care—which reduces microplastic emissions by up to 60%—demonstrate the company's emphasis on both gentle fabric handling and sustainability.

The minimalist design incorporates a Digital Dial LCD and flat tempered glass door with chrome finish, offered in premium colour variants to complement modern interiors.

The models aim to balance aesthetics, energy efficiency and high-performance washing in a single package. The new Washer Dryer models, available in 20/10 kg and 15/8 kg capacities, cater to households seeking the efficiency of washing and drying in one unit.

Designed for environments with space constraints or limited drying options—such as monsoon-prone regions or high-rise residences—the machines ensure complete wash-and-dry care through advanced, fast and efficient cycles.

The Top Load Washing Machine range combines strong washing performance with intelligent care through AI DD, which identifies fabric types and weight to choose the op-

timal wash pattern from as many as 20,000 combinations.

The TurboWash® function enables a full load to be washed in just 29 minutes, appealing to time-conscious households. Steam with an in-built heater ensures up to 99.9% allergen elimination for improved hygiene.

LG ThinQ™ Wi-Fi support provides remote operation and scheduling, while an IPX4-rated water-resistant control panel and a premium jog dial on the rear panel enhance durability and ease of use.

Features such as Stain Clean and Duvet Mode ensure better handling of tough stains and bulky bedding.

With an 11 kg drum and a sleek flat design, the new top-load series aims to provide an optimal blend of performance, practicality and appearance.

The AIDD 2.0 series will be available in multiple SKUs ranging from 11 kg to 20 kg capacities and offered in premium colour options.

The models will be available through leading online marketplaces, retail outlets and LG Brand Stores, accompanied by cashback schemes and special finance offers.

The price of the front-load range starts from ₹69,990 and goes up to ₹1,39,990, while the top-load models are priced between ₹38,990 and ₹46,990.

## Aqua North East Summit to spotlight aquaculture growth in region today

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 11: The maiden edition of the Aqua North East Summit 2025, a one-day conference focused on accelerating aquaculture development in the Northeastern region, will be held on December 12 at Hotel Taj Vivanta, Guwahati.

The event is being organised by Aqua Doctor Solutions in collaboration with FisheryNews, the Department of Fisheries, Government of India, and supported by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), with the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) as the Chamber partner.

Addressing a press conference on Thursday, Induvardhan Reddy Putana, Founder and CEO of FisheryNews, underlined the region's potential to become one of India's major aquaculture hubs. He said the summit aims to bring science, technology, policy and business stakeholders together to lay the foundation for sustained industry growth as well as the forthcoming Aqua North East Expo 2026.

As co-organiser, FisheryNews will lead the summit's digital awareness and communication initiatives.

The press meet was also addressed by Suryateja Vemavarapu, Co-founder and COO of FisheryNews; Dr. Debanu Barman, Founder and CEO of Aqua Doctor Solutions; and Ashim Kumar Borah, Senior Executive (Technical) and Officer in Charge, NFDB-NERC, Guwahati.

They highlighted the summit's objective of bringing policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, technology companies, startups, cooperatives, FPOs and progressive farmers from across the Northeast onto a single platform.

Key issues to be discussed include productivity gaps, low scientific adoption, limited market linkages, value-chain inefficiencies and climate-related vulnerabilities.

The summit will also explore species diversification, cold-chain development, emerging digital technologies such as AI, IoT and smart farming systems, sustainability measures, and improved financial inclusion through schemes like PMMSY.

Sessions will include networking opportunities, product showcases and dialogues between industry and government stakeholders. Despite being one of India's richest aquaculture resource regions, with abundant waterbodies and high fish consumption, the Northeast continues to face constraints such as low productivity, inadequate extension services and fragmented supply chains. The summit aims to strengthen capacity for technology-driven aquaculture, foster investment, and improve coordination across sectors.

Contd. from Page 1...

## 18 killed, 3 missing

below the road near KM 40 in a re-entrant, inaccessible and not visible from helicopters or the road due to dense tree cover and thick foliage," he added. The Anjaw District Administration has requisitioned the SDRF, which is en route at present. "ADC Hayuliang is also questioning the sub-contractor of the Zila Parishad Member, Chaglagam, to verify the antecedents and exact strength of the workers hired," Rawat said.

"Despite harsh terrain and poor visibility, the Indian Army, in coordination with civil administration and other agencies, is making all possible efforts to trace the remaining individuals and provide immediate assistance," he added. Earlier during the day, Assam's Tinsukia District Commissioner Swapneel Paul told PTI that at around 11 am, they received information about a vehicle falling into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district. "Accordingly, we contacted the DCs of Anjaw and Teju for confirmation. Both the DCs said that rescue teams have so far recovered several bodies and found one person alive. Some more persons are still missing," he added. Paul said that a team from Tinsukia, comprising the circle officer and police personnel, have been dispatched to the neighbouring state to get more updates. "They have reached Tezu and within 2-3 hours, we will be able to give more details," the Tinsukia DC added. Tinsukia Circle Officer Jaideep Rajak, who is on the way to the spot, told PTI that the location is remote and the exact details will be known only after reaching the site. "Initial reports indicated that the workers were engaged by a private contractor in a project in Hayuliang. They were travelling in a dumper that skidded off the road and fell nearly 1,000 feet into a deep gorge. Rescue operations are underway," he added. Tinsukia Senior Superintendent of Police Mayank Kumar said that 22 labourers from the district had gone to Arunachal Pradesh for the construction of a hostel.

"They were from Delhatlag of Gillapukri Tea Estate. Out of the 22 people in the dumper, 21 are reportedly dead," he added. One of the workers, Budheswor Deep, managed to escape from the spot and called up his relatives on Wednesday morning. This phone call first alerted the families about the incident, Kumar said.

Apart from Deep, 18 more labourers, including the dead and the missing, have been identified. They are Rahul Kumar, Somir Deep, Arjun Kumar, Pankaj Manki, Ajay Manki, Bijay Kumar, Abhoy Bhumij, Rohit Manki, Birendra Kumar, Agor Tanti, Dhiren Chatriya, Rojoni Nag, Deep Gowala, Ramsebak Suna, Sonaton Nag, Sanjay Kumar, Karan Kumar and Junash Munda. (PTI)

## Aware of people's

defence, art and culture, and public service. This is Murmu's first trip to the strife-torn state after becoming the President of India. Addressing a gathering at a civic reception programme, she said, "I am aware of the pain that the people of Manipur have gone through following the unfortunate violence. I want to assure you that taking care of their concerns is the highest priority for us."

At least 260 people were killed and thousands homeless in clashes between the valley-based Meiteis and Kuki community of the hills since May 2023. The state is now under President's Rule.

"My government stands by every affected family. The Indian government remains fully committed to strengthening harmony, ensuring security, and supporting Manipur in its journey towards stability and prosperity," the President said. She added that the valley and hills of the state were rich in natural beauty.

The people of Manipur are talented and hardworking, Murmu said, expressing confidence that communities from the valley and the hills would remain together with renewed harmony and advance towards greater heights of prosperity and happiness. "I urge the people of Manipur to continue supporting harmony and development. Let us together strengthen Manipur where every child feels safe, every woman feels empowered, every community feels included, and every citizen moves towards a bright future," she added.

Murmu said she inaugurated a number of projects that will improve the quality of life of the people of Manipur. Earlier, the President laid foundation stones for 14 projects valued at ₹ 1,180 crore and inaugurated 12 projects worth ₹ 207 crore. These projects -- in diverse areas of tribal development, agriculture, electricity, drinking water, education and sports -- reflect the government's commitment to building a modern and inclusive Manipur, she said. "The foundation stones that were laid today cover a wide range, including tourism, electricity, drinking water, security, administration and sports. These projects will generate employment, improve infrastructure and accelerate economic activity," said the President.

"Over the past several years, many initiatives taken by the government of India for connectivity, health, infrastructure, education and rural development have brought tangible improvements to people's lives," she said.

Murmu said that the government will ensure that the fruits of development will reach each and every corner of the state. She said the northeastern state has recorded "multiple improvements" across development indicators, and attributed the progress to coordinated efforts between the Centre, the state government and "most importantly, the hard work of the people of Manipur." She called the state the "gateway to India's vibrant engagement with South East Asia" and a land of "unlimited potential" owing to its culture and natural beauty.

Murmu noted that Manipur has long been recognised for self-empowerment and women's empowerment. "Two days ago, I had the privilege of honouring four women from Manipur among the winners from across the country at the National Handicrafts Awards ceremony," she added.

On the Nupi Lal or 'women's war', the President said the brave women of Manipur waged war twice during the early decades of the 20th century. Nupi Lal refers to two movements -- in 1904 and 1939 -- led by women in Manipur, protesting British colonial economic policies and demanding reforms.

Murmu said she would pay floral tributes at the Nupi Lal Memorial Complex on Friday.

"I salute those brave women warriors. They inspire every Indian," she said.

The President also highlighted Manipur's contribution to the freedom struggle, noting that the Indian flag was first raised at Moirang by soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj in 1944.

"In honour of the bravehearts of Manipur, Mt Harriet in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been named Mt Manipur," she said. Praising the state's natural endowments, the President said she was told that Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the Northeast and home to "the only floating national park, not just in India but on the entire planet." (PTI)

## 'Justice will be

to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival (NEIF). A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police is probing Garg's death case after more than 60 FIRs were lodged across the state. (PTI)

## Five missing while

conducting search and rescue operations," she added. As of now, no bodies have been recovered and the identities of the missing persons are yet to be ascertained, the official said. "As per the latest update, rescue operations are underway. The area has been secured to allow teams to operate," she added. A senior official of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said that the area where the incident took place has strong currents, making the operation challenging. "The water seems to be calm on the above, but there are strong currents below. It is unlikely that the people are still at this location. We are looking for them downstream as well," he added. (PTI)

## Fire at Guwahati

high-tech smoke-reduction equipment to assist in the operation. The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) in its evening bulletin said though the fire is controlled, operations are still on.

"The situation will be observed for a few hours before closing the operation. NDRF has been released from the site," it added. The ASDMA stated that the actual cause of fire could not be ascertained till now.

During the entire firefighting operation, only one personnel sustained minor injuries and was treated at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital. "Our boys immediately responded to the fire call post midnight on Wednesday and reached the spot within 15 minutes. We could stop the fire from spreading to other nearby buildings," the F&ES official said. "The fire originated at the godown of the mall on the second floor, where a lot of inflammable materials and clothes were stored," he added. "The fabric and fibre aggravated the problem. Although it looked like the flame was doused at a particular portion, it lit up again after some time. Moreover, excessive heat and poor visibility due to heavy smoke created a huge obstacle for our personnel," the senior IPS officer said. The fire was initially thought to be contained on Wednesday evening, but it suddenly engulfed the entire back portion on the 4th floor, another official said. "When the fire was at the rear of the building, we could not go there instantly. Due to non-adherence to safety norms while construction, fire tenders were unable to reach the rear," he added.

Visiting the site, Kamrup Metropolitan District Commissioner Sumit Sattawan said preliminary inquiries found that all safety clearances were availed by the building.

"The building owner said the audit was done two months ago. So, it seems the building prima facie does not have any issue," he told reporters. The authorities will wait for a final report from the F&ES Department after dousing the flame fully before taking any action, Sattawan said. "If there is any lapse, we will definitely take action against the responsible people. We will come to know all the details of the origin of the fire from the report," he added. ASDMA in its earlier bulletin said fire personnel were attempting to control the spread of fire and prevent it from reaching the lower floors. "Due to zero visibility and heavy smoke, the fire could not be controlled effectively in the initial stage. The building premises and surrounding areas have been secured. Evacuation protocols were initiated for safety," it added. ASDMA said preliminary observation suggests significant damage to the affected floors, but a detailed assessment will be done once the fire is fully controlled.

Scores of onlookers, mostly customers of SBI, came hearing the fire and stood on the road seeing the operation. They expressed concerns regarding their valuables kept in the lockers, which were there inside the building.

"We have been told that the blaze has just been controlled, but the fire department officials are still assessing the building. They are likely to observe it for a few more hours. We will be able to check the lockers and other items in detail only after getting an entry into the different floors," a senior SBI official told reporters outside the building. F&ES Deputy Director Nanda Singh said two SBI officials entered the building wearing protection gears to visit the documentation portion and found that all important papers are safe. "SBI's chief fire officer has reached Guwahati from Mumbai. He has contacted us and will visit the bank tomorrow," he added. (PTI)

## Two J&K men

the investigators arrested Sabir from Abotani Colony here, police said. Sabir was instructed to facilitate the illegal entry of Pakistani nationals into India and act as an arms courier, they alleged. Both the men, who run small businesses here, are in judicial custody, police said. An officer stated that Nazir's presence in Arunachal Pradesh suggests a larger plan to activate operatives in the region. A case has been registered under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Official Secrets Act, and the Arunachal Pradesh Act. A detailed investigation is underway to identify the wider network, its linkages, and the objectives behind the operation, he said. Inspector General of Police (Law & Order) Chukhu Apa confirmed the arrests but declined to divulge details, citing the sensitivity of the case.

"This is a developing case. We are working on it, and a lot remains to be done. We will soon give an official statement. Whatever information is in the press is not the official version of the state police," he said. (PTI)

## Pranab Mukherjee had

unified voices across party lines and strengthened the foundations of our democracy," he added. Mukherjee assumed office as the 13th President of India on July 25, 2012, crowning a political career of over five decades. He had the rare distinction of having served at different times as Foreign, Defence, Commerce and Finance Minister. He was elected to the Rajya Sabha five times from 1969 and twice to the Lok Sabha from 2004. (PTI)

## District-level programme honours 860 martyrs, with family felicitations

# Singhal recalled the Assam Movement (1979-1985)

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Dec 11:** Along with the rest of the state, the Sonitpur district administration on Wednesday observed "Swaheed Divas 2025" at Church Field, Tezpur. Assam's Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Ashok Singhal, graced the district-level programme as Chief Guest. A live telecast of the central programme held at West Boragaon, Guwahati was arranged, allowing the audience and invited guests at Church Field to witness the ceremony simultaneously.

The event commenced with Minister Ashok Singhal, Tezpur MLA Prithviraj Rabha, District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, Superintendent of Police Barun Purkayastha, AMTRON Vice-Chairman Ritubaran Sarma, Tezpur Municipal Board Chairman Ramen Tamuli, Tezpur Development Authority Chairman



Biswadev Bhattacharjya and other dignitaries offering floral tributes and lighting ceremonial lamps at the symbolic Saheed Bedi in homage to the martyrs of the Assam

Movement and those from Sonitpur. This was followed by the live telecast and a welcome address by District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das.

Speaking as Chief Guest, Minister Singhal recalled the Assam Movement (1979-1985) and paid heartfelt respects to the 860 martyrs who laid down their lives to protect the identity, culture, land and resources of the indigenous people, making special mention of martyrs from Sonitpur district. The cultural segment included a performance of the song "Saheed Pranamo Tomak" by students, teachers and artistes, followed by a felicitation ceremony honouring martyrs' family members. The Assam Police Pipe Band performed the national anthem and ceremonial pieces at the start and conclusion of the event.

The programme was attended by members of martyrs' families, AASU leaders, representatives of various organisations, government officials, students, teachers, artistes and media personnel.

## Safai Karmachari Sanstha seeks resolution of long-pending issues in BTC

### Commission member urges approval of posts, housing for Harijan families and better wages

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 11:** The Safai Karmachari Sanstha has demanded the resolution of long-pending issues affecting safai karmacharis across the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Addressing reporters at a press conference held at Bijn Press Club on Thursday in Chirang, Bhim Basafor, Member of the Assam State Safai Karmachari Commission, urged the BTC government to address the long-standing concerns of the workers at the earliest. He highlighted several unresolved issues concerning safai karmacharis working under the council.

He expressed concern that the posts of safai karmacharis serving in various government departments under the BTC have not been officially approved to date. He urged BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary to take immediate steps to approve all positions so that workers can receive permanent status, security and right-



ful benefits.

Basafor further pointed out that the government has not yet undertaken the construction of residential houses in the Harijan Colony within the BTC area. He said many families continue to live in difficult conditions due to the absence of proper housing facilities.

Highlighting the situation in Bijn, he appealed to the BTC administration to construct residential houses for at least 30 Harijan families who are in urgent need of shelter and improved living conditions.

He also stressed the need for interviews to be conducted for all vacant positions across various BTC departments. Basafor demanded that 80 per cent of these jobs be reserved for safai karmacharis, considering their long-standing contribution and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

In addition, he called upon the BTC government to increase the salaries of safai karmacharis, noting that their current remuneration is insufficient compared to the essential services they provide to the community.

## Baksa bans daytime movement of dumpers and heavy vehicles

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 11:** The Baksa District Administration has imposed restrictions on the movement of dumpers and other heavy vehicles from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM across the district to prevent road accidents, reduce environmental hazards and ensure public safety. The order, issued by District Magistrate Gautam Das, ACS, under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, states that uncontrolled movement of heavy dumpers in the Salbari and Mushalpur areas has caused significant road damage and posed risks to schoolchildren, elderly pedestrians and local residents.

However, exemptions have been granted for vehicles engaged in government-sanctioned projects with prior written permission and for vehicles operating outside restricted hours or using approved alternative routes designated by the Traffic Police or District Administration.

The order comes into effect immediately. Violations will be punishable under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

## National Deworming Day observed in West Karbi Anglong

**HT Correspondent**  
**HAMREN, Dec 11:** National Deworming Day (NDD) is being observed across the country with Assam joining the initiative through various programmes in West Karbi Anglong.

The inaugural event was held at the auditorium of Donkamokam Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC), Dr Biren Chandra Timung, Sub-Divisional Health Officer, delivered the welcome address, emphasising the roles of health workers and parents in raising awareness about deworming.

Dr Durgeshwar Engti, Additional Chief and Health Officer (Communicable Diseases), spoke as a resource person, highlighting measures to improve sanitation and cleanliness and urging active participation in the programme.

Amrita Hazarika, Block Community Mobiliser, National Health Mission (NHM), West Karbi Anglong, outlined the deworming procedures to ASHA workers present. The event, anchored by Aldrin Phangcho, Block Programme Manager, NHM was attended by Hemarani Bhoumik District Coordinator for Kilkari and Mobile Academy, Rahul Deka District Media Expert and other officials from the National Health Service.

Simultaneous NDD programmes were also organised at the BPHCs of Baithalangso, Umpantai and Jirikingding.

Under the programme, every student aged 1 to 19 in government, government-aided, private schools and Anganwadi centres will receive free deworming tablets.

## AJYCP demands martyr status for anti-CAA protesters

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Dec 11:** The Jorhat District Committee of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) staged a three-hour silent sit-in near the Deputy Commissioner's office on Thursday, demanding that the five people who lost their lives during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 be accorded martyr status without delay.

AJYCP Jorhat District Committee president Asimjyoti Saikia and general secretary Biswajit Gayan stated that while the Assam government observed statewide Martyrs' Day on December 10 in memory of the 860 martyrs of the anti-foreigners agitation, the BJP-led government has ignored the five martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the anti-CAA movement of 2019. They described the oversight as extremely unfortunate and painful for the people of Assam, urging the government to immediately confer martyr status on the deceased without dividing the martyrs into two groups.

The AJYCP noted that the organisation and other non-governmental bodies have already recognised the five individuals who died on December 12, 2019, as martyrs, but the government is yet to do so.

## Sivasagar Book Fair concludes with record ₹ 70 lakh sales

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, Dec 11:** The Sivasagar Book Fair, organised by social organisation 'Khoj' and the people of the town, ended on Thursday with a concluding function presided over by Samiran Phukan, General Secretary, AASU and president of the organising committee. Over ₹ 70 lakhs worth of books were sold during the 11-day book fair.

The function was attended by Dr Jagadish Patgiri Vice-Chancellor, Sibsagar University, as the chief guest, Dr Jyoti Prasad Saikia Vice-Chancellor, JB University, Akhil Gogoi Sivasagar MLA and leading citizens. Jay Jyoti Gogoi, secretary of Khoj, delivered the welcome address, quoting Padmashree Inran Shah's message to the book lovers.

Dr Jagadish Patgiri in his speech, said that "Festival of Books" is a better term than book fair. He noted that the first book fair began in Assam in 1984, ushering in a new change in social life. He also said that it is difficult to be a good reader and readers are the base structure on which a conscious society stands. Dr Jyotiprasad Saikia spoke on various types of reading habits in his speech.

The winners of different competitions held over the week were given away the prizes.

## CM launches bicycle drive for over 3 lakh students to reduce dropouts

**HT correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Dec 11:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday inaugurated Assam's statewide bicycle distribution programme, beginning with a ceremonial handover of cycles to Class IX students in Dibrugarh. The initiative will benefit 3, 10,031 students across government, provincialised and model schools, including tea garden institutions.

Highlighting the programme's purpose, the Chief Minister noted that transportation challenges contribute to nearly 6% of students dropping out after five years of schooling. "This cycle distribution initiative is designed to reduce dropout rates by ensuring faster and more reliable access to schools, particularly in rural and interior areas," he said.

In addition to improved mobility, Sarma announced a compre-



hensive academic support package. Students preparing for Class X board examinations will receive ₹ 300 per month, while admission expenses ranging from ₹ 10,000 to 12,000 will be covered for those pursuing higher education after the

HSLC exams. Addressing gender inclusivity, the Chief Minister noted the ongoing Nijut Moina scheme for girls and launched the new Babu Asoni scheme to extend similar financial assistance to male students.

## Farmer trampled to death by wild elephant

**HT Correspondent**  
**MARHERITA, Dec 11:** A farmer lost his life after being attacked by a wild elephant at a paddy field in Balijan Dirok Tea Estate under the Margherita West Range office of Digboi Forest Division.

According to officials, the incident occurred around 1:30 AM on December 9, when the victim and his brother had gone to their paddy field to inspect the area.

The deceased has been identified as 41-year-old Ghuron Lakra, who succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday, December 10, at his residence in Balijan, Dirok Tea Estate, Margherita.

His body was sent to Tinsukia Civil Hospital for post-mortem examination.

Sources in the Forest Department stated that an ex-gratia compensation of ₹ 4 lakh will be provided to the next of kin as per government norms.

## Hojai mourns at Ansuia Devi Sharma passing away

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOJAI, Dec 11:** Ansuia Devi Sharma (Rinwa), wife of noted businessman and social worker Keshav Dev Sharma and mother of Bikram Sharma, former president of Lions Club of Hojai Royals, passed away on Wednesday at the age of 75 after a long illness. She was known for her simple lifestyle, kind nature and strong belief in religious and social values. Her gentle personality and dedication to helping others earned her deep respect in the community.

Her funeral procession began on Thursday from her residence at Jugal Kishore Kedia Road and proceeded to the Hojai Bhoonath crematorium, where she was given a final farewell by her son Bikram Sharma and other family members in the presence of well-wishers.

Sharma leaves behind her husband, two sons, three daughters and a large extended family.

## Hunger strike demanding justice for Zubeen Garg

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Dec 11:** The Jorhat District Youth Congress on Tuesday launched a hunger strike demanding a speedy and transparent investigation into the mysterious death of Assam's iconic singer and cultural figure, Zubeen Garg. The protest was led by district president Abhijit Barthakur with active participation from Youth Congress committees of Jorhat, Titabar, Teok and Mariani constituencies.

During the demonstration, the protesters placed three key demands before the authorities: immediate justice for Zubeen Garg with full transparency in the investigation, posthumous conferral of the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour and measures to preserve his creative works and artistic legacy for future generations.

## Loan shark's reign of terror in Nagaon ends with arrest

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, Dec 11:** A loan shark, identified as Imran Hussain alias Iran has been terrorising people in Nagaon by charging exorbitant interest rates and seizing vehicles.

According to reports, Iran had lent ₹ 5.52 lakh to a person named Kazi Masood at a 15% interest rate. When Masood failed to repay the loan on time, Iran seized his XUV vehicle.

Masood has filed a complaint at Nagaon Sadar police station, following which Iran was arrested. The police have also recovered the seized vehicle and are investigating the matter.

This is not the first time Iran has been involved in such activities. He was previously arrested and sent to jail by the Nagaon police for similar offences.

## Veteran social worker Munin Borthakur passes away

**HT Correspondent**  
**JAGIROAD, Dec 11:** Veteran social worker and founder member of Jagiroad College, Jagiroad Lions Club, Jagiroad Development Authority, Jagiroad Senior Citizens' Forum and several other organisations, Munin Borthakur, passed away last night at his residence here. He was 93 and left behind two sons, one daughter and a large circle of relatives. He had been suffering from prolonged illness due to old age.

His demise has been deeply mourned, with floral tributes paid by numerous organisations including the Dry Fish Merchants' Association, Jagiroad College, Lions Club, Jagiroad Press Club, Jagiroad Sahitya Sabha, Arpita, Lekhika Samroh Samity and Baruary Durga Puja Samity, among others.

## Two decades of learning: North East's only open University celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 11:** Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) celebrated its 20th Foundation Day on Thursday, at its City Campus in Resham Nagar, Khanapara, marking two transformative decades as Assam's premier open and distance learning institution. The occasion brought together academicians, administrators, alumni, learners and invited guests.

The event was graced by Chief Guest Prof Uma Kanjilal, Vice Chancellor of IGNOU and Dr Arupjyoti Choudhury, Vice Chancellor of Madhabdev University. Members of the Board of Management and Academic Council, former Vice Chancellors, University officials, Coordinators, Centre-in-Charges, faculty members, staff, research scholars and media representatives were present in large numbers.

In his welcome address, Vice Chancellor Prof Rajendra Prasad Das highlighted KKHSOU's rapid expansion and growing role in Assam's higher education landscape. He noted that the University contributes nearly 11% of the state's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), enrolling 1.29 lakh learners across more than 50 programmes in the last three admission cycles through extensive digital outreach, including 338 Study Centres and four Regional Centres of which 30 centres operate in district jails.

Prof Das emphasised the University's so-



cial responsibility initiatives, including full fee waivers for jail inmates, persons with disabilities and transgender learners. Under the Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission, KKHSOU has adopted 11 villages, providing free education, livelihood training, health camps, and awareness programmes. He also shared that the University is progressing toward NCVET recognition as both an Awarding and Assessment Body and is developing the Rani Campus as a Centre for Vocational Excellence, where science and vocational programmes will commence in 2026.

Highlighting digital progress, Prof Das mentioned that 91,539 learners have regis-

tered on the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and e-Samarth has been implemented to enhance administrative efficiency. He also announced the Government of Assam's allocation of 1.5 acres of land for a new Silchar Regional Centre. KKHSOU faculties have developed 29 MOOCs on SWAYAM, the highest from any institution in Northeast India, while 52 learners qualified the UGC-NET, including one JRF awardee. Postgraduate programmes in Assamese and online PG programmes will be launched from the next academic session.

Delivering the Foundation Day lecture on the "Role of Emotion in Human History and Society," Dr Arupjyoti Choudhury discussed

the influence of emotions in shaping historical change, citing the Russian Revolution, Moamoria Rebellion and the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. He stressed balancing emotion with logic for a positive and resilient society.

Prof Uma Kanjilal congratulated KKHSOU on its milestone anniversary, praising its ODL awareness campaigns, ICT-driven practices and diverse learner base. She lauded the introduction of Assamese programmes and encouraged adoption of technologies such as AI, AR/VR and AI-enabled learner support systems, reaffirming IGNOU's commitment to collaborate on MOOC development and ODL innovation in the Northeast.

The programme felicitated top performers from the 2024-25 academic session, Best Study Centres for highest enrolment—Morigaon College, Cachar College and Manabendra Sarma Girls' College and winners of the Anti-Ragging Slogan Writing Competition. Learners who qualified the NET examinations for December 2024 and June 2025 were also honoured.

The ceremony concluded with a formal vote of thanks by Prof Pranjit Bora, Registrar, KKHSOU and a cultural programme showcasing the talent and creativity of the University community, hosted by Dr Trisha Dowerah Baruah, Assistant Professor, Discipline of Mass Communication, KKHSOU.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Not knowing anything is the sweetest life.*  
- Sophocles

## Reality of India-Russia's \$100 bn target

The world watched as Mr Vladimir Putin visited India. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was particularly excited as the two countries signed deals spreading across defense, trade, healthcare, civil nuclear energy, and labour cooperation. How much of this bonhomie will translate into trade figures, particularly in achieving the much-touted goal of reaching \$100 billion by 2030 in bilateral trade between these two trusted neighbours? India-Russia economic ties emphasize inter-industry trade, where India exports labour-intensive manufactures like pharmaceuticals, chemicals, iron & steel, vegetable and marine products, while importing Russia's capital- and resource-intensive goods such as crude oil, fertilizers, coal, and defence items. The nature of this trade is unlike intra-industry trade, which involves countries simultaneously exporting and importing similar products within the same industry, such as automobiles or electronics. The Russia-China trade is more of intra-industry, with the Russian dependent much on Chinese made automobiles, electronic items, and microchips. The literature on intra-industry trade suggests that trade between countries is more likely to grow and be sustained when it is intra-industry rather than inter-industry.

With India-Russia relations at a historic high, the key question is how long trade dynamics can sustain them. Russia's growing economic dependence on China may constrain its ability to openly back India amid potential Indo-China tensions, mirroring India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine war by advocating peaceful resolution. India is more dependent on Russia, and China on the other hand is an equal trade partner with Russia. Bilateral trade between Russia and India reached a record \$68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, marking a sevenfold increase over five years, primarily driven by India's surging imports of discounted Russian crude oil, coal, fertilizers, and defence equipment. Russian exports to India dominated at around \$65 billion in 2024, while Indian exports, including pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, electronics, and chemicals, totalled about \$4.9 billion. Both nations aim to sustain trade through diversification, industrial cooperation in sectors like metallurgy, IT, and agriculture, and infrastructure like the International North-South Transport Corridor.

In 2024, India exported \$434.44 billion around the world, the main destinations being: United States (18.29%), European Union (EU) (17.80%), And United Arab Emirates (8.54%). Valued at US\$ 4.84 billion, exports to Russian Federation accounted for 1.11%. On the other hand, considering the import data from Russia, a different picture emerges. In 2024, India imported \$ 656.84 billion of the world, the top sources being: China (18.52%), Russian Federation (10.22%), And United Arab Emirates (8.49%). Economically, India can sustain its trade momentum with Russia by establishing itself as an equal trade partner, much like China has done. India needs to reduce the burgeoning trade deficit with Russia.

## India's Light Becomes the World's Legacy

By: Lalit Garg

UNESCO's decision to declare Diwali as an Intangible World Heritage is a historic moment for India's cultural consciousness. It not only fills every Indian with pride but also reaffirms that the soul of Indian civilization still possesses the power to guide humanity. Diwali is not merely a festival—it is a scripture of light that celebrates life, spirit, relationships, harmony, and universal brotherhood. For thousands of years, this heritage has led humanity from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom, from jealousy to love, and from fear to faith. To understand the grandeur of Diwali is to understand the depth of Indian culture. This culture does not reside only in temples, rituals, scriptures, or festivals, but flows through human memory, emotion, belief, and conduct. That is why it is called "intangible"—not visible in form, yet profoundly alive. Diwali is the highest celebration of this living essence. When 26.17 lakh earthen lamps illuminated Ayodhya's Ram Ki Paidi in a single radiant moment, the spectacle was not just a sea of lights; it was the global proclamation of India's cultural luminosity. The world saw that India's traditions continue to be a universal source of inspiration. UNESCO's recognition is the natural outcome of this wonder. At its core, Diwali is not merely about worship but about the philosophy of life. The festival reminds mankind that within every difficulty lies the possibility of light. Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions may celebrate Diwali for different reasons, but the message remains one—the path of light is the path of humanity. Today, this eternal message is receiving global recognition.

India's intangible cultural heritage has always served the larger good of humanity. Traditions like the Kumbh Mela, Vedic chanting, Ramlila, Yoga, and Durga Puja are already part of UNESCO's heritage list. With Diwali added, the list grows even more luminous. Diwali fulfills UNESCO's purpose: to protect traditions that carry humanity's highest wisdom across time. Diwali also carries profound economic, social, and human lessons. The small potter who molds a simple clay lamp brings light into crores of homes. The small shopkeeper's livelihood becomes as important as that of a large business. The festival teaches that society becomes truly radiant when every individual receives light. Thus, Diwali is a celebration of community consciousness, equality, and shared opportunities.

In a world burdened with division, war, anxiety, material greed, and emotional darkness, Diwali's message becomes even more relevant—one small flame can challenge the deepest darkness. India has always taught that moral courage, harmony, peace, and spiritual energy are what make civilizations sustainable. Diwali is the living symbol of this truth. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's modern vision and cultural diplomacy have carried India's timeless concepts to the global stage. Whether it is the worldwide acceptance of Yoga, the rising interest in Ayurveda, international Ramayana conferences, or the global celebration of Indian festivals—this is India's soft power in action. UNESCO's recognition of Diwali marks the next beautiful milestone on this journey. Modi's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has now become not only India's foreign policy but a global viewpoint. From G20 to international forums, this vision has strengthened India's global identity. The world honouring Diwali is an extension of the same principle—it reminds humanity that the world is one family, pain is shared, and joy must be shared too.

Diwali is not merely a spiritual festival—it is also a profound cultural psychology. It does not empty the mind; it fills it. It does not extinguish the self; it awakens it. Diwali is an occasion to dust the mind, awaken new hope, and recognize the inner light. Declaring it a world heritage acknowledges the spiritual future of humanity. Globalization may have connected the world technologically, but emotional fragmentation has also increased. In this scenario, India's cultural diversity—especially traditions like Diwali—serve as philosophical bridges between civilizations. They remind the world that life is not only consumption but compassion; not only progress but harmony; not only development but values. After UNESCO's announcement, the world will no longer see Diwali merely as an Indian religious festival. It will be regarded as a global ethical consciousness.

## Lack of work culture and Assam's growing unemployment problem

Assam, a state abundant with natural and human resources, the most alarming and thought-provoking issue in recent times is the absence of economic self-reliance and the gradually increasing aversion to work among the younger generation. This problem is not confined merely to the government statistics on the number of unemployed or the data registered at employment exchanges; rather, it has transformed into a profound social malady that strikes at the very spine of our national life. A close observation of Assamese society reveals that our difficulty is not simply a shortage of employment opportunities; the far more frightening issue is the poverty of our mindset and the disdain we show toward the dignity of labour. History teaches us that only those nations that have revered labour as divine have been able to hold their heads high in the world. Yet it is a matter of deep regret that, despite possessing fertile soil, inexhaustible water resources and rich biodiversity, we are forced to live dependent on others. At the root of this lies a negative outlook that has taken hold among a large section of our youth, an outlook that refuses to see work merely as a means of livelihood and instead treats it as a marker of social status or elitism. Until we can uproot this mentality, no government scheme or subsidy alone can resolve this enormous problem. To uncover the true nature of unemployment, we must collectively analyse our education system, social values, family attitudes and the impact of globalisation, because each of these elements continues to exert a deep influence on young minds.

One of the primary reasons for the decline of work culture in Assamese society is the hypocrisy and class-divisive mentality associated with our notion of the dignity of labour. Even today, a person in our society is judged not by knowledge or honesty but by what work he does or how much power his position carries. This distorted mindset has so thoroughly gripped our youth that, after acquiring higher education, they feel hesitant to engage in physical labour. A postgraduate degree-holder considers it humiliating to bend down in an agricultural field or to run a small shop because of his education. Yet the same youth, when he goes to another state, is ready to do any job because no one there knows him. In other words, the problem is not with the work itself; the problem is the false sense of prestige expressed as "what will people say" or "my respect will be lost". This mentality has created an environment in our society where thousands of bighas of land lie fallow yet there is a shortage of people to cultivate it, while in the markets we remain dependent on other states for vegetables, fish and meat. A nation that feels ashamed to produce its own food can never secure its economic future. Our educational institutions and families have failed to teach the new generation that physical labour is not degrading but is rather the first step toward creativity. As a result, we have produced a class of educated unemployed who are mentally unprepared to do anything except government jobs and who waste the most valuable years of their lives chasing this mirage.

The flawed structure and short-sighted curriculum of our present education system can rightly be held responsible for this problem, because it teaches students only to memorise information but not the skills needed to survive life's struggles. Even after so many years of independence, our education system still largely follows the

clerk-producing concept introduced by Macaulay. The kind of education imparted in schools and colleges has very weak direct connection with real-world employment. After obtaining a degree in arts, science or commerce, a student still has to ask himself what he can actually do. Vocational education, technical skills and the entrepreneurial mindset have always been given secondary importance in our curriculum. Consequently, lakhs of students pass out every year yet possess no specific skill through which they can independently start something. Carrying only their degree, they register at employment exchanges and wait year after year for appointment. This theoretical education plants in their minds the idea that the sole purpose of studying is to obtain a comfortable job that involves no physical labour. Only when education is understood not merely as livelihood but as the application of knowledge and skill will some relief from this problem become possible. Instead of moulding youth into problem-solvers, the present system is turning them into part of the problem. They do not think of creating anything new; they only want to become a cog in the existing machinery. This lack of creativity remains a major obstacle on the path of industrial development in our state.

Although the slow pace of industrialisation and inconsistent government policies have made the unemployment problem more complex, the mentality of "easy money" that has simultaneously taken root in our society is equally culpable. A large section of today's youth has begun an unhealthy competition to become rich in the shortest possible time. Instead of achieving success through hard work, honesty and long-term planning, many are choosing the paths of brokerage, syndicates or unethical means. This mindset has damaged not only the economy but also shaken the moral foundation of society. When a young person sees an acquaintance living a luxurious life without any special qualification or effort, merely through political patronage or dishonest ways, his own desire to work honestly naturally diminishes. This search for "short cuts" not only turns the youth away from work but also pushes them toward criminal tendencies. Because genuine labour has no value in society, talented youth are compelled to leave the state for places where their effort and intellect receive proper recognition. Meanwhile, people from outside come here and build economic empires through business and trade. It is a matter for serious reflection that the very markets where our own people see no opportunity or feel ashamed to work are the same markets where outsiders achieve success. The answer lies hidden in our mentality and our willingness to work. We keep shouting about lack of opportunities, yet we clearly lack the patience and readiness to put in the hard work required to turn the opportunities right in front of our eyes into reality.

Our neglect and negative attitude toward agriculture and the rural economy constitute another crucial aspect of the unemployment problem that we cannot deny under any circumstances. Although Assam is an agriculture-based state, the new generation still hesitates to accept farming as a respectable profession. Many believe that cultivation is work only for the uneducated or the poor. This very notion has brought stagnation to the development of our rural economy. Yet in the modern world, agricul-

ture is regarded as an extremely profitable and honourable industry. With scientific methods, advanced technology and market management knowledge, agriculture alone can provide employment to thousands of unemployed youth. But instead of establishing a relationship with the soil, our youth are more attracted to the artificial life of cities. As a result, agricultural fields in villages are becoming barren while the crowd of unemployed swells in towns. If we look at the list of our daily necessities, we find that we have to import rice, lentils, potatoes, onions and even flowers from other states. Every year, hundreds of crores of rupees flow out of Assam simply to purchase these items. Had our unemployed youth planned to capture this market, the economic picture of Assam would have changed completely. Unfortunately, excessive dependence on government schemes and the absence of self-initiative continue to deprive us of this opportunity. Until we stop seeing agriculture merely as "farming" and begin to regard it as an "industry" or "business", a permanent solution to our unemployment problem will remain impossible.

Most parents in our society, citing a "secure future", steer their children exclusively toward government jobs. From childhood, boys and girls are taught that doing business is very risky and carries neither social stability nor respect. When a young person wants to start some new venture or enterprise, instead of encouragement from home he usually receives only obstacles and harsh words. Remarks such as "So-and-so's son got a job, what will you achieve by doing business?" crush the young person's confidence. At social gatherings or weddings, when someone asks "What does your son do?", an answer of business or farming makes people wrinkle their noses. This social pressure frightens the youth from thinking outside conventional lines. Parents must understand that the world has changed and government jobs for everyone are no longer possible. Instead of making children chase only examination marks, they should emphasise the development of their latent talents and skills. Teaching children to be self-reliant is far more important than preparing them merely for jobs. Until this mental transformation begins within homes, building an entrepreneurial culture in society will remain difficult. Our society's inability to accept failure easily is also connected to this; if a young person suffers loss in business even once, society and family criticise him so harshly that he loses the courage to try again.

At present, the easy availability of technology and the internet has opened doors of knowledge and possibility for the youth, yet its misuse or unproductive use has indirectly become another cause of unemployment. The smartphone in a young person's hand today can be a powerful medium for connecting with the entire world and doing business. Sadly, however, most of our youth use this technology only as a tool for cheap entertainment, wasting time on social media and engaging in meaningless arguments. While youth in other parts of the world are using the internet to master new skills, freelance or earn from home through digital marketing, many of our young people simply while away a large part of their day staring at mobile screens. This waste of time not only leaves them economically backward but

also destroys their concentration and creative thinking. They show very little interest in acquiring the skills needed to participate in the gig economy or freelance professional economy created by the digital world. If the technological revolution is not harnessed for productive work, this gap will only widen in the future. In today's age, alongside physical labour, intellectual and technological skills are of immense importance. Therefore, instead of merely blaming the government or sitting idle complaining about lack of work, it is the demand of the time that the youth equip themselves through proper use of technology to compete in the global market.

The absence of political will and Assam's agitation-oriented culture have also adversely affected the work environment, causing investors to fear coming to Assam. Various protests, bandhs and road blockades that have continued for decades have seriously damaged the state's economic development. Democratic movements are necessary, but when they paralyse economic activity they only fuel the growth of unemployment. Establishing industry in any region requires a peaceful and stable environment, but frequent unrest creates uncertainty in business and commerce. Moreover, bureaucratic red tape, corruption and lack of infrastructure discourage new entrepreneurs. The complexities in obtaining bank loans and the long delays in getting new projects approved in government offices pour cold water on the enthusiasm of enterprising youth. The government does announce many schemes, that is true, but whether they are properly implemented at the grassroots level remains a big question. It is often seen that instead of genuine beneficiaries, only those with political connections receive the benefits. In such a situation, a youth who truly wants to work feels deprived, and resentment and despair toward the system grow in his mind. Therefore, it is the government's responsibility to go beyond political slogans and adopt practical, transparent policies so that a production-oriented work culture can emerge in the state.

In conclusion, it is clear that Assam's unemployment problem and the lack of work culture is a multi-dimensional issue whose roots lie deep within our psychology, social system and policies. We must reduce dependence on government jobs alone and move toward building a self-reliant and entrepreneurial society. For this, we need an intellectual and mental awakening. The youth must realise that no work is small or big; every task performed with honesty and dedication is honourable. Educational institutions must become centres of skill development rather than mere degree-giving machines. Society and parents must abandon old ways of thinking, welcome new ideas and encourage entrepreneurs. Instead of handing over our own resources, our own markets and our own potential to others, we must become ready to protect and utilise them ourselves. Times have changed, and our mindset must change accordingly. Instead of complaints and despair, through work and innovative energy we can build Assam into a self-reliant state. This journey is not easy, but neither is it impossible. All that is required is the firm resolve and tireless effort of every Assamese, especially the younger generation. The day every young person begins to see himself not merely as a job-seeker but as a creator of resources, the dark clouds over Assam's economic sky will part and a new sun will rise.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

## Human Rights Day: Celebration and call to action

By: Satyabrata Borah

Human Rights Day, observed annually on December 10, marks the anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This document, drafted in the shadow of World War II and the Holocaust, remains one of the most translated and influential texts in history. It articulates thirty articles that proclaim the inherent dignity and equal, inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Every year on this date, governments, civil society organizations, schools, artists, activists and ordinary citizens pause to reflect on how far humanity has come in recognizing these rights and how far it still has to go.

The story of the Declaration itself is worth remembering. After the horrors of two world wars and the systematic extermination of millions, the newly formed United Nations decided that "never again" could not be an empty promise. Delegates from China, France, Lebanon, the Soviet Union, the United States, Chile, Australia and Canada, among others, worked under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt to craft a common standard. They came from different ideologies, religions and legal traditions, yet they agreed on one essential truth: every human being possesses rights simply by virtue of being human, not because a government chooses to grant them. On the night of December 10, 1948, in Paris, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration with forty-eight votes in favor and none against, while eight countries abstained, mostly from the Soviet bloc and South Africa, then under apartheid.

The Declaration's articles cover civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law, to equal protection of the law, to a fair and public hearing by an independent tribunal. The document proclaims freedom of movement, the right to seek asylum, the right to a nationality, the right to marry and found a family, the right to own property, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to take part in government, the right to work, to just and favorable conditions of work, to equal pay for equal work, to form and join trade unions, the right to rest and leisure, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, and the right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

Seventy-seven years later, the world is a different place, yet the same challenges persist in new forms. Slavery has not disappeared; it has mutated into human trafficking, forced labor and debt bondage affecting tens of millions.

Torture continues in police stations, secret detention centers and conflict zones. Freedom of expression faces threats from authoritarian regimes, corporate censorship, online harassment and disinformation campaigns. Migrants and refugees are turned away at borders or left to drown in the Mediterranean and the Andaman Sea. Indigenous peoples see their lands seized for mining and agribusiness. Women and girls are denied education, forced into early marriage or killed in the name of honor. LGBTIQ persons are criminalized in dozens of countries and murdered with impunity in many more. Journalists are jailed, disappeared or assassinated for telling uncomfortable truths.

At the same time, progress is undeniable. Colonial empires have crumbled. Apartheid has ended. The number of democracies has grown. The death penalty is disappearing from law books. Child mortality has plummeted. Literacy rates have soared. Same-sex marriage is legal in more than thirty countries. Movements such as MeToo, BlackLivesMatter and FridaysForFuture have shown that ordinary people can still shift the conscience of the world. International tribunals have prosecuted war criminals who once seemed untouchable. A global network of human rights defenders, often at great personal risk, documents abuses and demands accountability.

Yet the backlash is fierce. Populists and strongmen dismiss human rights as Western luxuries or elite conspiracies. Some governments withdraw from international treaties or sabotage the very institutions created to protect rights. Surveillance technologies enable unprecedented control over citizens. Climate change threatens the right to food, water and life itself, with the poorest suffering disproportionately by those who contributed least to the crisis. Artificial intelligence raises new questions about privacy, non-discrimination and accountability. Economic inequality has reached levels not seen since the 1920s, mocking the promise of equal opportunity. Each Human Rights Day carries a theme chosen by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Recent years have focused on youth standing up for human rights, reducing inequalities, advancing racial justice, dignity, freedom and justice for all during the COVID-19 pandemic, and equality as the foundation of human rights. In 2025, the theme emphasizes the indivisibility of rights in an era of multiple crises. The message is clear: civil and political rights cannot flourish when people go hungry, lack healthcare or face discrimination. Economic and social rights remain hollow when governments silence dissent or jail opponents.

Celebrations and commemorations take many forms. In schools, students debate the meaning of dignity and organize mock sessions of the General Assembly. Universities host lectures and panel discussions. Museums open exhibitions on the history of struggles for rights. Cities illuminate public buildings in the blue of the United Nations.

Concerts, poetry readings and theater performances remind audiences that art has always been a weapon against oppression. Activists launch campaigns to free political prisoners, end child marriage or protect environmental defenders. Families light candles for victims of atrocities. Social media fills with quotes from the Declaration, photos of protests past and present, and calls to action.

The day also serves as a moment of reckoning. Reports released around December 10 document the state of human rights worldwide. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the UN Human Rights Council and national institutions publish findings that often make uncomfortable reading for governments. Indexes measure press freedom, corruption, gender equality and rule of law, revealing both bright spots and persistent darkness. The Universal Periodic Review process forces every UN member state to face scrutiny from its peers every four and a half years, an imperfect but vital exercise in accountability.

Perhaps the most powerful celebrations happen far from headlines. A teacher in a refugee camp explains to children that they too have rights. A community radio station in a remote village broadcasts the Declaration in a local language for the first time. A group of women in a conservative society meets secretly to discuss bodily autonomy. A young programmer develops an app to document police violence safely. A former political prisoner visits a school to tell students why freedom matters. These quiet acts of courage and learning are the true measure of whether the promise of 1948 is alive. Looking ahead, the challenges are daunting but not insurmountable. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly links human rights to the fight against poverty, hunger, inequality and climate change. New treaties on business and human rights, on the rights of peasants, and on the prohibition of nuclear weapons show that the international community can still agree on progress. Youth movements demand not charity but justice. Technology, for all its dangers, also empowers marginalised voices and exposes abuses in real time.

Human Rights Day is not a celebration of arrival but a renewal of commitment. It reminds us that rights are not self-executing; they require constant defense. Every generation must fight its own battles against indifference, hatred and greed. The Declaration is not a compass, not a destination. As Eleanor Roosevelt said on that December night in 1948, this document can become "the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere" only if citizens make it their own. On December 10 each year, the world is invited to do exactly that: to read the articles aloud, to teach them to children, to invoke them in courtrooms and streets, to live them in daily choices. In a world that often feels broken, Human Rights Day insists that another world is still possible, one where every person is free and equal in dignity and rights. The task is ours, and the time is always now.

# Finfluencers: A threat to India's small investors

By: Satyabrata Borah

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, shaping how we connect, learn, and make decisions. Among its many influences, one of the most concerning is its impact on personal finances, particularly through the rise of financial influencers, commonly known as influencers. These individuals, often with massive followings on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, dispense investment advice that can lead to significant financial harm. Influencers have emerged as a genuine menace in the financial landscape. Allowing them to operate without stringent oversight is no longer viable. Tough regulation is essential to protect vulnerable investors from misleading and often reckless guidance.

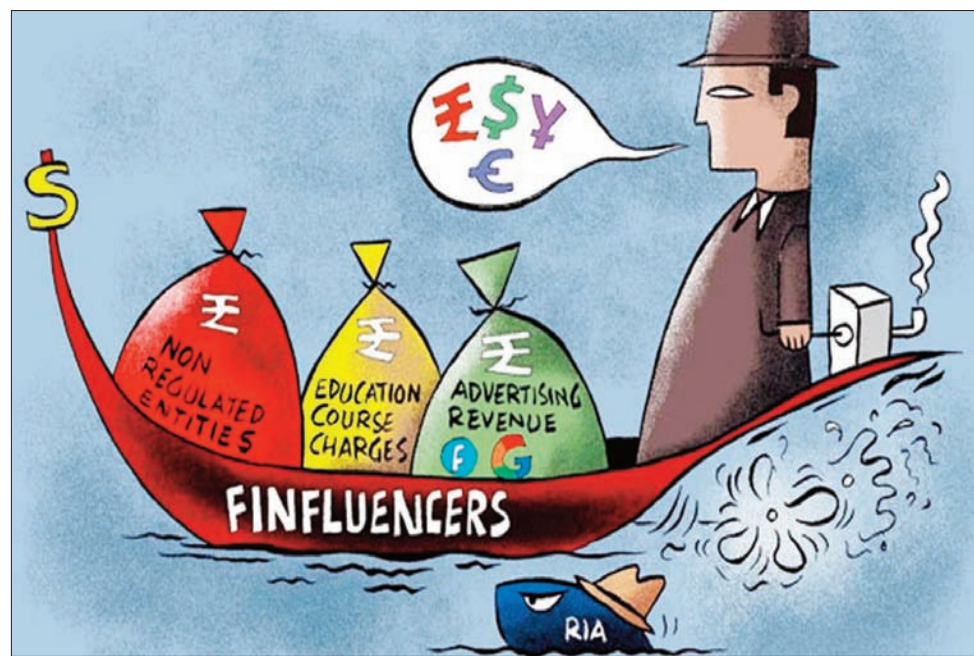
To understand the scale of the problem, consider some stark figures from India. This year, revisions to tax slabs have effectively increased collective disposable income by approximately one lakh crore rupees, putting more money in people's pockets. Yet, just last year, ninety-three percent of retail traders in the futures and options segment collectively lost around seventy-five thousand crore rupees. These numbers, when viewed side by side, highlight the devastating consequences of poor financial decisions driven by bad advice. When small investors lose thousands of crores from their hard-earned savings or even borrowed funds, it does not just affect individuals. It weakens consumer demand, which remains India's primary economic growth driver. Protecting investors, especially those with limited resources, from being misled is therefore a matter of national interest.

The markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), recently took welcome action against a prominent influencer accused of earning over five hundred forty-six crore rupees through questionable practices. The regulator barred him from the markets and seized his illicit gains. This move signals a growing recognition of the dangers posed by unregulated financial advice on social media. However, such isolated actions are insufficient. A deeper and more comprehensive cleanup is urgently required for several compelling reasons.

First, the potential for widespread harm is simply too great to adopt a hands-off approach. This view aligns with an evolving global consensus on the need for intervention. The core issue lies in the incentive structure of influencers. They are primarily content creators whose success depends on attracting and retaining eyeballs. Dispensing cautious, long-term investment advice, such as recommending diversified mutual funds or fixed deposits, rarely generates viral engagement. Instead, the fastest path to growing an audience involves promoting high-risk, get-rich-quick opportunities like cryptocurrencies or derivatives trading in the futures and options market. These topics create excitement, promise quick profits, and drive views, likes, and shares, which in turn boost algorithmic visibility and monetization.

Traditional financial advisors operate under a different model. They are typically registered, bound by fiduciary duties, and required to assess a client's risk profile, financial goals, and capacity before offering personalized recommendations. Finfluencers, by contrast, broadcast generic advice to millions without knowing anything about their followers' circumstances. They have no insight into whether a viewer is a young professional with disposable income or a retiree relying on limited savings. This detachment makes it easier to promote speculative schemes without regard for the consequences. Pump-and-dump operations, where influencers hype an asset to inflate its price before selling off their holdings, thrive in this environment. Followers rush in at peak prices, only to suffer heavy losses when the inevitable crash occurs.

International examples abound and serve as cautionary tales. Four years ago, celebrity Kim



Kardashian promoted a cryptocurrency called Ethereum Max on her Instagram account to her hundreds of millions of followers. The token's value plummeted by ninety-seven percent within months, wiping out investors who followed her endorsement. Regulators in the United States fined her for failing to disclose that she was paid for the promotion. Another notorious case involved the electric vehicle company Nikola. Around five years ago, numerous influencers and promoters drove its stock price to extraordinary heights based on exaggerated claims about its technology. Reality soon caught up, revealing significant misrepresentation. The company's shares collapsed, and today they trade at a fraction of their peak, effectively worthless for many who bought in during the frenzy. These incidents illustrate how influential figures can cause massive financial damage, often with impunity if regulations are lax.

Surveys conducted abroad reveal troubling trends among younger generations. Approximately forty percent of Gen-Z individuals reportedly base their investment decisions entirely on advice gleaned from social media. In India, SEBI's own studies indicate that sixty-two percent of retail investors rely completely on influencers for guidance. This level of dependence is deeply unhealthy. Part of the problem stems from widespread financial illiteracy, where people lack the tools to evaluate advice

critically. However, the sheer size of these influencers' audiences, often numbering in the millions, fosters a dangerous suspension of disbelief. Followers assume that popularity equates to expertise and trustworthiness. Lavish displays of wealth, luxury cars, and opulent lifestyles portrayed in videos reinforce the illusion that these individuals have unlocked secrets to financial success, secrets they are generously sharing.

In reality, many influencers profit not from their investment acumen but from their followers. Revenue streams include referral fees from trading platforms, commissions from promoted products, paid courses promising trading mastery, and sponsorships. When followers act on hyped recommendations, the influencer benefits regardless of the outcome. If the trade succeeds, they claim credit. If it fails, they blame market volatility or the follower's execution, rarely accepting responsibility. This asymmetry encourages reckless promotion of high-risk instruments that offer the allure of quick gains but carry a high probability of loss.

India's youth are particularly vulnerable. Facing job uncertainty, rising living costs, and pressure to achieve financial independence quickly, many are drawn to narratives of overnight success. Finfluencers exploit this aspiration by showcasing curated success stories while downplaying risks. New investors, enticed by promises of multiplying their money, pour in funds they can ill afford to lose. Many borrow money or dip into emergency savings, only to face ruin when markets turn. The futures and options segment, heavily promoted for its leverage, has become a graveyard for retail traders, with the vast majority incurring losses as evidenced by recent data.

The need for regulatory intervention is clear and multifaceted. When the scale of potential harm is so immense, a laissez-faire attitude is indefensible. The misaligned incentives of content creators prioritize engagement over prudence. The lack of personal accountability allows advice to be dispensed without empathy or due diligence. Global regulators are responding accordingly. In the United States, the Securities and Exchange Commission has pursued cases against celebrities and influencers for undisclosed paid promotions. In the United Kingdom, the Financial Conduct Authority requires clear disclosures and has banned certain high-risk product promotions to retail investors altogether.

In India, SEBI has introduced measures requiring influencers to partner only with registered advisors and prohibiting unregistered

entities from offering specific investment recommendations. The recent high-profile enforcement action demonstrates willingness to impose severe penalties, including market bans and asset seizures. Yet gaps remain. Many influencers continue operating in gray areas, using vague language to skirt rules or shifting to unregulated assets like cryptocurrencies. Stronger enforcement mechanisms, mandatory disclosures for any financial promotion, real-time monitoring of social media content, and steeper penalties for violations are needed to deter misconduct effectively.

Beyond regulation, enhancing financial literacy is crucial. Educational initiatives in schools and colleges should cover personal finance basics, risk management, and critical evaluation of online information. Public awareness campaigns can highlight the dangers of unsolicited advice and promote verified sources. Individuals must learn that sustainable wealth building requires patience, diversification, and informed decision-making, not chasing speculative trends.

Ultimately, curbing the excesses of influencers is not merely about protecting individual savings. It has broader economic implications. When households retain and grow their wealth confidently, they spend more on goods and services, fueling consumption-led growth. Losses from misguided investments, conversely, erode confidence and constrain spending. By fostering a safer investment environment, regulators can help channel household savings into productive avenues that support long-term economic stability.

Social media platforms themselves bear responsibility. Algorithms that amplify sensational content should be adjusted to deprioritize unverified financial claims. Collaboration with regulators to flag suspicious promotions could prevent harm at scale. Investors, too, must exercise caution. Seeking advice from qualified professionals, verifying credentials, and resisting the allure of quick riches are essential habits.

The harm inflicted by unregulated influencers extends far beyond individual portfolios. It undermines financial security, exploits vulnerability, and hampers national economic potential. While recent regulatory actions are encouraging, they represent only the beginning. Comprehensive reforms, combining tough oversight, public education, and platform accountability, are indispensable. Only through concerted effort can we ensure that social media serves as a tool for empowerment rather than exploitation in matters of personal finance. Protecting investors today will yield dividends for generations tomorrow.

# How a Seventy-Year-Old Presidential order still shapes Dalit Life after conversion

By: Khalil ur Rehman

Earlier this week, the Allahabad High Court ordered a statewide inquiry into Christian converts retaining Scheduled Caste ('SC') status, calling such retention a "fraud on the Constitution." The High Court relied on the Andhra Pradesh High Court's decision in Akkala Rama Reddy v State of A.P (2025) and noted that a person ceases to belong to their original caste upon conversion to Christianity.

Questions around the caste location of Christian converts, however, are not limited to the courts. The recent caste enumeration conducted by the Karnataka State Backward Class Commission sparked controversy when 33 castes within the Christian community were listed, including Banajiga Christian, Holeya Christian, Madiga Christian, Valmiki Christian. These communities were later dropped after an uproar from the opposition BJP and the governor's suggestion. While these communities were dropped, four categories within the Christian faith were retained, namely Christian, Protestant Christian, Syrian Christians, and Scheduled Caste ('SC') converts to Christianity.

The move highlighted how the caste positionality of those who undergo religious conversion continues to be viewed in government policy. Be it their identity, practice or faith, Dalit Christians (SC converts to Christianity) continue a struggle to navigate their own space amidst multiple binaries.

In Chinnappa Garden, Bangalore a narrow lane amidst the large bungalows leads you to a Dalit Christian locality. It is primarily inhabited by large numbers of Madigas who practise Christianity. Many residents hold the SC certificates but have not officially converted for the fear of losing reservation benefits. They identify themselves as Hindus officially – a consequence of the oppressive 1950 Presidential Order that places an unfair burden on the people who want to practice Christianity by disenfranchising them from SC benefits once they convert to Islam or Christianity. Due to the fear of losing the SC status, they practise their faith privately, retain their Hindu names, and avoid formal affiliation with the Christian communities.

However, Maya\*, Shyamsundar and many others from the community defy the norm and proudly proclaim themselves as Christians without worrying about the consequences. Maya and Shyamsundar narrated that when the Scheduled Caste survey commissioned by the Karnataka government was underway, and officials asked them what they wanted to be identified as – Hin-

du or Christians – they proudly chose 'Christian', despite having been warned that selecting 'Christian' would render them without affirmative State support.

Maya explained to me that people warned her to identify as Hindu so that she does not lose the affirmative actions benefits, but she says that she is not concerned about losing the benefit, since identifying truthfully as Christian is non-negotiable for her. "My faith is not something I will compromise," she said.

Both the above situations underscore the discriminatory and oppressive nature of the 1950 Order. In the first scenario, people are prevented from exercising their freedom of choice and conscience freely, which strikes at the core of an individual's cognitive autonomy. The founders of the Constitution envisioned a society where different individuals were free to choose different faiths; however, the State now tries to keep SC converts hostage by not wanting them to be identified as Christians.

In the second, the State penalises practitioners for choosing their faith. It is unfair for practitioners of Christianity or Islam to let go of their SC status solely because they have converted to Semitic religions. Caste and discrimination operate intrinsically in South Asian society, and these religions are not untouched by them. Hence, the narrow communal outlook of caste that is viewed only through a Hindu framework is deeply flawed. Caste has to be seen independent of religion.

The petitions challenging the 1950 Presidential Order, filed by various Dalit Muslim and Dalit Christian forums and groups – including the Akhil Maharashtra Khatik Samaj (Khatik is a community engaged in the profession of meat selling) and United Front for Dalit Christians – before the Supreme Court point out the existence of caste hierarchy within Islam and Christianity. They highlight that discrimination continues at the social level despite conversion to Semitic faiths.

Secondly, they point out that a Hindu Dhobi (washerman) or a Hindu Khatikare similarly placed on the social ladder with a Muslim Dhobi or Muslim Khatik since their jobs are considered "dirty" in society. Despite this parallel positioning, the former come within the ambit of SC category while the latter are left out, amounting to a grave violation of Article 14, which strikes at the core of reasonable-ness.

Thirdly, they argue that the Presidential Order is anti-secular and violates the right to profess and practise religion, since it indirectly prohibits anyone from the Scheduled Caste



from choosing the faith of Islam or Christianity for fear of losing the SC status.

Lastly, they emphasize the need to delink the SC category from religion, as has been done with Scheduled Tribes – a religion-neutral category – in line with various committee reports. Interestingly, the Muslim Khatiks' petition broadens the argument by suggesting to expand the eligibility for SC status by not keeping untouchability as the sole criterion for protection under Article 17 and the Atrocities Act, 1989.

In the affidavit filed by the Union government in response to the Dalit Muslim and Dalit Christian petitions before the Supreme Court, the State has argued that the egalitarian principles of the Semitic religions and the purported non-existence of 'untouchability' among them justify not extending the SC status. This burden placed on practitioners of these faiths to prove that castes, untouchability and discrimination exist among them is grossly unfair. They are subjected to pass through a higher standard set by the State, whereas as a convert to Buddhism, Sikhism is not required to go through this rigorous process, even though these faiths are within the purview of the Presidential Order despite professing caste-free doctrines. The burden is only on Semitic religions to prove that untouchability exists among them, which is discriminatory on its face. It also cites lack of empirical data and documented evidence to establish that disabilities continue with the same severity despite conversion.

The Union government has argued that the inclusion of Buddhists and Sikhs in the SC category is justified since they are 'Indic' religions, and in the case of Buddhist converts, there was voluntary conversion by the Dalits upon the call of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, unlike Christian and Islamic conversions, which occurred centuries ago on account of "other factors," making the determination of original caste diffi-

cult. The inclusion of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians would be a grave injustice to the existing SCs, the government has argued. Further, it has noted that the original intent of the Presidential Order was to address untouchability, a practice associated with the Hindu social order, and hence has constitutional backing.

Several scholars working on the issue of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians have pointed out the existence of untouchability and presented material evidence of it. Ali Anwar in his seminal work 'Masawat Ki Jang' (The Battle for Equality), highlighted the various forms of discrimination faced by the Dalit Muslim castes, like Bakkho, Halalkhor, Nat, and Darzee, in Bihar. He pointed out that the practice of untouchability continues even at the graveyard, as upper-caste Muslims restrict Dalit Muslims from burying their dead in their burial grounds. As per a paper published by Prashant Trivedi – based on a household survey from 14 districts of Uttar Pradesh – one-third of the Dalit Muslims stated that they are not allowed to bury their dead in an upper-caste burial ground.

The paper observes: "Most of the Muslims offer prayers in the same mosque, but in some places Dalit Muslims felt discriminated against in the main mosque. A significant section of Dalit Muslims also feel that their community is seen as being associated with menial jobs. Respondents who studied at the madrasas were found to be more vocal about the untouchability they have experienced." Even Masood Alam Falahi's work 'Zaat Paat aur Musalman' on Dalit Muslim communities, reveals stark discrimination faced by the Arzal, a community considered the lowest within the Muslim social hierarchy.

It is imperative to recognize that we need to redefine and broaden the idea of untouchability beyond the Hindu fold. It manifests in multiple forms. For instance, upper-caste Muslims like Sayyeds, Pathans and Sheikhs do not

allow marriages with Muslim castes like Mehtar, Nadaf, Pinjari or Bazigar. Consider the case of Shareef Nadaf, a social worker belonging to the Nadaf-Pinjari community, which engages in making cotton carding or ginning. When I asked Shareef about inter faith marriages within the Muslim community, he quickly responded that they simply do not happen and are hard even to imagine. Shareef notes that many youths from the Nadaf community have changed their surnames due to stigma, inferiority, and the desire for wider social acceptance. If exclusion, stigma, and denial of equal social relations persist in this way, is this not a form of untouchability?

It is pertinent to note that the Constituent Assembly deliberately left the word "untouchability" undefined and unrestricted to ensure it encompasses all future forms of discrimination that may take the shape of untouchability.

Justice D.Y Chandrachud, in Indian Young Lawyers Association v Union of India (2019), which dealt with enabling entry for women of menstruating ages within the Sabrimala Temple, emphasized that Article 17's link with human dignity and its broad, evolving anti-exclusionary principle while concluding that untouchability strikes at the core of notions of "purity and pollution". He observed:

Article 17 must be construed from the perspective of its position as a powerful guarantee to preserve human dignity and against the stigmatization and exclusion of individuals and groups on the basis of social hierarchy...The Constitution has designedly left untouchability undefined. Any form of stigmatization which leads to social exclusion is violative of human dignity and would constitute a form of "untouchability."

Article 17 is an intrinsic part of the social transformation which the Constitution seeks to achieve. Hence in construing it, the language of the Constitution should not be ascribed a curtailed meaning which will obliterate its true purpose. "Untouchability" in any form is forbidden. The operation of the words used by the Constitution cannot be confined to a particular form or manifestation of "untouchability." The Constitution as a constantly evolving instrument has to be flexible to reach out to injustice based on untouchability, in any of its forms or manifestations.

It is also important to recognize that many lower castes may have embraced Islam and Christianity hoping to escape caste, but that is far from the only reason for conversion. People choose new faiths based on a constellation of factors. The State should not assume they converted solely to escape caste or believe they now live in an egalitarian eco-system. People may convert

even knowing caste persists, because their spiritual connection, doctrinal belief or personal relationship with God draws them to the faith. What touches a human cannot be reduced to a mere legal question, although courts often frame it as such when examining the status of Scheduled Caste converts.

In Akala Amma Reddy (2025), a Christian pastor who converted from Hindu Madiga Schedule Caste filed an FIR under the Atrocities Act, 1989 alleging caste-based abuse and assault by Hindu Reddys. The Andhra Pradesh High Court held that the pastor cannot claim the Act's protection since he had converted to Christianity, unless reconversion is proven.

Based on the fact that the complainant had served as a pastor for 10 years and named his children Jadsan and Mahima Paul, the single-judge bench concluded that he is a Christian and therefore cannot invoke the Act. The Court reasoned that he ceased to be a member of the SC community the day he converted to Christianity.

The reasoning rests on the assumption that caste stratification does not exist in Christian religious scriptures. This becomes clearer when the bench notes that "the caste system is alien to Christianity," suggesting that caste is reliant on religion. What is striking is that the pastor continued to face casteist abuse from Hindu Reddys despite his conversion, meaning that in their eyes, he remained a Madiga – a lower caste. The deeper truth is that caste identity survives in social perception despite conversion. It also shows that disabilities and handicaps continue with the same oppressive severity even within a new religious context. To the world around him he is still a Madiga.

The Dalit-Christians and Muslims therefore cannot avail the protection granted under the protective legislation because of their conversion to a Semitic religion, despite continuing social stigma and exclusion.

The term "Scheduled Caste" in the Constitution connotes a religion neutral reference under Article 341. However, the 1950 Order speaks in a contrary language. It is high time, thus, that the 1950 Presidential Order be brought in line with the Constitution and with the recommendations of the Gopal Singh Panel, Sachar Committee, Ranganath Misra Commission and the National Commission for Minorities Report, 2008 which recommended amending the 1950 Presidential Order to include all Schedule Caste converts regardless of religion by citing principles of justice and fairness.

To use the words of Dr. Ambedkar, "Whatever is wrongly settled is never settled and must be resetled" and the same holds true for the 1950 Order. (IPA Service)

## Vande Mataram should be accorded same status as national anthem: Nadda

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** BJP President J P Nadda on Thursday asserted in the Rajya Sabha that the national song Vande Mataram is linked to "nationalism" and the country should take a resolve to accord equal status to it as is given to the national anthem and flag.

He also accused the Congress of appeasement and negating the importance of Vande Mataram during pre- and post-independence, even though the national song was linked to our ancient cultural heritage.

Vande Mataram was a mantra of uniting the country, which the British feared, he said.

Concluding a discussion on the 150th Anniversary of National Song Vande Mataram, Nadda, the Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha, also stated that the objective of this debate was not to defame former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru but to keep the record of India's history "straight".

The BJP leader said he fully respects the national anthem 'Jan Gana Mana' and was ready to sacrifice his life for it.

"Whenever there is an incident, then responsibility lies with the leader. Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader of the Congress party at that time," Nadda said.

He said the Congress party has



always been opportunistic and cites the Nehruvian age to take credit when the situation suits the party.

However, the party does not take responsibility when the situation is adverse and seeks to put the blame on others, he alleged.

"I want to say with a sense of full responsibility that the respect and status that Vande Mataram was to be accorded, it did not receive the same and those in power at the time are fully responsible for it," he said.

Nadda alleged that the importance of Vande Mataram and its link

to our cultural heritage was negated by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which is our charge, as he cited Nehru's words in the House from the archives.

Nadda's speech was marked by constant barbs from both sides, even as the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge asked whether the debate was on Nehru or Vande Mataram.

Right from the beginning, the Congress Party has compromised with India's culture, ethos and thought process, Nadda alleged.

The BJP president mentioned that the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, does not have any provision for a penalty if one disrespects or does not sing the national song Vande Mataram.

"The country is not run by making compromises. This is our ideology. It is governed by keeping in mind unconditional national sentiments. Therefore, the Vande Mataram song is linked to our nationalism, and one should move forward keeping nationalism at the fore," Nadda said.

Hence, he asserted that Vande Mataram should be accorded the same status as the national flag and the national anthem have in the Indian constitution, and the same should be done.

"Meaningful discussion on 150th anniversary can take place only if we take resolve that Vande Mataram has the same status as national anthem and national flag in the Constitution and it should be added," he said, while wrapping up his around 50-minute speech in the Upper House.

To this, Senior Congress Member Jairam Ramesh said the national song and national anthem always had the same status, and it would continue to have the same status. (PTI)

## Conspiracy to dismantle public institutions deep-seated, detrimental to India's future: Rahul

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the NDA government of weakening PSUs and trying to sell their assets to its "capitalist friends for free" while claiming that the "conspiracy" to gradually dismantle government institutions is very deep-seated and detrimental to India's future.

Gandhi, the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, shared a video of his conversation with employees of a PSU, Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Corporation Limited (BIBCOL) at his Parliament office, saying they had not received salaries for some time now. The biotech company that has been successful until recently would be handed over to private companies in the name of "losses", he alleged.

"The suppression and privatisation of government institutions have become the biggest misdeed of the current NDA government and a great curse for India.

"Just a few days ago, I met with a delegation of employees from Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Corporation Limited (BIBCOL) at the 'Jan Sansad' (People's Parliament). The situation they described will not only surprise you, but leave you utterly shocked," he said in a post on his WhatsApp channel.

Gandhi said the employees of this government company have been without salaries for years and their lives depend on loans, borrowing, and sheer desperation to make ends meet.

"This is the same BIBCOL, the only government company in India that manufactures vaccines, which made a historic contribution to the eradication of diseases like polio. Its role in providing vaccines to the government at low prices and ensuring their availability to every child has been crucial.

But this company, which was profitable until 2017, has been deliberately and systematically driven into losses, the Congress leader claimed.



"The reason is clear: So that government contracts can be handed over to private companies. So that private companies can make huge profits by selling vaccines at exorbitant prices – and the cost is borne by you, the taxpayer.

"And so that one day, BIBCOL can be shut down in the name of 'losses' and its assets distributed to capitalist friends for free or at throwaway prices," he added. He said it should be noted that the land and assets of this company, located in Bulandshahr, are very valuable – especially after the announcement of the Jewar Airport, its proximity to which has sent its value soaring.

Gandhi also noted that the employees' financial plight has been shared with the government and they have been assured that their pending salaries and arrears will be paid soon.

"This conspiracy to gradually dismantle government institutions is very deep-seated – and extremely detrimental to India's future," Gandhi said in his post.

Gandhi has been meeting with several people in groups at his Parliament office to understand their concerns. (PTI)

## Mamata calls Shah 'dangerous', alleges SIR being used to delete names of 1.5 crore voters in Bengal

**KRISHNANAGAR (WB), Dec 11:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday intensified her attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah, calling him "dangerous" and accusing the Centre and EC of using the SIR of electoral rolls to unlawfully delete names of lakhs of eligible Bengali voters ahead of the 2026 assembly polls.

Addressing a rally in Nadia district's Krishnanagar, Banerjee alleged that Shah was directly guiding attempts to remove as many as "1.5 crore names" from the voters' list, and warned that she would sit on an indefinite dharna if even a single eligible voter was excluded during the SIR exercise.

"The country's home minister is dangerous. His two eyes send a message of disaster — in one eye you see Duryodhan, and in the other, Dushasan," Banerjee said, dramatically intensifying the rhetoric she has been using over the past week in her public meetings.

She also accused the BJP of attempting to weaponise the SIR exercise barely two months before the polls.

"They are so hungry for votes that they have launched the SIR now. If any eligible person's name is struck off, I will sit on a dharna till it's restored. There will be no detention camps in West Bengal," she said. Banerjee claimed that district magistrates were being pressured to remove 1.5 crore names during the revision.

"In Bihar you may have managed it, but you cannot do this in Bengal," she said, alleging that the draft rolls were being prepared "at the instruction of the BJP's IT cell."

The chief minister cited reports that individuals who had submitted names of grandparents as part of their documentation would be called for hearings and risk deletion from the rolls.

"Now we hear those who gave their grandparents' names will be summoned, and the plan is to strike off names directly from these hearings," she said.



On Wednesday, Shah had warned in Parliament that those "standing with infiltrators" would "vanish from Bengal", prompting Banerjee to issue a sharp counter on Thursday.

"There will be no NRC and no detention camps in West Bengal. We will not allow anyone to be driven out. And if someone is pushed out, we know how to bring them back," she asserted.

Attacking the Election Commission, Banerjee alleged that officers aligned with the BJP were being sent from Delhi to supervise SIR hearings and influence district administrations.

"Some BJP-backed people are overseeing the work of DMs. Why should only BJP's complaints be acted upon? Does the Commission work only on their letters?" she asked. She further referred to BJP's allegation seeking deletion of lakhs of names, saying, "BJP has given a complaint. They want everyone's name except their own removed. Will the Commission delete names just because BJP writes a letter?"

Banerjee also took aim at the ruling party's alleged use of money to divide votes ahead of polls. (PTI)

## EC extends SIR timeline in six states, Union territories

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** The Election Commission on Thursday extended the timeline for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in six states and Union territories following requests from the respective chief electoral officers.

In a statement, the Election Commission (EC) issued the revised schedule for SIR in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Uttar Pradesh.

The enumeration period for these six states and Union territories was to end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on December 16.

The enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended till December 14 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 19, the statement said.

For Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration period has been extended till December 18 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 23.

The enumeration period for Uttar Pradesh has been extended till December 26 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 31. (PTI)

## Congress MP in LS demands govt bring Beijing-style plan to deal with Delhi pollution

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** Congress MP Manickam Tagore on Thursday said that the air pollution in Delhi is a human crisis and demanded that the government undertake a Beijing-style time-bound clean air emergency plan to deal with pollution.

Raising the matter during the Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, Tagore accused the government of not putting in place enough enforcement or fixing accountability to control air pollution even though people continue to breathe toxic air.

Tagore said that China's capital Beijing was more polluted than Delhi a few years back, but it took steps by fixing strict deadlines and accountability and undertook electrification of the transport system.

"I demand an immediate time-bound, Beijing-style clean air emergency plan," Tagore said, as he suggested steps like stricter penalties for violators and electrification of public buses to deal with air pollution.

"This is not just an environmental crisis, it is a human crisis. When people are choking with polluted air, no nation can call itself developed," the Congress MP said. Speaking during the Zero Hour, TMC member Saugata Roy raised the issue of funds due to West Bengal under various central schemes like MNREGA and Jal Jeevan Mission.

Roy accused the Centre of using dues to state as a weapon to "beat" the state governments which are opposed to it. "I protest the discriminatory attitude of the Centre towards the state," Roy said.

Balwant B Wankhede (Congress) demanded a separate rail reservation quota for soldiers of the Indian Army, saying if their rail tickets are not confirmed on time, it creates a hindrance in their duty.

He also demanded that the Defence Ministry and the Centre take steps to ensure a smooth ticket confirmation process through digital verification for soldiers. (PTI)



## PM, his brigade bruised, exposed for their lies: Cong

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** After both Houses held a debate on 150 years of Vande Mataram, the Congress on Thursday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and "his entire brigade" have been thoroughly "bruised and exposed for their lies".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh noted that the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha debated Vande Mataram for this week. The national anthem also figured in some speeches, he said in a post on X.

"It is clear that the PM and his entire brigade have NOT read the two definitive and authoritative books on the national song and the national anthem - written by two of India's finest historians, in the true sense of that term," Ramesh said and shared the screenshot of the cover pages of Rudrangshu Mukherjee's 'Song of India: A Study of the National Anthem' and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's 'Vande Mataram'.

"It is too much to expect that they would do so even after being thoroughly bruised and exposed for their lies," the Congress leader said.

In another post, Ramesh said, "To clear up all the misinformation that the PM and his acolytes have been spreading, this is a compilation of 12 letters and notes penned by the many founding fathers of the Indian Republic, documenting their thoughts on Vande Mataram -- Letter from Rajendra Prasad to Sardar Patel (28/9/1937); letter from Subhas Chandra Bose to Rabindranath Tagore (16/10/37); letter from Tagore to Bose (19/10/37); letter from Bose to Nehru (17/10/37); letter from Nehru to Bose (20.10.37); letter from Tagore to Nehru (26.10.37); CWC Resolution on Bande Mataram (Kolkata 28/10/37); JB Kripalani to (C. Rajagopalachari) re Gandhi note (2/1/39); Rajaji to Patel re Gandhi note 7/1/39; Pant to Nehru re Gandhi note 8/1/39; Nehru to Pant re Gandhi note 16/1/39; Gandhi note in Harijan weekly (1.7.39)." (PTI)

## ED raids in 4 states in Padgha ISIS-linked radicalisation case

**MUMBAI, Dec 11:** The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted multi-state searches as part of terror financing-linked money laundering investigation against a "highly radicalised" module of banned global terrorist group ISIS that had its base in Thane's Padgha village, officials said.

The raids were launched early morning at 40 locations, including in the twin villages of Padgha-Borivali in Maharashtra's Thane apart from Ratnagiri district and locations in Delhi, Kolkata and some towns of Uttar Pradesh, they said.

The ED teams were provided security by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of Maharashtra for the raids undertaken in the state while central security forces assisted them in other areas, the officials said.

The federal agency filed a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) taking cognisance of a November, 2023 NIA case which alleged that certain individuals were part of a "highly radicalised" ISIS-linked module and engaged in recruitment, training, procurement of weapons and explosives and raising funds to sustain their operations.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has listed 21 people in the charge sheet in the case on charges of conspiracy to recruit and radicalise vulnerable youth into the ISIS ideology and fabrication of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

According to the NIA, the accused had self-declared the Padgha village in rural Thane as a "liberated zone" named 'Al Sham' and they were motivating impressionable Muslim youth to relocate in Padgha from their place of residence for strengthening their base. (PTI)

## Goa nightclub fire: Luthra brothers detained in Thailand

**PANAJI, Dec 11:** Gaurav and Saurav Luthra, co-owners of the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub where a Saturday blaze claimed 25 lives, have been detained by the authorities in Thailand, and efforts are underway for their return to face legal action, officials said here on Thursday.

Gaurav, 44, and his brother Saurav Luthra, 40, had fled to Phuket within hours after the December 6 tragedy at their club in Goa. An Interpol Blue Corner notice was issued on December 9 following a request from the Goa police routed through the CBI.

The Goa police said that the two brothers were accused of injury causing death, manslaughter and murder by organising a fire show "without taking proper care and caution and without providing fire safety equipment, other safety gadgets." (PTI)

## Tourist facility centre in East Champaran district to enhance visitors' experience: Bihar CM

**PATNA, Dec 11:** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday said the upcoming tourist facility centre in East Champaran district would benefit thousands of visitors to the historic Kesariya Buddha Stupa each year and help them better understand Buddhism.

Kumar inspected the centre, visited the Buddha Stupa and interacted with villagers, including women and schoolgirls, during his tour of the district, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a statement.

According to the CMO, Kumar visited the under-construction tourist facility centre at Kesariya and directed officials to expedite its completion.

"Timely completion of the centre would benefit a large number of tourists who visit the historic Buddha Stupa each year and help them understand various dimensions of Buddhism along with Bihar's rich cultural heritage," he said.

According to the statement, "The upcoming centre will include a 5D theatre with seating capacity for 48 people, where frames related to important Buddhist teachings will be displayed. A dedicated Bihar pavilion showcasing the state's historical legacy is also being built". (PTI)

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"The upcoming centre will include a 5D theatre with seating capacity for 48 people, where frames related to important Buddhist teachings will be displayed. A dedicated Bihar pavilion showcasing the state's historical legacy is also being built". (PTI)

## Widow gets Railways compensation after 23 yrs, CJI says smile is what we want to earn

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** "A smile on a poor person's face is what we want to earn, nothing else," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Thursday while noting that Railways finally managed to trace and pay Rs 8.92 lakh as compensation to a tragedy-struck widow, who lost her husband in a train accident in 2002 after the Supreme Court's judgment.

The bench, also comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi, said it was a difficult task to trace the elderly woman, who had changed her residence in a far-flung village of Bihar and her last contact was lost as her local lawyer passed away, lauded the efforts of Railways and advocate Fauzia Shakil, who represented the widow pro bono (without any fees) to ensure she gets the financial relief.

"This young lawyer (Shakil), who represented her pro bono ensured that she gets the compensation after 23 years. We had to trace her with the help of local police and administration and finally railways



managed to pay her. A smile on a poor person's face is what we want to earn nothing else," CJI Surya Kant said.

The railways in its affidavit said that in compliance with the October 6 order, it managed to trace the woman Sanyokta Devi with the help of local administration and the police.

"That in compliance with the order of the Supreme Court dated

October 6, 2025 the Railways' sent a staff to collect the PAN Card, Aadhaar Card, Certificate issued by the Gram Panchayat and Bank mandate particulars from the resident of the appellant/claimant with the help of the local police station. However, the appellant/claimant submitted all documents except the Bank particulars. She later sent her Bank particulars through speed post on November 10, 2025 in this office," the railways said.

It further stated that after receiving the bank particulars, the authorities had remitted Rs 8,92,953 lakh to her bank account on November 13.

In October, the top court walked an extra mile to ensure that the widow is duly compensated by the Railways after years of struggle.

Devi's husband Vijay Singh had a valid railway ticket from Bakhtiyarpur station to go to Patna by the Bhagalpur-Danapur Intercity Express on March 21, 2002, but he accidentally fell down from the running train at the originating station itself, due to heavy rush inside the compartment and died instantly.

What followed was a legal battle for next two decades, as Devi's claim for compensation was turned down by the Railway Claims Tribunal and the Patna High Court on the ground that the deceased was of unsound mind.

Aggrieved by the high court's order denying her claim, she, through her lawyer Shakil, approached the apex court.

The Supreme Court in 2023 rejected the reasoning given by the Railway Claims Tribunal and the Patna High Court and set aside the orders terming them "completely absurd", "imaginary" and "contrary to the undisputed facts on record".

"What emerges is the fact that the appellant's claim was not accepted by both the Tribunal and the High Court solely on the ground that the deceased was of unsound mind and he was knocked down by an unidentified train," the top court had noted in its order of February 2, 2023. (PTI)

## Ramesh gives Rajnath copy of Maniben Patel's diary entries to rebut his 'Nehru-Babri' claim

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Thursday gave to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh a copy of diary entries in Gujarati of Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter that appeared in a book, and told him that there was no mention in them of his claim that Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to build the Babri masjid using public funds.

Ramesh met Singh as soon as he alighted from his car outside Makar Dwar of Parliament.

Ramesh told Singh that he had especially brought for him Maniben Patel's diary entries in Gujarati, to which the BJP leader responded saying, "we have it in English".

While handing over the papers containing the original diary entries in Gujarati that appeared in a book as well as its Hindi translation, Ramesh told him to read it and Singh, who was heading for the Makar Dwar, replied that he did not know Gujarati.

The Congress leader said there was no mention in the diary entries of Singh's claim that Nehru wanted to build the Babri masjid using public funds.

The Congress last week had shared diary entries of Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter from a book to rebut Singh's claim that Nehru wanted to build the Babri masjid using public funds, and demanded that Singh apologise for spreading "falsehoods".

Ramesh had claimed the defence minister was spreading falsehoods to improve his relationship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Here is Maniben's original diary entry in Gujarati on pages 212-213 in the book 'Samarpit Padchhavo Sardarno' by CA R S Patel 'Aareesh', published by Sardar Patel Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial Society, 2025," Ramesh had said on X, sharing screenshots of the relevant pages from the book.

There is a huge difference between what is contained in the original diary entry and what Rajnath Singh ji and his fellow 'distorians' are propagating, Ramesh had said. (PTI)

# Transnational conspiracy case: SC grants bail to man arrested in Manipur

**NEW DELHI, Dec 11:** The Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to an accused arrested in 2023 for his alleged links with some Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to wage war against India by exploiting the ethnic unrest in Manipur.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta noted that petitioner Moirangthem Anand Singh is in jail for over two-and-a-half years and trial in the case is yet to commence.

"Taking into account the facts and circumstances of the case, the period of incarceration already undergone by the petitioner, which is more than two years and six months, and further noting that the trial has not yet commenced and that the co-accused have already been granted bail, we are inclined to grant bail to the petitioner," the bench said.

The top court passed the order on a plea filed by Singh challenging an April 2 order of the Delhi High Court which had denied him bail. The bench directed that Singh be released on bail in the case on such terms and conditions as may be imposed by the trial court.



The counsel appearing for Singh said the other co-accused in the case were earlier granted bail. On September 15, the apex court sought the response of the NIA to ascertain the status of trial against Singh. The high court had denied him bail citing flight risk and the possibility of witnesses being influenced. "Considering the volatile situation that exists in Manipur and the circumstances that had earlier led to his release on bail, including the protests, it can clearly be said that enlarging the appellant on bail would not only entail flight risk but also the possibility of witnesses being influenced in the present case as also deterioration of law and order," it had said. The high court had said the NIA has established a prima facie case against Singh, supported by material evidence indicating his involvement in the alleged offences. Singh was arrested in September 2023

leashed on bail in the case on such terms and conditions as may be imposed by the trial court.

"In the event the trial court or the State finds that the petitioner is delaying the conclusion of trial, it will be open for them to approach this court for recall of this order," the bench said.

Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj, appearing for the National Investigation Agency (NIA), opposed the bail plea saying it was a case of transnational conspiracy and the allegations against the petitioner were very serious.

The bench was told that in September 2023, a vehicle was intercepted in Manipur in which Singh and four other individuals were caught wearing camouflaged clothes along with various weapons.

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earlier granted bail. On September 15, the apex court sought the response of the NIA to ascertain the status of trial against Singh.

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The high court had said the NIA has established a prima facie case against Singh, supported by material evidence indicating his involvement in the alleged offences.

Singh was arrested in September 2023

from Manipur and brought to the national capital for questioning.

He was one of the five persons arrested by Manipur Police for allegedly possessing weapons looted from a police armoury.

The NIA alleged that Singh's arrest was in a case of "transnational conspiracy" by Myanmar-based terror groups to wage war against the Government of India by exploiting the ethnic unrest in Manipur.

Before the high court, Singh's counsel had argued that allegation of transnational conspiracy was not borne out by any evidence placed on record.

Singh had challenged in the high court an order passed by a special NIA court which denied him bail in the case.

Over 260 people were killed and thousands displaced in the ethnic violence that broke out in Manipur in May 2023. (PTI)

## Voting begins for Panchayat and Municipality elections in Arunachal Officials and personnel cast votes ahead of main polling on Dec 15



**ITANAGAR, Dec 11:** Voting for the upcoming local body elections in Arunachal Pradesh began on Thursday for officers, officials and personnel engaged in election duties through the Election Duty Certificate (EDC) system. The state election commission clarified that no postal ballot system is in place, and the voting process for EDC holders mirrors that of the main polling day.

The main polling for Panchayat and municipal elections is scheduled for December 15, with political parties actively campaigning across the state. According to reports, 63 candidates out of 245 Zilla Parishad (ZP) seats have been elected unopposed. The ruling party secured 58 ZP constituencies unopposed, along with one candidate from the National People's Party (NPP). In the Itanagar Municipal Corporation

(IMC), four candidates were elected unopposed.

A total of 440 candidates are contesting for 186 ZP seats, along with 39 candidates for 16 IMC seats and 21 candidates for 8 Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) seats. Overall, 600 nomination papers were filed for 245 ZP constituencies, 10,550 for 8,182 Gram Panchayat seats, 101 for 20 IMC wards and 28 for PMC wards. Some seats remain vacant due to lack of nominations or the death of a valid candidate, which may be filled through by-elections.

In Itanagar, around 450 EDCs were issued and voting was conducted at IG Park under arrangements made by the Municipal Election Returning Officer (MERO) and other officials. Simultaneous EDC voting was held in other parts of the state and will continue on Friday.

## Class 1 student killed in fire at hostel of Tawang school

**ITANAGAR, Dec 11:** A six-year-old student was killed as fire ravaged the hostel of a school in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district in the early hours of Thursday, a statement said. The fire broke out around 12:20 AM at the hostel of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Awasiya Vidyalaya at Taktsang when most children were asleep, it said.

Dorjee Tsomu, a student of class 8, and hostel warden Nima Lhamu managed to rescue several students, but Choine Tsomu of class 1 could not be saved, said the statement issued by the district administration.

"Personnel of a nearby Indian Army unit, villagers, school staff and hostel authorities rushed to the scene. Despite their efforts, the dried wooden planks and furniture inside the hostel accelerated the fire's spread, making containment difficult," it said.

District Deputy Commissioner Namgyal Angmo and SP DW Thongon visited the site to assess the damage.

The body of the deceased girl was sent for post-mortem examination. (PTI)

## Protests in Nagaland over CAA

**KOHIMA, Dec 11:** The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Thursday observed 'North East Black Day' in Kohima, protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Member organisations of the North East Students' Organisation (NESO) held demonstrations across all states in the region to mark the day the Act was passed in Parliament in 2019.

NSF general secretary Kenilo Kent said the observance of the 'black day' across the region symbolised a collective stand of resistance.

"Today, we stand together in collective defiance along with the rest of the people of the Northeast," he said.

Kent alleged that the law is discriminatory in nature and a direct threat to the indigenous people of the Northeast.

"Our homeland is not just a physical space, it is the cradle of our identity, culture and history," he said, adding that the CAA posed an existential threat to indigenous rights.

NESO secretary general Mutsikhoyu Yhobu said the students' bodies had opposed the law since its inception.

"Today, the entire Northeast is observing this black day against the imposition of the Citizenship Amendment Act," he said.

He reiterated that NESO had consistently demanded that the Act not be implemented in the Northeast, pointing out that although ILP-covered states were exempted, the region as a whole remained vulnerable.

Yhobu said NESO, along with its member bodies, was compelled to observe the 'black day' to send a message to the Centre that "we don't want this Citizenship Amendment Act".

All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) vice president (protocol) Nabam Gandhi claimed the law was "socially and economically damaging for the region".

"Before implementing any Act, there must be a study of its social and economic impact," he said, noting that the CAA failed to consider the unique demographic vulnerability of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other tribal-dominated states.

He argued that the ILP exemption offered by the Centre was nothing more than "a chocolate" to placate indigenous communities.

"This ILP can be lifted anytime," he warned, stressing that unrestricted settlement of migrants could erode tribal cultures, customs and natural resources.

Yhobu led the symbolic burning of CAA documents, declaring it an act of public dissent against the implementation of the law in the Northeast. (PTI)

## LGBTQIA+ community marks World Human Rights Day in Itanagar

**HT Correspondent**  
**ITANAGAR, Dec 11:** The LGBTQIA+ community in Arunachal Pradesh, along with allies, observed World Human Rights Day at the APLS Office in an event organised by AP QueerStation in partnership with Bridge. The programme, themed "LGBTQ+ Rights Are Human Rights," brought together nearly 30 participants for an open mic poetry session, a panel discussion, a mini art exhibition and the launch of a survey document/primer.

The survey, conducted across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha and West Bengal in 2023-24 with over 900 participants, revealed high levels of discrimination and bullying against LGBTQ+ individuals during adolescence (ages 12-15), often beginning at home and continuing in schools. Such experiences frequently result in school dropouts, incomplete education and limited future employment opportunities.

Panelists included Zendeekar, a non-binary entrepreneur, who spoke on resilience and the role of family support, Wanggo Socia a



researcher exploring queer representation in Hindi literature, contemporary artist Chutung Ratan, who highlighted self-expression through queer art and Nido Taluk, Project Coordinator at CHRI under SSHAKTI CSC 2.0, who addressed misinformation linking LGBTQ+ people to viruses and clarified distinctions between HIV and AIDS.

A highlight of the event was a performance by actor and singer Janeth Piggam. AP QueerStation founder Sawang Wangchha underscored the importance of recognizing intersectionality in struggles

across queer communities, women, children, indigenous groups and persons with disabilities, while calling for greater kindness and empathy in society.

Despite legal advances such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2018, the 2014 NALSA judgment affirming the right to self-identification and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, participants stressed that systemic discrimination, violence and exclusion remain widespread, affecting access to education, healthcare and livelihoods.

## Nagaland Raj Bhavan renamed Lok Bhavan

**KOHIMA, Dec 11:** Nagaland has officially renamed Raj Bhavan as Lok Bhavan, following the central government's decision to rename Raj Bhavans across all states.

The notification was issued by the commissioner and secretary to the governor of Nagaland, Thavaseelan K, following a communication from the ministry of home affairs on November 25.

The official said all references, records and communications will be updated to reflect the new name as mandated. (PTI)

## Ghanaian national arrested in Meghalaya for travelling under fake identity

**SHILLONG, Dec 11:** A 35-year-old Ghanaian national has been arrested in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district for travelling under a fake identity, police said on Thursday. The foreign national was apprehended on Wednesday by local villagers while he was allegedly attempting to infiltrate to Bangladesh illegally, they said.

West Jaintia Hills Superintendent of Police Jagpal Singh said the man, identified as William Addo Agyei, had initially claimed to be Stanley Obayendo, but later revealed his true identity

during sustained questioning.

Agyei, a resident of Kumasi Accra in Ghana, had entered India on a medical visa in June 2025, which was valid for three months. Although he applied for an extension, he reportedly did not receive any response from the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO), Singh said.

He recently received an email from the FRRO directing him to report either to their office or to the Banaswadi Police Station in Bengaluru, Karnataka, the SP said. (PTI)

## Meghalaya's first Eklavya school welcomes students; CM asks them to value opportunity

**NONGPOH, Dec 11:** Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Thursday launched the academic session of the first Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) at Pahamsyiem in Ri-Bhoi district, expressing gratitude to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Centre for supporting the state's efforts to strengthen education infrastructure.

EMRS started in 1997-98 to impart quality education to ST children in remote areas.

"I thank them (Centre and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs) sincerely for blessing our young students with this opportunity and infrastructure," he said at the inaugural programme.

Sangma said education was not merely about "teaching, textbooks, or exams", but about shaping the future of the state and instilling values that define a strong society.

"The true measure of education lies in the quality of students and the values they uphold," he added.

The chief minister said nearly 2,000 students had applied and only a select



few were chosen.

"I urge all of you to value this opportunity, commit yourselves fully to your studies and embrace the education you receive here," he told the students, whom he described as the "true guests of honour" of the programme.

Sangma also laid the foundation

stone for a Synthetic Athletic Track at Pahamsyiem. The project, being executed by the State Sports Council, aims to improve sports infrastructure and provide better training facilities for young athletes of Ri-Bhoi district.

"Our approach is inclusive: development is for all regions, tribes and

communities. It is not selective," he said, urging people to move beyond divisive factors and recognise the progress being made across Meghalaya.

He outlined the state's broader developmental trajectory, noting that Meghalaya is currently the second fastest-growing economy in the country, with real GDP rising by 10 per cent annually over the past three years.

Responding to student requests for musical instruments and gardening tools, the chief minister assured them that their needs would be fulfilled.

Education Minister Lakhmen Rymbui emphasised the government's continued commitment to prioritise education and urged teachers and staff to guide students towards achieving excellence.

As part of the programme, the chief minister also flagged off four vehicles under a scheme to improve rural transport connectivity and support livelihood activities for self-help groups. (PTI)

**IN THE COURT OF THE DISTRICT AND SESSION JUDGE, TINSUKIA**

**T.S.(M) 14/2025**

Sarat Baruah ..... Petitioner

-Vs-

Tanbi Baruah ..... Respondent

TO,  
SMT. TANBI BARUAH  
W/O, Sri Sarat Baruah  
Near Army Camp, Namsai.  
P.O & P.S- Namsai, Dist. Namsai  
Arunachal Pradesh

**WHEREAS** the Petitioner have filed the Petition praying for decree of divorce dated in October 2008 between you and petitioner.

You are therefore directed the petitioner to file your objection if any on 17-12-2025 at 10.30 Am against the said petition either personally or through Your Authorized Advocate, falling which the petition would be heard and decided in your absence in the course of Law.

Given under my hand and seal of the Court, this 11th day of November 2025.

**District Judge  
Tinsukia  
DISTRICT JUDGE  
TINSUKIA**

No.TECH-213/NTI/KOK(BLDG)/2023-24/4687 Dated Kokrajhar, the 11/12/25

**PRESS NOTICE**

Re-tender No. KOK/BLDG-218/175 of 2025-26

The Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar District & Chirang District Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar invites bids from registered contractors with Class-(A), (B), (C) and Class- II for

1) Landscaping, Carpeting along with 4(Four) Nos. Solar Light at Officers Quarter inside BTC Secretariat Complex, Bodofa Nwgrw, Kokrajhar for an estimated amount of 24,29,631.00(Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Twenty Nine Thousand Six Hundred and Thirty One) only (approx.)

The details may be seen at the website <http://assamenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-Executive Engineer, P.W.D  
Kokrajhar Dist. & Chirang Dist.  
Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3257

# Mitch Hay's 61 helps New Zealand to a 1<sup>st</sup> innings lead over West Indies in the 2<sup>nd</sup> test

WELLINGTON, Dec 11: Mitch Hay scored 61 in his first test innings Thursday to help New Zealand to a 73-run first-innings lead over the West Indies on the second day of the second test.

The wicketkeeper-batter who cut his teeth in seven one-day internationals and 12 T20s was called into test cricket as a replacement for the injured Tom Blundell. He followed Devon Conway's 60 at the top of the innings to guide New Zealand to 278.

New Zealand then claimed two wickets in 10 overs before stumps, leaving the West Indies 32-2, still 41 behind. John Campbell (14) was bowled by Michael Rae, leaving a ball which cut back from outside off and night-watchman Anderson Phillip (0) was trapped lbw by Jacob Duffy.

"At that time of day their batters have got nothing to gain and we've got all to gain so it was cool to get a couple there," Duffy said. "Any time you get a lead it's not too bad."

"A couple of guys will be a bit gutted to get a start and not go on but any time you get a lead and get them two down, you have to be happy with that."

The West Indies bowlers made sure New Zealand's task of surpassing the tourists' first innings of 205 was a difficult one on a pitch at the Basin Reserve which retained pace, bounce and some treacherous movement well into the second day.

That was demonstrated in the first session in which New Zealand, after resuming at 24-0, gained a strong position at 112-2 by lunch while losing Tom Latham (11) and Kane Williamson (37) to superb pieces of seam



bowling.

Latham was bowled by Kumar Roach in the fifth over of the day with a ball that jagged back sharply from outside off and pierced his tentative defensive shot. Williamson fell close to the first interval, beaten by a peach of a ball from Phillip which pitched on middle and straightened past the outside edge to hit off stump.

Conway reached his 15th test half century, his first against the West Indies, from 87 balls prior to lunch. He and Rachin Ravindra (5) were then out in consecutive overs early in the second session as New Zealand slipped to 117-4.

Hay and Daryl Mitchell, returning from injury after missing the drawn first test, put on 63 for the fifth wicket. They batted as-

sertively to put New Zealand back on top before Mitchell (25) was out with the score 190-5.

Hay reached 50 from 74 balls with seven fours and one six before being tempted by a short ball from Ojay Shields which he hooked to Kumar Roach at fine leg. He left, chiding himself for falling into an obvious trap.

Glenn Phillips, who also missed the first test with injury, made 18 before holding out to deep midwicket off Roston Chase. As a bonus, New Zealand's tail added 45 runs for the last two wickets.

Zak Foulkes made an unbeaten 23, Jacob Duffy 11 and 13 to go with his three wickets on debut.

Blair Tickner didn't bat after dislocating his left shoulder in a fielding accident on the first day which again leaves the New Zealand bowling attack short-handed. In the second innings of the first test, only Foulkes, Duffy, Michael Bracewell and Ravindra were fit to bowl.

Tickner took 4-32 before his injury which means he won't bowl or field again in the match.

On the eastern side of the Basin Reserve, grassy embankments are lined with Pohutukawa trees, the New Zealand Christmas tree which is decked at this time of the year with red blossoms, standing out against a vivid blue sky. The trees might have caused the West Indies to drop two catches Thursday when a fielder lost the red ball among the red background.

The third and final test begins Dec. 18 at Bay Oval at Mount Maunganui. (AP)

## U-19 Asia Cup

Suryavanshi star attraction but will ICC urge BCCI to revisit 'no handshake' policy?



DUBAI, Dec 11: India's Asia Cup U-19 campaign will be fronted by Gen Z batting sensations Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, but equal focus would be on whether the BCCI allows the youngsters to exchange handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts, in what would be construed as maintaining sporting civility at the junior level.

While the India U-19 side, under the able leadership of dashing Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre start its campaign against UAE on Friday, it is the match against Pakistan on Sunday that will certainly gain the most traction in the junior continental championship seen as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup early next year.

In the senior men's Asia Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players have refused to shake hands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack.

However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it and the normal protocol of sportsman spirit should be adhered to.

"The boys haven't been told anything. But obviously BCCI has given explicit instructions to its manager Anand Datar. Now if Indian boys don't shake hands with Pakistan team then match referee will have to be informed in advance."

"We know for a fact that ICC doesn't want politics to take front

seat when it comes to junior cricket. So it is a case of both bad optics and public sentiment," a BCCI official in the know of things told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

As far as the tournament is concerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as the top two teams from group A. Apart from India and Pakistan, the other two sides are Malaysia and UAE, and they don't have a lot of experience of playing 50 over cricket.

Both Suryavanshi and skipper Mhatre are coming into the tournament following a great run of form in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. While Mhatre played a massive role in the group league stages with back-to-back centuries and a fifty, Suryavanshi became the youngest player in SMAT history to hit a century, against Maharashtra.

In India's squad of 15, these are two boys, who have played more than 30 senior level games across the three formats and cumulatively scored nine centuries.

That, in fact, is the most number of senior level centuries when all the other seven teams are combined and it does make India the runaway favourites in the junior continental championship.

India U19 squad for Asia Cup: Ayush Mhatre (C), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vihan Malhotra (vc), Vedant Trivedi, Abhigyan Kundu (wk), Harvansh Singh (wk), Yuvraj Gohil, Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan A. Patel, Naman Pushpak, D. Deepesh, Henil Patel, Kishan Kumar Singh, Udhav Mohan, Aaron George. (PTI)

## Indian Taekwondo player Rupa Bayor rises to career best 8<sup>th</sup> in world rankings

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Asian bronze-medallist Rupa Bayor has become India's first Taekwondo player to be ranked as high as eighth in the latest world rankings, rising a rung from her previous career-best position. The 24-year-old Poomsae competitor from Arunachal Pradesh won a bronze medal at the World Taekwondo President Cup Europe held in Innsbruck, Austria, from November 29 to 30. Earlier this year, she also won a bronze at the Australia Open Taekwondo Tournament in August.

Poomsae is a non-combative form of Taekwondo in which competitors perform a pattern of moves like gymnastics routines to be evaluated by a panel of judges. This format is currently a non-Olympic category but features in the Asian Games.

Bayor, who trains at the Indo Korean Taekwondo Academy in Mumbai, was inducted into the Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) of the Sports Ministry in April this year. (PTI)

## Amend commercially restrictive clauses in Constitution during Dec 20 AGM: ISL clubs to AIFF

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Twelve Indian Super League (ISL) clubs on Thursday urged the All India Football Federation (AIFF) to amend the "commercially restrictive" clauses of its constitution during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on December 20, in another reminder that the domestic game may collapse if immediate steps are not taken.

All the ISL teams, except for East Bengal, said the AIFF should transfer the long-term rights of the top-tier league to the clubs if the national federation is unable to bring the necessary amendments or provide a commercially viable framework.

"...the AIFF should either expressly support removal of commercially restrictive clauses in the Constitution, or itself undertake these amendments at the forthcoming AGM on 20 December 2025," the clubs wrote in a letter to the AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey.

"Thereafter, the federation along with the support of the Government and the Clubs proceed to transparently identify an appropriate commercial partner."

"If the AIFF is unwilling or unable to support the necessary amendments or provide a commercially viable framework for the league, then the only logical solution is for the Federation to transfer the long-term rights of the league to the Clubs."

Thursday's letter from the ISL clubs came after a missive a few days back in which they had asked

the AIFF to consider a framework under which they (the ISL clubs) may collectively form a consortium to own/operate the league as majority owners, alongside the national federation and aligned investors in case a suitable commercial partner is not found.

A recent tender floated by the AIFF for the commercial rights of the ISL could not find any bidder. "Clubs must have commercial flexibility, including the ability to attract sponsors, investors, and long-term partners. This is not possible until the commercially restrictive clauses in the AIFF Constitution are amended or removed. Without this change, no sustainable league structure can be built, regardless of good intentions," the letter said.

In the earlier letter of December 5, the clubs had even said that under the new AIFF Constitution, the national federation "possesses the authority to amend its own statutes including those impeding commercial operation of the league-without requiring judicial directions."

The latest letter written by Mohun Bagan Super Giant director Vinay Chopra on behalf of all the clubs said they are "fully prepared -- consistent with global best practices -- to either solely or jointly operate, commercialise, and develop the league, including through securing sponsors, broadcasters, commercial partners, and strategic investors".

"The time for procedural exchanges, meetings

without purpose, and administrative delay has expired... such a meeting must have clear, time-bound decisions, not reiterating constraints that have been known for months.

"The stakes are existential... Indian football faces the genuine risk of losing its only professional league, investors, sponsors, and the confidence of fans. Time is rapidly running out."

"**EC view not taken before suggestion to discuss formation of consortium**"

On Wednesday, the AIFF had suggested that the proposal made by the ISL clubs to form a consortium to own or operate the top-tier league may be discussed during its AGM on December 20.

But AIFF Executive Committee member Avijit Paul was not happy at the suggestion to discuss the formation of consortium without prior discussion with the panel.

"The Exco is the highest decision-making body in the AIFF, and to bypass it in any form is against the rules and regulations and the constitution of the AIFF."

"...The issue is highly sensitive in nature and is related to the long-time financial health of the AIFF."

"It is hugely disappointing that you have decided to jump the gun and enter into a dialogue in this regard by keeping Exco and General Body in the complete dark," Paul said in a letter addressed to AIFF deputy secretary general K Satyanarayan. (PTI)

## Whatever is good for cricket, BCCI should do it: Kapil on split coaching WTC finals have definitely delivered in providing pinnacle event for Test cricket: ICC CEO

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Former India captain Kapil Dev on Thursday steered clear of endorsing the idea of split coaches after the team's recent 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa at home, saying the BCCI should adopt whatever coaching structure best serves Indian cricket.

Asked whether separate coaches for red-ball and white-ball formats could be an answer to end India's recent run of reverses in Tests at home, Kapil said: "I don't know... I can't answer that. You have to really work something like that in your mind and say what should happen. Whatever is good for cricket, I think they should do it."

Kapil, the 1983 World Cup-winning captain, rejected the notion that it is tougher to be an athlete in the social-media era than during his playing days.

"No, it's always the same. It was difficult then, it is difficult now. It was easy then and it is easy now. Your mindset is more important," he said.

On whether the growing financial pull of T20 leagues has overshadowed national representation, Kapil said each player weighs priorities differently.



"Everybody loves money, but some players feel that is very important. I still feel playing for India is more important than playing IPL. But every body is individual, they have their own thought process. Good luck to them."

Asked if he preferred any particular format, Kapil said he simply enjoys the game in all its forms. "I just love cricket. Doesn't matter even two balls cricket or 100 balls or 100 overs or 10 overs... cricket is cricket. See golf is golf, whatever format you play, end of the day you enjoy golf."

He also offered a light-hearted remark on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma when asked about their

performances. "Good luck, they should play golf also," quipped Kapil, who is currently the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI).

Kapil was speaking at the launch of '72 The League', a city-based golf event announced by the PGTI and scheduled for next year.

The former skipper said India needs golfers who can win big global titles to trigger a mass shift in how the sport is perceived nationally.

"We have to produce world champions. Once they go and win a European Cup or US Cup, or win at the Olympics, it will change the entire scenario," he said.

On what could be golf's "1983 moment", Kapil said: "These boys go and win a European Cup or US Open, something like that... that will be the cherry on the cake."

"At the Olympics we just missed a medal. When only a handful of people are playing in our country and still we reached there, that gives hope. One day our kids will go and win Olympics or US Cup. In tennis, if you win Wimbledon, it makes a difference; the same is in golf." (PTI)

MUMBAI, Dec 11: The three World Test Championship finals held so far have "definitely delivered" on the aim of creating a pinnacle event for the traditional format of the game, said ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta here on Thursday.

New Zealand, Australia and South Africa have each won the WTC once with India finishing runners-up twice.

Gupta highlighted that a packed Lord's during the previous edition's final between Australia and South Africa, despite the absence of India and hosts England, was a landmark moment for the global governing body.

"What the World Test Championship final attempts to do, beyond just being a five-plus-one-day event where the two best teams compete for the greatest prize in the format, is to

give context to the two years of Test cricket that precedes that final," Gupta said during the announcement of ICC's global partnership with AB InBev India (Budweiser 0.0) here.

"That was the endeavour with which the World Test Championship was launched and what we've seen with three editions past us now, is that the World Test Championship final has definitely delivered on the goal of providing a pinnacle event for Test cricket." He said the turnout at Lord's showed that the WTC final has stirred interest among fans, who now look forward to it just as they do with other flagship events.

"The last World Test Championship final was played between Australia and South Africa in England, and Lord's was packed," he said.

"India was not playing, England

was not playing, (but) Australia was taking on South Africa, and Lord's was packed, which means that we now have a pinnacle event in Test cricket which the world waits for, or the world that enjoys Test cricket waits for."

Gupta added that the growing anticipation among fans in the months leading up to the final also strengthens the broader storytelling around Test cricket.

"The other thing that it did was, in the six months leading up to the World Test Championship final, the entire narrative was around who will feature and that gives additional meaning, context, and significance to the bilateral Test cricket that's being played in the lead-up to that World Test Championship final," he added. (PTI)

## LAC-level competitions of Chief Minister's Tea Tribes & Adivasi Football Tournament underway

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, Dec 11: The LAC-level phase of the Chief Minister's Tea Tribes & Adivasi Football Tournament (U-17 Boys), 2025-26 is progressing across Sonitpur district with substantial enthusiasm and participation from young footballers representing various tea garden communities.

The district-wide event has drawn significant local interest, reflecting the growing momentum of grassroots sports among Tea Tribes and Adivasi youth.

The Rangapara LAC segment commenced on 7th December 2025 in the presence of Krishna Kamal Tanti, MLA, Rangapara.

Matches are being organised at the Sonabheel Tea Estate Playground and Hatibari Tea Estate Playground.

With approximately 28 teams participating, Rangapara has recorded one of the highest turnouts in the district.

The Tezpur LAC competition

began on 10th December 2025 at the Nurbari Tea Estate Playground and was inaugurated by Prithiraj Rava, MLA, Tezpur.

This segment saw participation from 2 teams, accompanied by strong community support and an encouraging response from local spectators.

The Naduar LAC matches were conducted from 10th to 11th December 2025 at the Gela Hatinga Tea Estate Playground.

The closing ceremony was attended by Padma Hazarika, MLA, Naduar. A total of 7 teams took part in this segment, contributing to the district's overall competitive spirit.

In Dhekiajuli LAC, the tournament was held from 8th to 11th December 2025 at the Dhekiajuli Tea Estate Playground. Ashok Singhal, Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Government of Assam, attended the closing ceremony.

Around 20 teams participated, marking one of the stronger responses in the district.

## IOC president Coventry sets early 2026 target for new Olympic policy on gender eligibility

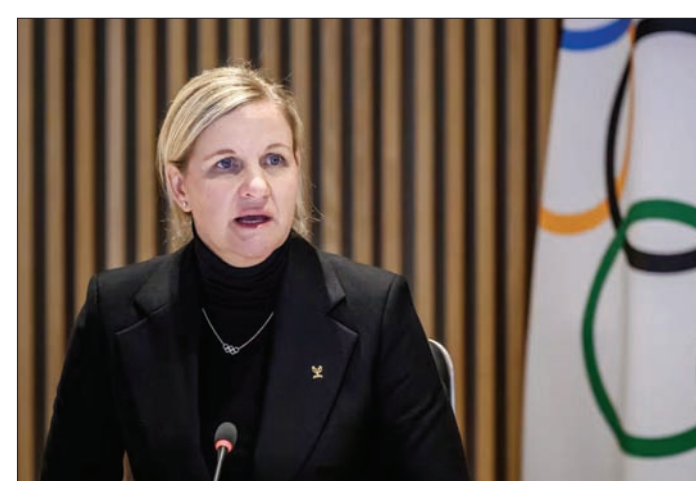
GENEVA, Dec 11: The IOC set a target of early 2026 to detail a new policy on eligibility in female sports that could see transgender athletes excluded from the Olympic Games.

International Olympic Committee president Kirsty Coventry also stressed the Olympic body's statutory belief in access to sport being a human right for all people at grassroots and recreational level.

The two-time Olympic champion swimmer created a working group after taking office in June to review "protecting the female category."

Coventry won an IOC presidential election where most of the seven candidates promised a stronger policy on gender eligibility. Previously, the IOC only offered guidance to the individual sports governing bodies, who were left to decide on their own rules.

"I am really hopeful that in the next couple of months, and definitely within the first quarter of next year, that we will have a very clear



decision and way forward," Coventry said at a news conference Wednesday after a meeting of the executive board she chairs.

That timetable could see an IOC policy — likely on transgender athletes and athletes with differences on sexual development (DSD) —

confirmed at its meeting on the eve of the Milan Cortina Winter Games that open Feb. 6.

The 2028 Summer Games follows in Los Angeles, and U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order in February, "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports,"

that could stop funding for organizations which let transgender athletes compete in women's and girls' sports. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee in July effectively barred transgender women from competitions, telling its national federations in Olympic sports they had an "obligation to comply" with the government order.

World governing bodies in top-tier Olympic sports track and field and swimming had already banned athletes who went through male puberty from their women's events ahead of the Paris Olympics.

In Paris 16 months ago, a furor was created around women's boxing and the eligibility of two gold medalists, Imane Khelif from Algeria and Lin Yu-ting of Taiwan.

World Boxing, the new body overseeing Olympic tournaments, has introduced the SRY gene test, which identifies the Y chromosome found in males. World Athletics and the International Ski and Snow-

board Federation also have introduced the tests.

Coventry said Wednesday trying to find a consensus is "maybe not going to be the easiest thing to do."

"But we are going to try our best to ensure that when we are talking about the female category, we are protecting the female category and we are doing that in the most fair way," she said.

It is unclear how many, if any, transgender athletes are competing at an Olympic level of competition. However, the Olympic Charter which codifies rules for the IOC and Olympic Games states: "The practice of sport is a human right ... without discrimination of any kind in respect of internationally recognized human rights."

"That stance is never going to change," Coventry said Wednesday. "Sport is, at grassroots levels and in any form of recreation, for everybody and you should have access for everybody to partake." (AP)