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Assam Cabinet clears ₹250 cr for BTC, approves forest protection, land allotments

Cricketer Simu Das to be appointed as physical instructor

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Assam Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on Thursday took a series of important decisions covering rural development funding, biodiversity conservation, sports promotion, land allotment and infrastructure expansion.

The Cabinet accorded approval for the release of ₹250 crore to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under the State-Owned Priority Development Fund (Rural) for the financial year 2025-26, aimed at accelerating development works in rural areas of the Bodoland region.

In a move underscoring the government's focus on environmental conservation, the Cabinet approved the declaration of Kumari Beel, spread over 270 hectares, and Dhamar Beel, covering 337 hectares, both in Goalpara district,



The Cabinet also decided to appoint Simu Das, an accomplished sports person from Assam and a member of the Indian women's blind cricket team that won the Women's T20 Blind World Cup, as a Physical Instructor under the Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare, recognising her achievement and contribution to sports.

To strengthen security infrastructure, approval was granted for the transfer of 607 bighas of government land at Kareng Chapori in Dhemajri district for the construction of a new Group Centre of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

Under Mission Basundhara, the Cabinet approved land allotment in favour of 308 families, continuing the government's push to provide land rights and security to eligible beneficiaries.

The Cabinet also cleared the allotment of land required for the Ammonia-Urea Project, the foundation stone of which is scheduled to be laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 21, marking a major step in strengthening fertiliser production and industrial growth in the state. (PTI)

Chief sculptor of Statue of Unity dies at 100

NOIDA/MUMBAI, Dec 18: Renowned sculptor Ram Sutar, whose creations included the gigantic Statue of Unity at Kevadia and the iconic Mahatma Gandhi statue at the Parliament complex, died late on Wednesday night at his Noida residence.

He was 100 and suffering from age-related illnesses, said his son Anil Sutar.

Among those who mourned his death was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said his works were "powerful expression of India's history and culture."

Known as the "statue man", Sutar was active till the very end and was involved in ambitious projects such as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar memorial at Indu Mill in Mumbai and soon-to-be-unveiled statue of Gopinath Bardoloi in Guwahati.

Born in a humble family at Gondur village in Dhule district of present-day Maharashtra on February 19, 1925, Sutar was a gold medalist from Mumbai's J J School of Art and Architecture.

He was honoured with the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2016. Recently, Sutar was conferred with the Maharashtra Bhushan Puraskar, the state's highest award.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of Shri Ram Sutar Ji, a remarkable sculptor whose mastery gave India some of its most iconic landmarks, including the Statue of Unity in Kevadia," PM Modi said in a post on X, adding that his work will always be admired as powerful expressions of India's history, culture and collective spirit.

"He has immortalised national pride for generations to come. His works will keep inspiring artists and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong preparing for 2036 Assam polls, lampoons Himanta

'I don't think they (Cong) are making any serious effort for the 2026 and 2031 polls'

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the opposition Congress is preparing for the 2036 assembly elections and "has already conceded the 2026 and 2031 polls to the BJP."

"The Congress is preparing for the polls in a way that they can form the government in 2036 and they have already given us (the BJP) the forthcoming and the next elections," Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme here.

"I do not think that the Congress is in any way preparing for the 2026 polls, but one thing is certain that they have a vote bank in some of the constituencies of the state," he said.

Even if the Congress brings somebody from Tamil Nadu and makes them contest in these constituencies, they will win, Sarma claimed.

"The Congress will get a fixed number of votes and they are assured of some seats but apart from that, I don't think they are making any serious effort for the 2026 and 2031 polls," he added.

Sarma said the BJP is not targeting 100 or any particular number of seats but "our goal this time to secure more than 50 per cent of the total votes in the state".

"We are not concerned about the number of seats but will focus on improving our position. One thing, however, is absolutely clear that the NDA with the BJP at the

Assam asks 15 'declared foreigners' to leave India by today

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Nagaon district administration of Assam has asked 15 people declared as foreigners by a tribunal to leave the state and India by Friday, according to an official order.

The 15, including six women, came from Bangladesh and have been living in India illegally, a Foreigner's Tribunal has ruled.

In a directive issued on December 17, Nagaon District Commissioner Devashish Sarma asked them to leave the country within 24 hours of receiving the order. It was handed over to them on Thursday, an official said. The tribunal had declared (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Assam moving ahead with proton therapy facility for cancer treatment'

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that Assam has taken a national lead in cancer care by moving ahead with the installation of proton therapy equipment, a cutting-edge treatment modality for cancer patients.

Addressing the annual conference of the Indian Orthopaedic Association (IOA) at the Sarusajai Sports Complex in Guwahati, the chief minister said the initiative marks a major milestone in the state's healthcare journey and reflects the government's commitment to providing advanced, affordable and accessible medical care.

He said that with the support of Tata Trusts, Assam has already es-

CEM reiterates KAAC's commitment to inclusive devp

Tuliram lays foundation stones for multiple road projects, distributes 3,500 land pattas



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 18: Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Tuliram Ronghang on December 17 laid foundation stones for a series of major road and infrastructure development projects in the Duarbagori

the constituency.

Among the projects inaugurated were the improvement and upgradation of the road from Merabheti to Lobonghat via Rongbonghat and Deithor, covering stretches from chainage 8,150 metres to 11,000 metres and from 13,444 metres to 13,994 metres.

Ronghang also laid the foundation stone for the construction of a new road from Kohora Nou Village to Chandra Sing Rongpi Village under the Mukhya Mantri Unnatto Paki Path Nirman Achari (MMUP-PNA) scheme, funded under RIDF-XXXI of NABARD for the year 2025-26.

Another major project inaugurated was the improvement and upgradation of the Chowkihola-Panjan-Deithor-Malasi-Diring-Kohora Road (CPDMDK), covering a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UPPL delegation meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah, seeks full implementation of BTR Accord

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 18: The Opposition United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has reiterated its demand for the full and effective implementation of all clauses of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Peace Accord, including the inclusion of Bodo-Kacharis under Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status and other pending provisions.

A UPPL delegation led by party president and former chief executive member of BTR, Pramod Boro, met Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his official residence in New Delhi on Thursday.

The meeting was described by the party as significant and productive, focusing on long-pending issues related to the implementation of the BTR Accord signed on January 27, 2020.

During the interaction, the delegation urged the Home Minister to ensure full implementation of key



clauses of the accord.

These included Clause 4.3, which relates to the 125th Amendment to Article 280 of the Constitution; Clause 3.1, concerning the inclusion of tribal villages within the BTR; and Clause 6.1, which seeks the inclusion of Bodo-Kacharis under Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status.

Other related issues impacting the socio-political and economic development of the region were also raised.

The UPPL leaders recalled that at the time of signing the historic BTR Accord in 2020, the Union Home Minister had assured all necessary support for its timely and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah to be in Assam on Dec 29 on day-long visit: CM

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to visit Assam on December 29 to inaugurate several projects during a day-long programme, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

The home minister will inaugurate the newly constructed Guwahati Police Commissioner's office here, and launch the CCTV network under the Intelligent City Surveillance System (ICSS), Sarma told reporters here.

Shah will also inaugurate the Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Complex, an auditorium with a seating capacity for 5,000 people. The chief (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Circumstantial evidence can be used for conviction if it leads to guilt only: SC

'Last seen together theory alone insufficient to sustain conviction'

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Circumstantial evidence can be used to convict an accused in a criminal case if it is of such a nature that is "consistent only with his guilt", the Supreme Court said on Thursday.

Setting aside the conviction and life sentence of a man accused in a 2004 murder case, a bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Prashant Kumar Mishra reiterated the legal principle that the "last seen together" theory alone is insufficient to sustain a conviction in cases resting entirely on circumstantial evidence.

"It is a well-established rule in criminal jurisprudence that circumstantial evidence can be made the basis of the conviction of an accused person if it is of such a char-



acter that it is wholly inconsistent with the innocence of the accused and is consistent only with his guilt," Justice Mishra, who authored the verdict said in a case that

lacks direct evidence, the incriminating circumstances being used against the accused must be such as to lead only to a hypothesis of guilt and must exclude every other possibility of the innocence of the accused.

"And if the circumstances proved against the accused, in a particular case, are consistent with the innocence of the accused, he will be entitled to the benefit of the doubt," it said.

The bench acquitted appellant Manoj alias Munna, granting him the benefit of the doubt after finding significant gaps in the prosecution's chain of evidence.

Referring to the facts of the case, the court said, "We are of the opinion that the nature of circumstantial

evidence available against the appellant though raises a doubt that he may have committed the offence but the same is not so conclusive that he can be convicted only on the evidence of the last seen together (theory)."

It is a settled proposition that whenever any doubt emanates in the mind of the court, the benefit shall accrue to the accused and not the prosecution, it added.

"The present case is one where except for the evidence of last seen together, there is no other corroborative evidence against the appellant. Therefore, the conviction only on the basis of last seen together cannot be sustained," it said while setting aside the impugned judgments. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM's forthcoming visit to Assam 'significant, symbolic and substantial': Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's forthcoming two-day visit from December 20 will be 'significant, symbolic and substantial' for the state.

During the day, the CM reviewed the arrangements for the Prime Minister's visit to the state BJP headquarters here.

Sarma said, "We do not want to link the Prime Minister's visit to election politics as he has been elected to run the nation, but his programmes in the state are very significant and symbolic," he said.

Assembly elections are due in the state early next year.

The PM will begin his visit to the state on Saturday afternoon by unveiling an 80-foot-tall statue of the state's former chief minister Gopinath Bordoloi who was a Congress leader and was awarded the Bharat Ratna by the BJP gov-

ernment led by Atal Behari Vajpayee.

He will also inaugurate the newly constructed ₹ 4,000 crore new terminal of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport and address a public meeting outside the terminal building, Sarma said.

Modi will then lead a road show towards the BJP headquarters in Bashista area where he will interact with party workers.

"This is the first time that a Prime Minister will visit a BJP office in the state and it is a historic occasion for us," Sarma said.

In this connection, "I have discussed with state party president Dilip Saikia and party workers today and reviewed the arrangements here," he said.

The Prime Minister will spend the night at the state guest house in Koinadhora at Khanapara area of the city. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, Oman ink trade pact; to provide duty free access to labour-intensive sectors

MUSCAT, Dec 18: India and Oman on Thursday signed a free trade agreement, which will provide duty-free access to a host of Indian labour-intensive sectors, including engineering goods and textiles.

The pact would help Indian exporters, reeling under the impact of 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Indian goods, to diversify shipments in the Middle East region, a gateway to Africa and Europe.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef in Muscat.

The agreement was inked in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sultan of Oman Haitham Bin Tarik. The deal is likely to be implemented by the first quarter of 2026.

As per the agreement, Oman has offered zero-duty access on over 98 of its tariff lines or product categories, covering 99.38 per cent of India's exports to the Gulf country.

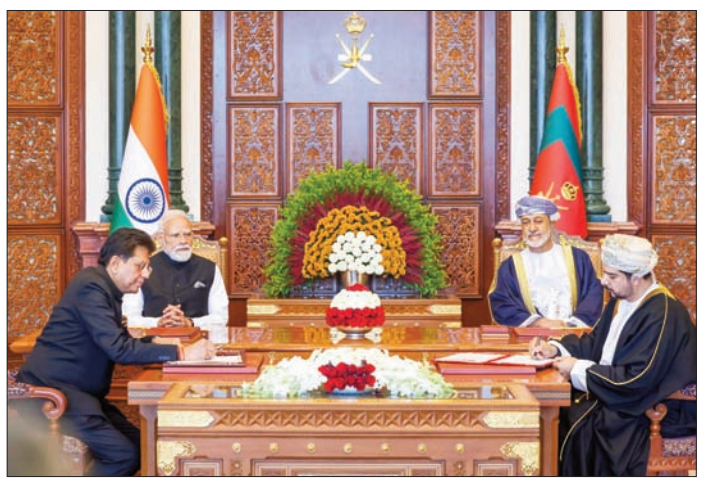
All major labour-intensive sectors, including gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, sports goods, plastics, furniture, agricultural products, engineering products, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and automobiles, will attract nil duty.

These goods, at present, attract import duties in the range of 5-100 per cent in Oman.

On the other hand, India is offering duty concessions on 77.79 per cent of its total tariff lines (12,556), which covers 94.81 per cent of India's imports from Oman by value.

For products of export interest to Oman and those that are sensitive to India, the offer is mostly a tariff-rate quota (TRQ) based tariff liberalisation, which includes products like dates, marbles and petrochemical items.

Addressing the India-Oman Business Forum, Modi said the



pact will infuse new energy into bilateral trade and investment ties while creating opportunities for mutual growth.

Describing the CEPA as the blueprint for India-Oman's shared future, the visiting Prime Minister called upon business leaders to realise the full potential of the trade pact.

"Today, we are making a historic decision whose impact will be felt for decades to come. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, or CEPA, will infuse our partnership with new confidence and energy in the 21st century," he said.

Goyal said the trade deal would provide opportunities for Indian exporters and professionals.

"It unlocks nearly universal duty-free access for Indian goods in the Omani market, expands services commitments across key high-growth sectors, and ensures greater mobility for Indian professionals," he said, adding that the agreement reinforces India's commitment to inclusive growth benefiting farmers, artisans, workers, and MSMEs while safeguarding core national interests.

The development is significant as the government is working to diversify India's exports after its largest export destination, the US, imposed steep tariffs on Indian goods from August.

India, in July, inked a comprehensive trade pact with the UK,

and negotiations are in the last phase with the European Union and New Zealand.

India is also strengthening its presence in the Middle East nations. In May 2022, it implemented a pact with the UAE and will soon start talks with Qatar. These nations are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Though Oman is a small country, it has strategic importance as the country borders the Strait of Hormuz, an important maritime chokepoint. Asian companies use this passage for oil trade.

Oman is also an important strategic partner in the region for India, as it is a key gateway for Indian goods and services to the wider Middle Eastern and African nations.

Nearly 7 lakh Indian nationals reside in Oman, and India receives about USD 2 billion in remittances from Oman annually.

Indian enterprises have built a strong presence in Oman, with over 6,000 establishments operating across sectors. India has received USD 615.54 million in foreign direct investment from Oman between April 2000 and September 2025.

Talks for the agreement formally began in November 2023, and the negotiations concluded this year.

Further to safeguard the interests of farmers and MSMEs, India has decided not to give any duty

concessions in sectors like agricultural products, gold and silver bullion, jewellery, footwear, sports goods and scrap of many base metals.

On the services sector front, Oman has offered to extend substantial commitments across a broad spectrum of sectors, including computer-related services, business and professional services, audio-visual services, research and development, education and health services.

Oman's global services imports stood at USD 12.52 billion, with India's share at only 5.31 per cent. It shows a significant untapped potential for Indian service providers.

For the first time, Oman has offered wide-ranging commitments under Mode 4 (movement of skilled professionals), including a notable increase in the quota for intra-corporate transferees from 20 per cent to 50 per cent, together with a longer permitted duration of stay for contractual service suppliers - extended from the existing 90 days to two years, with the possibility of a further two-year extension.

In addition, both sides have agreed to hold future discussions on the social security pact once Oman's contributory social security system is implemented.

This is the second trade pact signed in the last six months, after the UK and is a part of a strategy to sign trade agreements with developed economies that are not competing with our labour-intensive interests and provide opportunities for Indian businesses.

This is the first bilateral agreement that Oman has signed with any country since the US in 2006. Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among the GCC countries.

India-Oman bilateral trade was about USD 10.5 billion (exports USD 4 billion and imports USD 6.54 billion) in 2024-25. The pact is expected to help additional USD 2 billion in the next 2-3 years. (PTI)

RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group commits ₹ 15,800 cr investment in Bengal

KOLKATA, Dec 18: Sanjiv Goenka, Chairman of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group, on Thursday announced a capital expenditure plan totalling ₹ 15,800 crore aimed at bolstering infrastructure across energy, education, and healthcare sectors in West Bengal.

Addressing the Business and Industry Conclave 2025 here, he praised the "decisive leadership" of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, which facilitates rapid investment, and said his group has invested ₹ 26,500 crore in the past years of her leadership.

The cornerstone of the proposed investment is a revolutionary energy project—a massive 5,000 megawatt hours (MWh) storage facility at a cost of ₹ 12,000 crore, Goenka said.

He claimed that this project is anticipated to be one of the first of its kind in India.

The immediate goal of this high-capacity storage is to enable the city of Kolkata to receive at least 50 per cent of its energy from renewable sources.

If achieved, this proportion of renewable energy provision would be the first in the country, Goenka claimed.

The RP-Sanjiv Goenka group has already submitted a letter of application for the necessary land.

Responding to the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group's re-

quest for 600 acres of land for expansion of its projects, the chief minister assured it of all support.

She told government officials that she wanted a proposal to be placed before the next Cabinet in this regard.

Banerjee confirmed that 350 acres of land are already available in Uttarpara in Hooghly district. Beyond the energy sector, the group is directing significant funds toward social infrastructure, committing approximately ₹ 1,000 crore to expand its presence in education and healthcare.

In education, the group will double its capacity. This expansion alone requires an investment of Rs 500 crore.

Simultaneously, the group is focused on healthcare, with plans underway to build a state-of-the-art hospital, aiming for it to be recognised as India's best. This major facility is scheduled for commissioning by January 2027.

When combined with ongoing investments in distribution, the total proposed capital outlay by the group stands at ₹ 15,800 crores.

Goenka emphasised that this massive commitment is only possible due to the guidance and leadership of the chief minister, citing her decisiveness and speed as key factors enabling the ambitious plan. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CEM reiterates KAAC's

long stretch from 16 km to 52 km under the Asom Mala 3.1 scheme for 2025-26. The CEM further laid foundation stones for several additional road works under the Mukhya Mantrir Paki Path Nirman Achari (MMPPNA), also funded under RIDF-XXI of NABARD.

These include construction of roads from Upper Rangali to Rongteke, from Wophong Hanse to Sarthe Rongpi village, from Diring to Rashi Engli village along the CPDMDK route, from Kohora Ethnic Village to Kohora 6th Mile IB via Chandasing Rongpi village, from Kaziranga National Orchid Park to the CPDMDK road via Bakring Engli village, and a nine-kilometre stretch of the CPDMDK road up to Geleki village.

The Public Works Department Kohora Road Division, Dolamara, under the Executive Engineer, has been designated as the implementing agency for all the projects.

Later in the day, Ronghang attended a land patta distribution programme organised by the Land and Revenue Department of KAAC under the flagship scheme 'Purthimi Akemang 2.0'.

The programme was held at the Rongbonghat High School playground.

During the event, as many as 3,500 land pattas were distributed free of cost to selected beneficiaries belonging to indigenous tribal communities residing in Karbi Anglong.

The CEM said the initiative aims to secure land rights for indigenous people and strengthen their socio-economic security, while reaffirming the KAAC's commitment to inclusive development across the district.

UPPL delegation meets

effective implementation. They stressed that fulfilling the commitments of the accord in letter and spirit is essential to ensure peace, stability and inclusive development in the Bodoland region.

According to UPPL sources, Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured the delegation of all possible support from the Centre for the speedy and effective implementation of the BTR Accord.

The delegation comprised Rajya Sabha MP Rungvra Narzary, Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary, MLAs Lawrence Islay, Jolen Daimary and Bhupen Boro, UPPL general secretaries Raju Kumar Narzary and Madhab Chandra Chetry, and MCLAs Dhananjay Basumatary, Wilson Hasda and Mantu Boro.

Speaking after the meeting, UPPL president Pramod Boro said the discussion with the Union Home Minister was meaningful and focused on ensuring that all clauses of the BTR Accord are implemented fully.

He said the party appealed to Amit Shah to take decisive initiatives to honour the commitments made under the accord.

Boro added that the UPPL remains committed to ensuring equal rights, opportunities and dignity for all people in the BTR and beyond through comprehensive and sustainable development, rooted in the full realisation of the peace accord.

Assam asks 15

them as 'foreigners' from Bangladesh at different points of time. The order stated that the declared foreigners should 'remove themselves from the territory of Assam, India within 24 hours of receiving the order via the Dhubri/Sribhumi/South Salmara-Mankachar route'.

In the event of any default in complying with this order, the 'government would be compelled to take appropriate action to remove you from the territory of state of Assam, India', it stated.

The 15 people are identified as Anowara Begum, Asha Khatun, Hussain Ali, Rahim Sheikh, Burek Ali, Idris Ali, Nazrul Islam, Jahara Khatun, Abdul Aziz, Aheda Khatun, Azufa Khatun, Fazila Khatun, Rustom Ali, Anowar Khan and Taher Ali. (PTI)

Chief sculptor of Statue

citizens alike. My heartfelt condolences to his family, admirers and all who were touched by his remarkable life and work. Om Shanti," Modi said.

President Droupadi Murmu said Sutar's contributions enriched India's artistic and cultural heritage.

"His monumental works, including the Statue of Unity, stand as great symbols of India's enduring legacy. His art will continue to inspire generations of artists. I extend my deepest condolences to his family members and admirers," Murmu said. (PTI)

State to have

IOA annual conference, where he also spoke about the association's long-standing contribution to medical education, research and ethical practices since its inception in 1955.

He said platforms like IOACON have played a vital role in advancing specialised orthopaedic care and maintaining high standards of training and patient treatment in the country.

The programme was attended by IOA President Dr Ajit Sinde, IOACON 2025 President Dr D A Phukan, Secretary Dr Chimmay Das, Dr Anup Agarwal, other office-bearers of the association, delegates from across the country and distinguished guests.

Amit Shah to be

minister claimed that the complex is the largest in eastern India. Shah will then proceed to Borduwa, the birthplace of Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva, in Nagaon district, and inaugurate a project undertaken by the state government to develop it as a hub of art, culture and spiritualism, Sarma said.

Beginning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the state from December 20, several important national leaders will tour Assam, including the home minister, the CM added. (PTI)

PM's forthcoming visit

On Sunday morning, Modi will interact with 25 meritorious students of various schools in his programme 'Pariksha pe Charcha' for around half an hour while sailing on the River Brahmaputra aboard a cruise ship 'Charaideo', the CM said.

The Prime Minister has a weakness for the River Brahmaputra and a few years ago, when the Japanese Prime Minister was scheduled to visit Guwahati, a similar event had been planned, but the visit was cancelled,' he said.

The cruise along the river by the PM will lead to promotion of river tourism in the state just like his visit to Kaziranga last year and his subsequent posts on social media led to the arrival of record tourists to the national park, Sarma said.

"The PM's Kaziranga visit had led to a huge spike in tourist footfalls in the Park. We expect the same catalytic effect on river tourism in Assam when he takes a cruise on the Brahmaputra for Pariksha pe charcha," he added.

After the cruise, Modi will visit the newly constructed 'Swahid Smarak Kshetra' in memory of 860 martyrs of the Assam movement against illegal infiltrators, and offer his tributes before the lamp, which always remains lit.

The PM will also visit the martyrs' gallery, where the busts of the 860 people who lost their lives in the movement have been placed, and garland the statue of the first martyr Khageswar Talukdar.

He will then leave for Dibrugarh and from there to Namrup where he will do the 'Bhumi puja' of the ₹ 12,000 crore ammonia-urea fertiliser plant which marks substantial impetus to the state's growth and development.

The PM will also address a public meeting at Namrup before leaving for New Delhi, Sarma added. (PTI)

'Last seen together

The case dates back to June 2004. The prosecution had alleged that Manoj, along with five co-accused, killed one Yuvraj Singh Patle, a tractor driver, to steal the vehicle and sell it.

The deceased was found with burn injuries and ligature marks on his neck.

While the trial court acquitted the five other co-accused, Manoj was convicted under sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) of the Indian Penal Code, primarily based on the testimony of witnesses who saw him leaving with the deceased on the evening of June 6, 2004.

The Chhattisgarh High Court upheld his conviction in 2011. (PTI)

KFC launches 'Epic Feast' to add crunch to year-end celebrations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: As year-end festivities gather momentum, KFC has rolled out its special 'Epic Feast' offer to make celebrations with friends and family more indulgent and flavourful across the North-East.

Designed for group dining and sharing, the Epic Feast brings together some of KFC's most popular offerings, including its signature Hot & Crispy Chicken, juicy Boneless Chicken Strips, crispy fries, chilled Pepsi and a selection of flavourful dips.

The brand says the combination is aimed at chicken lovers looking to enjoy a complete and satisfying festive meal.

Priced starting at ₹1,299, the Epic Feast is available for dine-in and takeaway across KFC outlets in the North-East.

The limited-period offer will be valid till January 4, 2026, making it a festive option for celebrations through the New Year.

KFC has also encouraged customers to use its mobile app for added convenience.

Customers can pre-order through the KFC app while dining in, helping them skip waiting time and enjoy their meals without delay.

With the launch of the Epic Feast, KFC aims to add a crunchy and memorable touch to year-end celebrations, inviting customers to close the year on a 'finger lickin' good' note.

Airtel Payments Bank enables EV wallet recharges via Bharat Connect Platform

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Airtel Payments Bank, in partnership with NPCI Bharat BillPay Limited, has enabled electric vehicle (EV) wallet recharges through the Bharat Connect (BBPS) platform on the Airtel Thanks app, marking a significant step toward simplifying digital payments in India's growing EV ecosystem.

Until now, EV owners had to rely on individual wallets provided by different Charging Point Operators (CPOs) to make payments for vehicle charging.

With the introduction of the EV Recharge category, Airtel Payments Bank now allows customers to directly top up their EV wallets through the Airtel Thanks app, making the process seamless, instant and interoperable across platforms.

To use the service, customers can log in to the Airtel Thanks app, select the "Recharge EV" option under the Pay Bills section, enter their registered mobile number along with the desired recharge amount, and complete the payment securely via Bharat Connect-enabled applications.

The recharge amount is credited instantly to the EV wallet, ensuring immediate access to funds for charging.

Stock markets decline for 4th day on weak global trends, trade deal uncertainty

MUMBAI, Dec 18: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday amid a muted trend in global markets and uncertainty over a trade deal with the US.

Falling for the fourth day, the 30-share BSE Sensex shed 77.84 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 84,481.81 in a volatile session. During the day, it moved between a high of 84,780.19 and a low of 84,238.43, gyrating 541.76 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty ended flat, skidding 3 points or 0.01 per cent to 25,815.55. After a muted start, the Nifty attempted a recovery during the first half but failed to sustain higher levels later in the day.

Losses in energy, auto and pharma shares dragged indices down, while gains in IT shares helped trim losses. Select buying in financials and metals also aided recovery in the pre-close session.

Among Sensex firms, Sun Pharma declined the most by 2.74 per cent. Tata Steel fell by 1.26 per cent, Power Grid by 1.15 per cent and Asian Paints by 0.89 per cent. HDFC Bank, L&T, NTPC and Bharti Airtel were also among the laggards.

However, Tata Consultancy Services jumped 1.94 per cent, Tech Mahindra by 1.74 per cent

ing. The facility is available to all Airtel Thanks app users, offering a convenient and secure experience.

Ganesh Ananthanarayanan, Executive Director - Business Operations, Airtel Payments Bank, said the initiative reflects the bank's continued focus on digital-first innovations aimed at improving everyday customer experiences.

He said the EV wallet recharge feature supports India's expanding EV ecosystem while providing users with a fast, safe and hassle-free method to manage their charging payments.

Noopur Charurvedi, Chief Executive Officer of NPCI Bharat BillPay Limited, said the partnership with Airtel Payments Bank will play an important role in advancing EV adoption in the country.

She noted that enabling interoperable and convenient payments across platforms will help build a future-ready digital payments infrastructure that supports India's transition toward green mobility.

The launch is expected to enhance ease of use for EV owners and contribute to the broader push for sustainable transportation through efficient digital payment solutions.



cent), capital goods (0.80 per cent), utilities (0.75 per cent) and industrials (0.66 per cent).

However, BSE Focused IT jumped 1.24 per cent and Information Technology climbed 1.10 per cent. Services (0.79 per cent), realty (0.33 per cent) and financial services (0.13 per cent) also advanced.

"Indian equity markets staged a smart recovery from the day's lows despite broad weakness across Asian equities. However, mild selling pressure emerged at higher levels, prompting cautious traders to pare positions ahead of the release of US consumer price inflation data," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Wednesday as they bought equities worth ₹ 1,171.71 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth ₹ 768.94 crore in the previous trade.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.42 per cent to USD 59.93 per barrel.

On Wednesday, the Sensex edged lower by 120.21 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at 84,559.65. The Nifty declined by 41.55 points or 0.16 per cent to 25,818.55. (PTI)

CONSTRUCTION OF TRACK MACHINE SIDING

Tender Notice No.: TSK/Elect/215, Dated: 16-12-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
SN-1; Tender No.: LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-09. Brief Description of Item : Electrical (TRD) work in connection with construction of track machine siding at 6 stations-Furkating Jn., Mariani Jn., Simaluguri Jn., Sapekhati and New Tinsukia station. **Tender Value: ₹1,41,77,947.27/-; Earnest Money: ₹2,20,900/-; SN-2; Tender No.: LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-10.** Brief Description of Item : Electrical (TRD) work in connection with construction of track machine siding at 8 stations-Boginadi, Bordolani, Sripani, Silapathar, Simen Chapari, Laimekuri, Murkongselek and Numaligarh Station. **Tender Value: ₹59,61,628.05/-; Earnest Money: ₹1,39,200/-.** Date & time of closing of above tenders at 13:00 hrs and opening at 15:00 hrs on 07-01-2026. Complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 13:00 hrs on 07-01-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (Elect./TRD), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

Nagaon district administration issues expulsion directive

15 declared foreigners told to leave Assam within 24 hours

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 18: The Nagaon district administration has directed 15 individuals, who have been declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunal, Assam, to leave the state within 24 hours.

According to official sources, the individuals have been instructed to exit Assam through designated routes at Dhubri, Sribhumi or South Salmara-Mankachar. The order has been issued following their declaration as foreigners by the competent tribunal.

Those directed to leave include Zahura Khatun, daughter of Riaz Uddin of Kandhulimari village under Dhing police station; Abdul Aziz, son of Abdul Ali of Hedayat Nagar under Nagaon police station; Waheda Khatun, wife of Atab Uddin of Bogariguri village under Juria police station; Ajufa Khatun, wife of Abdul Kalam of Garematkhowa village under Rupahihat police station; Hussein Ali, son of Abdul Latif of Dighaliati village under Raha police station; Fazila Khatun, wife of Umar Ali of Hatju-



juwa village under Jajari police station; Anura Begum, wife of Kalam Ali of Lenteng village under Samaguri police station; Asha

Khatun, wife of Halilur Rahman of Salabari village under Samaguri police station; Nazrul Islam, son of Abdul Latif of Cha-

parmukh town under Raha police station; Rahim Sheikh, son of Baju of Dighaliati village under Raha police station; Borek Ali, son of Wazuddin Sheikh of Dighaliati village under Raha police station; Idris Ali, son of Samar Ali of Raha town under Raha police station; Rustam Ali, son of Jabar Ali of Pach Hatigaon Tea Estate under Kaliabor police station; Anowar Khan, son of Kurban Khan of Garubandha village under Jakhala-bandha police station; and Taber Ali, son of Abdul Hussain of Garalmari village under Uluwani police station.

The district administration has warned that failure to comply with the directive within the stipulated time will result in forced expulsion under the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950.

The order further stated that the names of the declared foreigners will be removed from the electoral rolls, their ration cards will be cancelled, Aadhaar cards will be frozen and all government social security benefits will be withdrawn with immediate effect, sources added.

Illegal livestock transport foiled at Jagiroad, one arrested

35 cattle rescued during police operation on NH-27

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Dec 18: Jagiroad police, acting on a tip-off, arrested a man and rescued 35 cattle that were being illegally transported on National Highway 27 at Palahguri under Jagiroad police station in Morigaon district this morning.

The incident occurred at around 7 AM when police intercepted a vehicle bearing registration number AS 01 TC 8355. The arrested person has been identified as Jainuddin of Rupahi in Nagaon district. According to police sources, the cattle were being transported from Rupahi to Meghalaya via NH-27 in violation of the Livestock Transport Act.

After completing necessary formalities, the police handed over the rescued cattle to Jyoti Go-Sala in Nagaon for safety and care.

It may be mentioned that earlier on December 13, the police had also rescued nine cattle being illegally transported and apprehended one accused in a similar operation.

KLTs and KMTs in Karbi Anglong receive long-awaited salaries

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 18: After months of anticipation, Karbi Language Teachers (KLTs) and Karbi Medium Teachers (KMTs) across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong have finally begun receiving their monthly salaries under the Roles of Payment (ROP) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) through the Karbi Language Development Board (KLDB).

Out of 862 KLTs and KMTs, 338 teachers who have been regularised received their November salary of ₹ 32,430 with payments for August, September and October 2025 also set to follow.

KLTs are appointed to teach the Karbi subject in government schools, while KMTs instruct students in Karbi Medium Schools. Since their appointments, many teachers had raised concerns about meager salaries insufficient to support their families and had repeatedly requested KAAC for regularisation and payment as per ROP.

The Karbi Language Teachers Association (KLTA) expressed

gratitude to Chief Executive Member (CEM) Dr Tuluram Ronghang for his support in ensuring the teachers' salaries were regularised and paid. KLTA Secretary Khonson Bey stated, "CEM Dr Tuluram Ronghang has truly shown his commitment to the development and promotion of the Karbi language by regularising the services of KLTs and KMTs."

Receiving regular salaries is expected to provide economic stability for the teachers and enable them to focus more effectively on educating children. They also acknowledged the contributions of several officials, including Executive Member (EM) Rechar Tokbi, MP Amarsing Tisso, various MLAs and EMs, Principal Secretary Mukul Kumar Saikia, Additional Secretary Nirupama Timungpi, KLDB officers and other stakeholders for their support.

The KLTA further thanked DIET Principal Kakrai Teronpi, KLTA office bearers and other members for their joint efforts in advocating for the salaries of KLTs and KMTs.

Protesters in Kheroni invited for talks after 11-day hunger strike

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 18: Protesters in Phelangpi, Kheroni (West Karbi Anglong), who have been staging an "unto-death" hunger strike demanding eviction from village grazing reserve and professional grazing reserve land, have finally received an invitation from authorities for talks regarding their demands.

After an eleven-day-long hunger strike, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) sent a delegation to the protest site and handed over the invitation letter to the protesters. While the invitation signals willingness from the authorities to engage, the protesters have stated that their hunger strike will continue until the discussions actually take place.

'Your Money, Your Rights' campaign in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 18: Under the guidelines of the Department of Financial Services, Government of India, district-level awareness and assistance camps on the Depositor Education and Awareness Fund (DEA Fund) are being organised across Assam as part of the "Your Money, Your Rights" public awareness campaign. These camps will continue to be held in various districts of the state in a phased manner till December 31, 2025.

The camps are being organised under the leadership of the respective District Collectors and the guidance of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Assam, through the Lead Bank of

each district. The programme will witness the participation of all banks, insurance companies, pension departments, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF).

According to SLBC, Assam, a special district-level camp will be organised in Kokrajhar district on December 19 under the supervision of the District Collector and the Lead District Manager. The camp will be held from 10 AM to 6 PM at the conference hall of the office of the Block Development Officer (BDO), Kokrajhar.

During the camp, assistance counters will be set up to help citizens claim unclaimed bank de-

posits, insurance claims, dividends, shares and mutual fund investments. Beneficiaries and claimants will also receive support for Know Your Customer (KYC) updates, filling up claim forms and verification of necessary documents.

An appeal has been made to the residents of Kokrajhar district to participate in large numbers and take advantage of this public welfare initiative of the Government of India. Through this campaign, the State Level Bankers' Committee, Assam has reiterated its commitment to enhancing public awareness about depositors' and investors' rights and ensuring easy access to rightful financial benefits.

Unlicensed seed shops shut amid farmers' complaints in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 18: The Agriculture Department has launched a crackdown on the sale of spurious agricultural seeds in Nagaon district following allegations of large-scale circulation of fake seeds that have allegedly duped farmers.

A team led by the District Agriculture Officer conducted raids in various markets, including Shantian Bazaar and shut down several shops found selling agricultural seeds without valid licences. Officials warned that stern action would be taken against dealers involved in the illegal sale of seeds.

Meanwhile, farmers alleged that the issuance of licences to unqualified persons had aided the spurious seed racket. They demanded strict action against officials responsible for granting licences to such unqualified dealers, stating that the practice has caused significant losses to farmers in the district.

Couple died in road accident on NH-37

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 18: A husband and wife were killed in a tragic road accident at Rupohimukh on National Highway 37 near Gaurisagar early this morning. The deceased have been identified as Bipul Hatimuria (51) and his wife Namita Chetia (31).

The accident occurred around 5.30 AM when the Hyundai Xcent car (AS-04 AJ 863) in which the family was travelling collided head-on with a dumper bearing registration number HR 39 F 2359. The couple died on the spot due to the impact of the collision.

Their two-year-old son Riyans and the driver of the car, identified as Arunjoy Seal, sustained serious injuries in the accident and were rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment. Their condition was reported to be critical.

Cadets from Uttar Pradesh and NE states celebrate unity in diversity

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 18: The NER Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB I) Camp, organised at Missamari Cantonment in Sonitpur district, culminated on Thursday with the departure of cadets from their respective states, marking the successful conclusion of a vibrant cultural and national integration programme.

The camp, which commenced on December 8, brought together 560 NCC cadets from Uttar Pradesh and various North Eastern states. It aimed at fostering national integration, mutual respect and cultural inclusivity among youth through shared experiences and collaborative activities.

Held amidst the scenic and culturally rich environment of Assam, the camp provided a dynamic platform for cadets to engage with India's diverse traditions while strengthening bonds of unity, discipline and camaraderie. Throughout the duration of the camp, cadets participated in a wide range of activities, including cultural competitions and heritage showcases, designed to promote understanding and appreciation of the country's pluralistic identity.

Cultural programmes featuring solo and group songs, folk and classical dances and thematic performances highlighted the unique traditions of Uttar Pradesh and the North Eastern states, reflecting the true spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat. These interactions enabled cadets to move beyond geographical boundaries and develop a deeper understanding of each other's customs, languages and ways of life.

Educational visits to military units, local tea estates and the historic Agnigarh Park in Tezpur further enriched the cadets' exposure to Assam's heritage, strategic importance and socio-economic landscape. Emphasis was also laid on discipline, safety, security, teamwork and leadership, reinforcing the core values of the National Cadet Corps.

As the cadets return to their home states, they carry with them lasting memories, strengthened friendships and a renewed sense of national pride and responsibility. The successful conduct of the EBSB NCC Camp once again highlighted the NCC's vital role in nurturing unity in diversity and shaping socially conscious and culturally aware citizens.

Sonitpur DC, SSP inspect encroached compensatory afforestation land

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 18: A team of government officials led by Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kr Das on Wednesday visited the encroached areas of land earmarked for compensatory afforestation of Burha Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary under Sonitpur district.

The inspection team included the Superintendent of Police, Sonitpur, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue), Sonitpur, Divisional Forest Officer of Nagaon Wildlife Sanctuary and Circle Officers of Tezpur, Thelamara and Dhekiajuli, along with their respective staff.

During the visit, it was found that around 6,200 bighas of land, which had already been allocated for compensatory afforestation of Burha Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary, is currently under illegal occupation. The encroached land has been used for constructing dwelling houses and for agricultural activities.



Officials stated that earlier, based on joint verification carried out by revenue circle offices and forest department officials, notices had been served to the encroachers directing them to vacate the government land. However, even after nearly one month since the notices were issued, the encroachers have

failed to vacate the land. In view of the situation, the District Commissioner, along with his team, visited the area to assess the ground reality. During the inspection, the DC interacted with the encroachers and urged them to vacate the land allotted for compensatory afforestation at the earliest.

KKHSOU organises eye screening camp in Andherijuli village



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) organised an eye screening camp on Thursday in collaboration with Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya, Guwahati, at Andherijuli (Para) village under the Rani Development Block. The village is one of the adopted villages of KKHSOU, reflecting the university's ongoing commitment to community welfare and inclusive outreach.

The camp was held at the local LP School, aiming

to provide preventive and curative eye care services while raising awareness about eye health, hygiene and the importance of timely medical intervention. A medical team of nine optometrists and two supervisors from Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya conducted comprehensive eye screenings and consultations for the villagers.

Under the initiative, ration card holders diagnosed with cataract will receive free cataract surgery at Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya, along with complimentary transportation to and from the hospital, facilitated by the hospital authorities as part of their community outreach programme.

During the camp, optometrist Angshuman Baruah emphasised the importance of regular eye screening and early intervention to prevent vision-related complications and improve quality of life. Out of 51 villagers screened, 15 were diagnosed with cataract.

The camp was coordinated by Dr Bhaskar Bhatnagar, Chairperson of the Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission, along with Dr Trisha Dowerah Baruah and Chayan Kakati, coordinators of Andherijuli (Para) village on behalf of KKHSOU. The successful organisation of the camp underscores the university's efforts to integrate social responsibility with educational outreach for the holistic development of rural communities.

Bhogeswar Baruah honoured with Padmanath Gohain Barua Memorial Award

Asomiya Club confers first-ever award on veteran sports icon in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 18: The century-old Asomiya Club of Tezpur on Tuesday conferred, for the first time, the Sahitya Kandari Padmanath Gohain Barua Memorial Award on Arjuna awardee and veteran sports icon Bhogeswar Baruah at a solemn function held on the occasion of the 154th birth anniversary of eminent litterateur, educationist and social reformer Padmanath Gohain Barua.

Padmanath Gohain Barua, the first president of the Asam Sahitya Sabha and a pioneer of physical culture in Assam, authored the seminal work Deshi Kacharat in 1904 and was regarded as a leading educationist of his time. The award, instituted in his memory to honour outstanding contributions to literature, culture, theatre and sports, comprised a citation, a memento, a traditional gamosa, an eri shawl, a fulam japi and a cash prize of ₹ 50,000.

The award was presented to the 86-year-old Bhogeswar Baruah by office-bearers of the Asomiya Club, including president Aruna Devi, vice-president Pankaj Kumar Bora, secretary Anu Devi Mahanta, joint secretaries Narayan Borthakur and Bhupen Sarma and former secretary Chittadev Sarma, among others. Several organisations, including Baan Theatre, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha, Padmanath Gohain Barua Branch Sahitya Sabha, Tezpur District Sports Association and various district-level sports bodies, also felicitated Baruah on the occasion.

Receiving the honour, Bhogeswar Baruah recalled moments from his sporting career and said an inner, almost divine, strength had often guided him during crucial competitions against national and international opponents. He urged young athletes to pursue sports with discipline and dedication, pointing out that the present generation enjoys far better platforms and facilities. He also expressed his willingness to con-



tinue training young sportspersons and concluded his address by singing a line from a Bihu song, drawing warm applause from the audience.

Delivering the keynote lecture on "Padmanath Gohain Barua's Contribution as an Educationist", distinguished author and North Lakhimpur University faculty member Dr Arabintha Rajkhowa described Padmanath Gohain Barua as Assam's first educationist in the true sense. He highlighted Gohain Barua's pioneering role in textbook writing, teacher training and children's literature, noting that Shikshabidhi was the first teacher-training manual written in Assamese. Dr Rajkhowa also called for renewed efforts to publish the second volume of Gohain Barua's collected works.

Earlier, Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha president Santanu Barua outlined the objectives of the Padmanath Gohain Barua Birth Anniversary Celebration Committee, jointly formed by six leading cultural organisations of Tezpur. In her welcome address, Asomiya Club

president Aruna Devi said the memorial award would be presented biennially to individuals who have made exceptional contributions to society.

The programme began with the rendition of a group song composed by Padmanath Gohain Barua, conducted by his grandson, noted musician Sanjay Krishna Gohain Barua. A documentary titled Kandari Padmanath, written by Santanu Barua and directed by theatre artiste Bhupen Sarma, was also staged, featuring performances by actors Ujjal Saikia and Biplab Sarma.

At the outset, Bhogeswar Baruah unveiled a full-length portrait of Padmanath Gohain Barua created by renowned artist Mrigen Kalita. Members of the Gohain Barua family, including Pori Gohain Barua, Uday Krishna Gohain Barua and Sanjay Krishna Gohain Barua, paid floral tributes to the portrait. The vote of thanks and brief introductions of the awardee and the keynote speaker were delivered by Anu Devi Mahanta and Dr Pallab Bhattacharyya, secretary of the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, respectively.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Positive anything is better than negative nothing.
- Elbert Hubbard

Political heat rises in Bengal

With the publication of Draft Electoral Rolls on December 16, 2025, political heat has considerably risen in West Bengal which is going to poll three months from now in March-April 2026. Over 58 lakh names have been deleted from the existing voter list during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in the state. The ruling TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee is miffed over the deletion and has asked the party rank and file to carry out fresh door-to-door scrutiny of the deleted names. As of October 27, 2025, when the SIR process was announced by the Election Commission of India, there were 7.6 crore voters on the electoral rolls. SIR process began on November 4. Out of them 7.08 crore (92.4%) voters had submitted the enumeration forms whose names are included in the draft voter list. It resulted in deletion of the names of over 58 lakh voters. With the publication of the draft voter list, the claims and objection period has begun from December 16, 2025, which will end on January 15, 2026. During this period any existing or prospective elector may file claims or objections for inclusion of eligible electors or deletion of ineligible names. The verification phase will end on February 7. The final rolls will be published on February 14.

It is well known that after Bihar, PM Narendra Modi's election machinery is focusing on West Bengal, throw the ruling TMC out of power from the state. TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee has been Chief Minister of the State since May 20, 2011. This is her third term as chief Minister, and she seems well set to retain power for the fourth consecutive term. Nevertheless, the SIR exercise has created considerable tension in TMC leadership and its rank and file, chiefly on account of the alleged large scale deletion of voters who are believed to be her support base, especially from among the minority Muslim community. BJP has been campaigning in the state for quite some time that she has been protecting illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators, and many of them have been able to get their name listed as voters in the state.

Mamata Banerjee has said that no valid voter's name should be deleted under any circumstances, and every deleted name must be physically verified by the party workers. TMC leaders and workers have thus started verifying the deleted voters who have been marked "dead", "shifted", or absent by the poll panel. ECI officials have said that enumeration forms were printed for all voters and delivered door-to-door by booth-level officers (BLOs). They said that whoever submitted signed forms, even if partially filled, their names have been retained in the draft list, though their details will be subject to further verification. Significant number of voters have been flagged during the SIR process. This is the primary reason of rising tension among voters and political parties.

Knowing how British used missionary as its most trusted weapon to consolidate its empire in India

By: Er Rajesh Pathak

The incidents of religious conversion, love jihad are continued to be fast increasing. The experiences world over tell that the conversion breeds the tendency of de-nationalisation ultimately among the converted. This is, notably, no less tantamount to be waging a war against the country. The things have come to a point now when this must be brought under the purview of UAPA [Unlawful Activities (Prevention Act)] treating it to be the sheer act of sedition. However, this is not possible, for now the act of conversion doesn't fall under the unlawful activity. This Supreme court advocate Shri Kumble said in the preface of symposium 'Dharma Swatantra Vidhyakavyam Janjati Samaj' organised on the occasion of 'Samvidhan Diwas' in Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad headquarter at Bhopal.

In the event prominently attended by the advocates, awoman speaker of repute engaged in the legal profession drew the attention to the fact that no country in the world declares itself not to be the religious. It is only India that feels proud to be secular country. Ghar-Vapsi or coming back to the Hindu fold is no act of conversion, she added. Whereas in the event of deceptive conversion of a Hindu there is a clear provision of prosecution in the Judiciary on the report lodged; true, if done willingly, it is no crime. But 60 days prior to the execution of the act, the district collector must be made informed. In the case of lack of information everybody would be liable to fall under the law.

Intending to convert Hindus where Muslim invaders targeted city; sothe Church, the village in the dense forests. From the queen Victoria that the East India company acquired the permission for 20 years to bring about the religious conversion in India. More so, to secure its rule in India intact the British took the conversion for a most trusted weapon. In 1813 in its charter the British government, thus, made the provision for the full government facility for padresand fathers laced with evangelical order reaching India. The remote land with dense forest resided by the innocent tribals where missionary chose to operate, the entry was completely made prohibited there for the others. Holding this a ground, as the country got liberated, they filed a petition in the court against the government starting its schools in the tribal region. As the time went on and the things got worse the first Chief Minister of undivided Madhya Pradesh, Pandit Ravi Shanker Shukla formed the Niyogi Commission instituting the inquiry against the network of conversion. This the chief guest, the former Justice and RSS Sangchalak of Madhya Bharat Prant, Ashokji Pandey told in his address to audiences.

In 2002 in Vatican Church, Ashok Pandey went on adding, ensured that where the people are to be converted into Christianity the missionary has to adopt the ways of life prevailed there. From here only the term 'Crypto' came into being. And from here that the distortion of Vedic mantra went whole hog under the active guidance of grand nexus of different entities of different hues evolved by the missionaries. Quoting the Vedic mantra, 'Oum ishavyasamidarsaryatkinchajagatyam-jagat'. 'Tayen tyaktenbhunjita gruddhkasysivddhanam.' they resorted to preach that it means whole world belongs to Isha Masih!

Nobody knows since when such self-destructive things have been happening, it's different matter though that we couldn't discern them in our slumber, sunk deep in the concern for our prestige, progress and hurdles of the personal life. As such when some have dream in the eyes to bring about Gazva-e-Hind in Bharat; when some have the dream in the eyes to see bible in every hand, and church in every piece of land then this could be fought back only by getting united through imbibing social harmony, keeping the interest of country above all. Saying so as an end note that Ashokji Pandey finished his speech.

The economics of Assam's Tea industry and its future prospects

The element most deeply and inseparably linked with Assam's geographical identity, cultural heritage, and social existence is undoubtedly "tea". Tea cultivation is not confined merely to an ordinary agricultural crop; over time, it has become the backbone of Assam's economy, the foundation of social stability, and a symbol of our pride in the global arena. A profound, theoretical, and impartial analysis is urgently needed of the historic and contemporary role that the tea industry has played in the state's industrial development, current employment statistics, infrastructure building, and its position in international trade.

In the mid-nineteenth century, when British colonial rulers initiated commercial tea cultivation in Assam, it later transformed into a colossal enterprise. Though in its initial phase the industry served only as a tool for foreign powers to extract profit through economic exploitation, after independence it gradually emerged as the primary driving force of Assam's own economy. The soil acidity, rainfall pattern, and humid climate of Assam are so ideally suited for tea that the world has few places that can produce tea of comparable excellence. Using this natural advantage as capital, modern Assam's economy has taken shape. When analysing the foundation of any state or country's economy, it becomes clear that all other sectors depend on the stability of the primary or agricultural sector. In a state like Assam, where the rate of industrialisation remains relatively low and agriculture is the mainstay, tea gardens stand alone as the only organised agro-industry. Unlike rice or other crops that provide income only during specific seasons, tea is a permanent and continuous economic process through which financial transactions, wage payments, and production cycles continue throughout the year. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that tea gardens have built the bridge connecting rural economy with urban commercial centres.

In every small and large tea garden of the state, hundreds and thousands of workers, staff, technicians, and officers remain employed. One distinctive feature of this industry is its labour-intensive character. While mechanisation has increased and human requirement decreased in many modern industries, skilled human hands still have no substitute for plucking high-quality tea leaves. This necessity is an economic blessing for a densely populated state like Assam. The daily livelihood, children's education, and future dreams of lakhs of permanent and temporary workers employed in the gardens are hidden among the green leaves of the tea bushes. Not only permanent workers but also seasonal or "extra" workers earn during the peak period an income that secures their financial stability for the entire year. Even when recession prevails in other sectors of the state, the wheels of tea gardens keep turning, providing the working class with a reliable source of income. Another important and positive aspect of employment in tea gardens is women's participation. The tea industry is perhaps the only organised sector in the world where the number of female workers is almost equal to, or sometimes greater than, that of men. Women who go to the gardens at dawn with baskets on their backs are not merely labourers; each is an independent pillar of the rural economy. Economic theory states that when a woman earns, the money is utilised most effectively for family nutrition, education, and health improvement. A portion of male earnings may sometimes be spent on non-essential items, but money earned by women directly raises the family's standard of living. Through tea gardens, lakhs of rural women in Assam have gained economic independence, quietly triggering a revolution in women's empowerment within the social structure. Their purchasing power determines demand in local markets and indirectly fuels economic development.

The employment and income generated by the tea industry do not remain confined within garden boundaries or workers' lines; their impact spreads across society and the entire state. In economic terminology, this is called the "multiplier effect". The economic cycle centred on a single garden is enormous. The weekly or fortnightly wages received by garden workers and staff are not hoarded but spent on daily necessities in local markets. As a result, small and large shops, weekly haats, and business establishments spring up around garden entrances and nearby areas. Thus, money flowing from the tea industry creates immense purchasing power in the rural economy. If we imagine all Assam's tea gardens shutting down for even one day, rural markets would instantly become lifeless. Local vegetable sellers, fish traders, cloth merchants, and grocery shop owners—all depend directly or indirectly on the money in tea workers' hands. Therefore, it would be wrong to regard tea gardens merely as centres of tea production; in reality, they are the heartbeat of the rural economy, continuously maintaining the flow of money.

As a source of government revenue, the contribution of the tea industry is by no means small; rather, it remains one of the state's primary own-revenue sources. The Assam government collects taxes from the tea industry in various forms. A large portion of agricultural income tax—an exclusive state subject—comes from tea gardens. Additionally, cess on green leaf, land revenue, and various duties on sold tea generate hundreds of crores of rupees annually for the government treasury. This revenue enables the government to implement developmental works such as road construction, running schools and colleges, and welfare schemes for people below the



The economic importance of the tea industry is not limited to profit-loss figures; it possesses a vast social economy. Historically, garden managements have provided housing, medical care, rations, and education for workers. Though the quality of these facilities remains debatable, economically they have borne a huge burden of social security that would otherwise fall on the state government

poverty line. In international trade too, Assam tea brings both prestige and foreign exchange to the country. CTC and orthodox tea produced in Assam enjoy demand worldwide. It is exported directly or through various channels to countries including the United Kingdom, Germany, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Japan, and the United States. The foreign exchange earned through these exports strengthens India's reserves and indirectly helps maintain the value of the rupee in international markets.

The establishment of the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre and its continuous growth represent a golden chapter in Assam's economic history. This centre has not only facilitated tea sales but elevated Assam into a global hub of tea trade. Earlier, Assam had to depend on Kolkata or London for tea auctions, depriving the state of taxes and business benefits. After the Guwahati centre was set up, financial transactions, banking, insurance, and warehousing related to tea took root on Assam's soil. Thousands of educated youth found employment as brokers, tasters, and logistics managers. The huge transactions at the auction centre directly boost the state's gross domestic product. The recent introduction of digital e-auctions has made the process more transparent and faster, enabling buyers from any corner of the world to purchase tea from Guwahati. This has given Assam's business sector a modern character.

Over the past two to three decades, an unprecedented and revolutionary change has occurred in Assam's tea economy—the rapid rise of "small tea growers". Traditionally, tea cultivation evoked images of vast gardens owned by big capitalists or multinational companies. Yet, starting from the 1990s, this new trend completely transformed the face of rural Assam's economy. Thousands of educated unemployed youth across Upper and Lower Assam chose self-reliance by planting tea on ancestral or purchased land instead of chasing jobs. Currently, small tea growers contribute roughly fifty per cent or more of Assam's total tea production. From an economic perspective, this is not merely a statistic of increased production; it is the democratisation of economic power and wealth. Previously, profits from the tea industry were concentrated in the hands of a few large companies or families, but now that money flows to thousands of ordinary families across the state. This process has given birth to a strong rural middle class whose purchasing power and investment capacity positively impacts the entire state economy.

The rise of small tea cultivation has benefited not only the growers; it has spawned a new industrial ecosystem. Hundreds of "bought-leaf factories" that purchase green leaf and process tea have emerged across the state, most owned by local entrepreneurs. This has led to local capital formation and the growth of entrepreneurial mindset. Transportation, repair, and supply chains have developed around these factories. The sight of small trucks carrying green leaf proves how thousands of drivers and labourers have found livelihood in the transport sector. Thus, small tea growers have brought a "silent revolution" to Assam's economy, playing a more effective role than the government in solving unemployment.

The economic reach of the tea industry is so vast that it does not exist in isolation; it sustains numerous ancillary industries for its own survival and growth. Fertilisers and pesticides needed for tea bushes have created a huge agro-chemical market in the state. Workshops repair and supply machinery and dryers required in factories. In the energy sector too, the industry's contribution is noteworthy. The enormous demand for electricity, coal, and natural gas to run factories provides assured revenue to energy producers. A significant portion of the business of Assam Gas Company and electricity distribution companies depends on tea gardens. The packaging industry is also intimately linked to tea. Sacks, paper packets, and plastic wrappers needed for export

employ thousands. At one time, Assam's plywood industry depended on tea chests; though the medium has changed, packaging remains crucial. This interdependence strengthens the state's industrial infrastructure.

In Assam, "tea tourism" is a highly promising sector. The natural beauty of Assam's

tea gardens, their carpet-like green vistas, and the colonial-era heritage bungalows attract domestic and foreign tourists like a magnet. Modern tourists seek not just sights but experiences. Spending nights amid gardens, plucking leaves firsthand, and witnessing tea processing offer unique experiences. Government-private partnerships have created "tea resorts" and "heritage bungalows" that successfully attract high-value tourists. This tourism stream opens new income avenues in rural economy. Local youth earn as guides, drivers, or in hospitality services. Traditional food, textiles, and handicrafts displayed to tourists benefit local artisans. Tea tourism not only generates revenue but enhances Assam's "brand value" globally, bringing long-term economic benefits.

The economic importance of the tea industry is not limited to profit-loss figures; it possesses a vast social economy. Historically, garden managements have provided housing, medical care, rations, and education for workers. Though the quality of these facilities remains debatable, economically they have borne a huge burden of social security that would otherwise fall on the state government. Garden hospitals in remote areas serve not only workers but neighbouring villagers in emergencies. Only a healthy worker can contribute maximally to production; hence expenditure on health and nutrition should be regarded as investment. Garden schools have helped raise primary literacy rates. This human resource development later enhances the state's economic productivity. The present government's efforts to establish high schools in garden areas and expand banking services, thereby integrating these communities more actively into the mainstream economy, are certainly welcome.

Like any economic sector, Assam's tea industry currently faces several complex challenges whose resolution is essential for its future security. Climate change is no longer merely an environmental issue; it has become a critical economic crisis. Erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and rising temperatures have reduced tea bushes' productivity and increased pest and disease incidence, thereby raising production costs. Meanwhile, intense competition from countries like Kenya and Sri Lanka sometimes prevents Assam tea from fetching fair prices in the global market. Caught between rising costs and falling prices, many gardens have fallen into financial distress. When a garden closes or declares a lock-out, the livelihood of thousands is endangered and recession grips the entire region. To counter this, scientific methods must replace traditional practices. Only through irrigation, mechanisation, and advanced research—reducing costs while maintaining quality—can the industry survive in the global market.

The changing currents of market economy demand radical changes in branding and marketing strategies. The old mindset of merely selling bulk tea in sacks must give way to emphasis on "value addition". Today's health-conscious consumers are willing to pay premium prices for quality. Demand is rising for organic tea, green tea, white tea, orthodox tea, and other specialty varieties. Many enterprising youth and small garden owners in Assam have seized this opportunity by packaging tea under their own brands and selling domestically and abroad. This not only increases profit margins but reduces middlemen's exploitation. Through the internet and e-commerce, tea can now be sold directly from a small Assam village to American customers. This digital revolution has brought new hope to Assam's tea economy.

Research and development constitute the lifeblood of any industry. In this regard, the

role of the Tocklai Tea Research Institute in Jorhat is economically vital. This century-old institution sustains the industry by solving cultivation problems, developing higher-yielding clones, and inventing new processing technologies. When research increases production or reduces losses, the benefit directly accrues to the economy. Moreover, research into tea's medicinal properties has elevated it from a mere beverage to a "wellness product", expanding market scope. Greater investment in this field will yield benefits that Assam's economy will reap. New technologies make the industry environmentally friendly and cost-effective, ensuring long-term economic gains.

Another promising aspect of Assam's tea industry is crop diversification or multi-crop agriculture. Instead of depending solely on tea, growers are increasingly cultivating black pepper, lemon, betel nut, and other spices in vacant spaces or under shade trees. This increases income sources and maintains economic balance even when tea markets slump. Beekeeping and fish farming are also feasible in garden environments. This multi-crop model can transform gardens into agro-industrial hubs. Especially for small tea growers, this approach is highly profitable as it ensures higher earnings from limited land. Such diversified farming not only protects farmers from market fluctuations but maintains year-round cash flow.

When people worldwide speak of "Assam tea", the respect and interest they show is an invaluable intangible asset for us. By leveraging this "brand equity", Assam can promote not only tea but other products in global markets. After receiving the Geographical Indication tag, the uniqueness of Assam orthodox tea has gained international recognition. This enables genuine Assam tea to command its rightful price and prestige amid counterfeit varieties. Such recognition also encourages investors to come to Assam. At various trade conferences, the government uses tea as a major attraction, improving the state's overall industrial climate. The international relationships built through tea also open doors for cultural diplomacy.

In conclusion, any discussion of Assam's economy remains incomplete without tea. The lives, livelihoods, dreams, and future of lakhs of people in the state are fused with these green leaves. Tea is not merely trade or commerce; it is an inseparable part of Assamese social life. From government policy formulation to private-sector investment, rural development to international trade—tea's influence is omnipresent. Yet the industry cannot survive solely on past glory; present challenges and future possibilities must be correctly identified and pursued. A coordinated effort incorporating modern technology, improved marketing strategies, and worker welfare is required to adapt to changing circumstances. Only if the tea industry remains healthy will Assam's rural economy grow strong, and only with a strong rural economy can overall state development become possible. Therefore, protecting and enhancing this "green gold" of Assam is not merely the responsibility of garden owners or the government; it is a national duty of every Assamese. We must recognise the economic struggle and success hidden behind every steaming cup of tea we lift each morning, for within that cup lies the key to our community's strength and prosperity.

Ram Vanji Sutar: The chisel that shaped a Nation

By: Dipak Kurmi

The passing of Ram Vanji Sutar on the night of December 17, 2025, at the age of one hundred, marks not merely the loss of an individual artist but the conclusion of a monumental chapter in India's cultural and artistic evolution. His death at his Noida residence, following a prolonged battle with age-related illness, was confirmed by his son Anil Sutar, himself an accomplished sculptor who spoke of the loss with profound grief. In an era where art often retreats into private galleries and exclusive exhibitions, Sutar remained steadfastly committed to public sculpture as a vehicle for national memory, collective identity, and civic engagement. His work transcended the boundaries of aesthetic appreciation to become an integral part of India's physical and psychological landscape, giving tangible form to the nation's ideals, aspirations, and historical consciousness. From village squares to parliament complexes, from airport terminals to international parks, his sculptures have shaped how India sees itself and how the world perceives the subcontinent's cultural heritage.

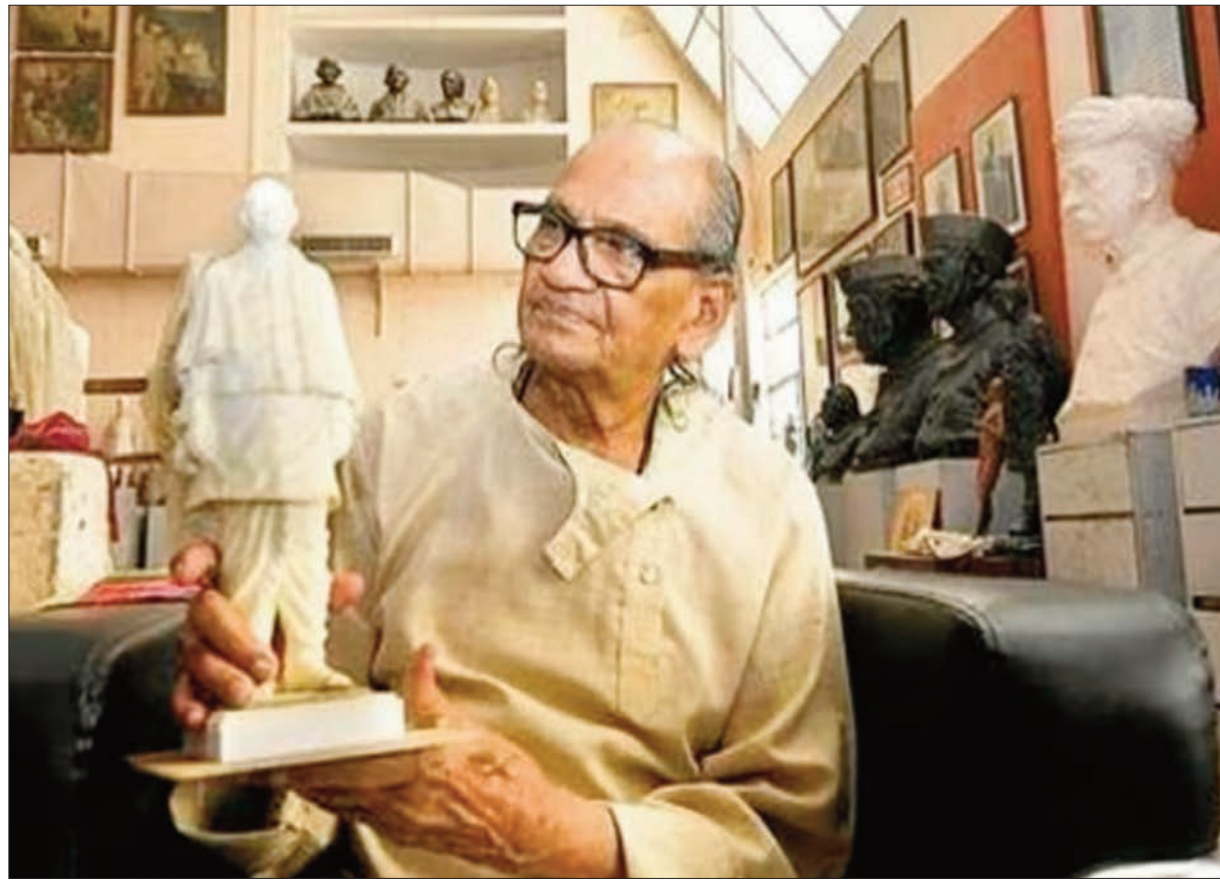
Born on February 19, 1925, in the modest village of Gondur in the Dhule district of present-day Maharashtra, Ram Sutar's origins were far removed from the corridors of artistic privilege or metropolitan sophistication. His early life unfolded against the backdrop of rural India, where formal art education was a distant dream and creative expression often remained unrecognized or undervalued. Yet even in this environment, young Sutar exhibited an instinctive attraction towards form, texture, and the expressive possibilities inherent in clay and stone. This natural inclination spoke to a calling that transcended circumstances, revealing an innate sensitivity to human form and emotional expression that would later define his artistic vision. His journey from this small village to becoming one of independent India's most celebrated sculptors mirrors the nation's own trajectory from colonial marginality to global recognition, embodying the possibilities of talent, perseverance, and unwavering dedication to craft.

Sutar's formal artistic education at the prestigious Sir J. J. School of Art and Architecture in Mumbai proved transformative, refining his raw talent into disciplined mastery and providing him with both technical excellence and philosophical depth. Emerging as a gold medalist from the institution, he absorbed not only the technical skills of sculpture but also developed a profound understanding of art as a public medium capable of engaging directly with civic spaces and collective mem-

ory. Unlike many contemporary artists who gravitated towards studio-bound practices and private patronage, Sutar recognized early that monumental public sculpture carried unique responsibilities and possibilities. His exposure to classical Indian sculptural traditions, combined with modernist sensibilities acquired during his training, enabled him to forge a distinctive artistic style marked by clarity of form, restraint in ornamentation, and deep respect for the moral stature of his subjects. This synthesis of traditional reverence and modern technique would become the hallmark of his work throughout his seven-decade career.

Among Sutar's most revered early works are the iconic statues that grace the Parliament of India premises, serving as silent yet eloquent reminders of the ethical and historical foundations upon which the republic stands. His seated statue of Mahatma Gandhi, sculpted with profound serenity and contemplative depth, deliberately departs from the common imagery of Gandhi as a walking ascetic figure. Instead, Sutar presents the father of the nation as a meditative moral force, with a calm yet resolute posture that captures Gandhi's philosophical depth and transforms the sculpture into a silent guidepost for lawmakers and citizens alike. Equally significant is his equestrian statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji, which depicts the legendary Maratha warrior-king in dynamic motion, embodying courage, sovereignty, and strategic brilliance. Together, these works symbolize the twin pillars of India's national identity: the ethical non-violence championed by Gandhi and the martial valor represented by Shivaji, both rendered through Sutar's balanced and thoughtful artistic vision that refuses to privilege spectacle over substance.

The zenith of Ram Sutar's extraordinary career arrived with the creation of the Statue of Unity in Gujarat's Narmada district, a project that would cement his place not only in Indian art history but in global sculptural achievement. Standing at an imposing height of 182 metres, this bronze statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel represents far more than an engineering marvel or a record-breaking monument. It stands as a monumental assertion of historical memory, paying tribute to India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, who was instrumental in the political integration of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union following independence. Sutar's depiction conveys Patel's characteristic firmness, resolve, and quiet authority, capturing the essence of a leader whose pragmatic statesmanship often operated away from public spotlight yet proved crucial to nation-building. Designing and executing a statue of



such unprecedented scale demanded not only extraordinary artistic insight but also complex coordination between art, architecture, and engineering disciplines. That Sutar accomplished this feat well into his nineties speaks volumes about his enduring creative vitality, professional discipline, and unwavering commitment to his craft.

Beyond the Statue of Unity, Sutar's prolific output encompasses an astonishing range of monumental works that dot the Indian landscape and extend to international locations. He designed the 108-foot-tall Statue of Prosperity at Bengaluru International Airport, unveiled in 2022, which depicts Kempe Gowda, the city's sixteenth-century founder, celebrating both historical legacy and contemporary aspirations. His 45-foot-tall Chambal monument demonstrates his remarkable ability to harmonize sculpture with landscape and civic symbolism. The Krishna Arjun Rath Monument at Brahma Sarovar, a bronze sculpture completed in 2008 in collaboration with his son Anil, captures a pivotal moment from the Mahabharata with dynamic composition and spiritual gravitas, showcasing Sutar's versatility in interpreting mythological subjects alongside historical and political figures. Earlier, he created a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in seated meditation for the Parliament complex, later replicating it on a larger scale at Bengaluru's Vidhana Soudha,

demonstrating how his works became templates for replication and adaptation across multiple sites.

Sutar's artistic reputation extended well beyond India's borders, transforming him into a global ambassador of Indian sculptural tradition and cultural diplomacy. His busts and statues of Mahatma Gandhi have been installed in numerous countries, reinforcing Gandhi's universal relevance and India's commitment to peace and non-violence. Particularly notable is the Gandhi statue at Roma Street Parkland in Brisbane, Australia, commissioned by the Indian community and created in collaboration with Anil Sutar. Unveiled in 2014 by then Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this sculpture exemplifies how Sutar's work facilitated India's cultural engagement with its global diaspora. His sculpture of Gandhi in Hanover, Germany, and various other international installations further attest to his global reach and the universal appeal of his artistic vision, which somehow managed to be distinctly Indian while remaining accessible to diverse international audiences.

Recognition for Ram Sutar's monumental contributions arrived steadily, though characteristically without ostentation or fanfare. The Government of India honored him with the Padma Shri in 1999, followed by the more prestigious Padma Bhushan in 2016, acknowledging both his artistic excel-

lence and his service to the nation. In October 2018, he received the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for 2016, an honor that reflected the unifying ethos underlying his diverse body of work. Most recently, on March 20, 2025, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis announced in the Maharashtra legislative assembly that Sutar would receive the Maharashtra Bhushan Puraskar, the state's highest civilian award, a fitting tribute from his home state. While these accolades carry significant prestige, they capture only a fraction of Sutar's profound influence on India's visual and cultural landscape, an influence measured not in awards but in the countless citizens who encounter his works daily in public spaces.

What fundamentally distinguished Ram Sutar from many contemporaries was not merely the impressive scale or sheer quantity of his sculptures, but the ethical seriousness and philosophical depth that consistently underpinned his artistic practice. He maintained an unwavering belief that public sculpture carried profound moral responsibility, that it should inspire contemplation and reflection rather than mere spectacle or superficial admiration. Even his largest and most ambitious works retain a distinctive sense of proportion and restraint, deliberately resisting theatrical excess or melodramatic posturing. This philosophical approach ensured that his statues have aged

gracefully, remaining relevant as thoughtful historical interpretations rather than dated political statements tied to specific moments or regimes. In an contemporary era increasingly dominated by spectacle-driven monuments and attention-seeking installations, Sutar's body of work stands as an eloquent reminder that true monumentality arises from intellectual thoughtfulness and artistic integrity as much as from physical size or technical complexity.

His personal life reflected values of simplicity, dedication, and familial continuity that paralleled his artistic philosophy. Despite achieving global fame and recognition, Sutar remained deeply rooted in his work, continuing to sculpt actively well into advanced age, demonstrating that creative vitality need not diminish with the passing of years. His close collaboration with his son Anil Sutar ensured not merely the continuation of specific techniques but the transmission of an entire artistic vision and ethical framework, transforming sculpture into both a familial inheritance and a cultural legacy. This deliberate passing of creative responsibility to the next generation underscores the enduring nature of Sutar's influence, ensuring that his approach to public art will continue shaping India's sculptural landscape for decades to come.

Ram Vanji Sutar's death closes a remarkable and irreplaceable chapter in India's artistic history, yet his presence endures vividly in bronze, stone, and collective national memory. From the quiet composure of his seated Gandhi to the towering resolve of his Sardar Patel, from the dynamic energy of his Shivaji to the contemplative depth of his mythological figures, his sculptures have given physical form to the nation's most cherished ideals, historical memories, and cultural aspirations. In doing so, he achieved what few artists in any medium or era accomplish: he transformed inert materials into living symbols of history, identity, and unity that speak across generations and social divisions. Few artists can legitimately claim to have fundamentally shaped how an entire nation perceives itself in public space and collective imagination; Ram Sutar accomplished precisely this with remarkable humility, consummate mastery, and unwavering commitment to his vision. His legacy, like the monumental statues that bear his artistic signature, will continue to stand firm and inspiring, long after time has weathered the skilled hands that created them, serving as eternal testimony to the power of art in shaping national consciousness and preserving collective memory. *(the writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

SHANTI: Igniting India's nuclear ambition safely

By: Satyabrata Borah

India stands at a pivotal moment in its pursuit of energy security and sustainability. With a burgeoning population and an economy that continues to expand at a brisk pace, the need for dependable, low-carbon electricity has become more pressing than ever. Renewable sources such as solar and wind are scaling up impressively, yet their reliance on weather patterns creates inconsistencies that coal has traditionally bridged, at the cost of severe air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Nuclear energy, capable of delivering consistent, emission-free power day and night, presents a powerful complement to this mix. For years, however, India's nuclear sector has remained predominantly under government control, generating only around three percent of the country's electricity despite repeated announcements of grand expansion plans.

This landscape is now shifting with the introduction of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India Bill, commonly known as the SHANTI Bill. Tabled in Parliament in December 2025, this legislation marks one of the boldest overhauls of India's nuclear policy since the Atomic Energy Act of 1962. Its primary aim is to dismantle the long-standing government monopoly on nuclear power production, opening the door to private sector participation while updating the overall regulatory structure. The ambition is straightforward yet transformative: to ramp up nuclear capacity to 100 gigawatts by 2047, a dramatic leap from current levels, in order to bolster India's commitment to net-zero emissions by 2070 and to fuel the escalating needs of industries, data centers, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

Picture a scenario where nuclear facilities become more widespread across the nation, supplying uninterrupted power to households and businesses without the variability inherent in renewable sources. Private enterprises, renowned for their agility in project delivery and ability to mobilize substantial funding, could hasten the realization of this goal. Leading

Indian business houses such as Reliance, Adani, and Tata have already signaled strong interest, eager to collaborate with international technology firms. Foreign investment, limited to 49 percent in any project, could introduce cutting-edge reactor designs, including small modular reactors that offer quicker deployment and improved safety features. This evolution extends beyond mere augmentation of generation capacity; it strengthens national energy independence amid global uncertainties over fuel supplies and intensifies the imperative to combat climate change.

The SHANTI Bill accomplishes these objectives by repealing two longstanding statutes: the 1962

Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, has maintained a commendable safety record but functions under an executive notification, fostering impressions of insufficient separation from the Department of Atomic Energy. The new bill confers statutory backing to the board, enshrining its authority in legislation and bolstering its capabilities for oversight, compliance enforcement, and safety approvals. This step seeks to bring India in line with international best practices, where autonomous regulators foster greater public confidence and stringent supervision.

Nevertheless, doubts persist regarding the extent of this autonomy. The process for appointing senior officials still involves considerable government and Atomic Energy Commission involvement, prompting worries that political or administrative pressures might linger. In a field where safety is paramount, with the shadows of historical accidents like Chernobyl and Fukushima still looming, an authentically independent regulator is indispensable. It requires the latitude to enforce difficult rulings free from external sway, supported by open procedures and sufficient funding. Reinforcing this dimension would not only elevate safety standards but also reassure investors and citizens that private sector entry does not compromise vigilance.

Safety forms the cornerstone of any credible nuclear initiative. The legislation incorporates structures such as a dedicated Nuclear Damage Claims Commission for swift compensation processing and an advisory body for grievance resolution, guaranteeing affected parties clear recourse. Critical functions like uranium enrichment and radioactive waste handling remain exclusively governmental to prevent proliferation concerns. Private operators may construct, own, and manage plants, yet only under rigorous permitting and continuous monitoring. This measured strategy acknowledges the technology's double-edged character: vast benefits paired with grave dangers if not managed meticulously.

Skeptics express apprehension that commercially oriented companies might favor expense reduction over safety protocols, particularly given the potentially devastating fallout

from rare but severe incidents. During parliamentary deliberations, opposition members voiced these anxieties, advocating stronger safeguards for whistleblowers and emergency response readiness. Advocates respond that market competition will incentivize superior standards, as private participants import worldwide expertise in hazard mitigation. India's own history of operating reactors for decades without significant accidents offers solid reassurance, though rapid expansion necessitates unwavering diligence.

The ramifications reach far beyond power generation alone. Nuclear applications drive advancements in healthcare through isotopes for diagnosis and treatment, enhance food security via irradiation for preservation, and support diverse industrial processes. By easing regulatory burdens on certain research activities and encouraging innovation, the bill could catalyze discoveries with widespread societal advantages. It also elevates India's stature on the world stage, enabling contributions to collective clean energy endeavors while capitalizing on indigenous engineering and manufacturing capabilities.

As the bill progresses through legislative stages, having passed the Lok Sabha following lively debates, its enactment could herald a new era. India is poised for a nuclear resurgence that combines entrepreneurial dynamism with responsible public oversight. Achievement, however, depends on meticulous execution, especially in solidifying regulatory independence. A truly empowered and impartial authority would cultivate trust, confirming that broader participation prioritizes safety above all.

The SHANTI Bill transcends mere policy reform; it embodies national aspiration. India is placing a strategic wager on nuclear energy to illuminate its developmental trajectory in an environmentally sound manner. Through thoughtful rollout that prioritizes openness and accountability, this initiative holds the promise of secure, abundant power for future generations, demonstrating that advancement and caution can harmoniously coexist. The international community is observing closely, and India has an opportunity to model a pathway for other developing nations navigating the demands of growth alongside stewardship.

A Broken Promise: The plight of bank pensioners

By: Dr Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit

The pension system in India was brought by the British government in 1857. The scheme was similar to pension system then prevailing in Britain, which was formalised by the Indian Pension Act of 1871. DS Nakara, then finance to Ministry of Defense, retired in 1972. He also, faced problems in getting his pension like other pensioners. Therefore, he filed a petition in the Supreme Court. It was on December 17, 1982, that the top court delivered a judgement in favour of pensioners. Therefore, the pensioner's community in India observed 17th December every year paying respectful tributes to late Mr D S NAKARA, who was instrumental in getting the landmark judgement and explaining various issues concerning pensioners the world over.

It was on this day in 1982 that the Supreme Court delivered the landmark judgment guaranteeing dignity and decency to the retired officials. 'Pensioners Day' is celebrated in our country to remember, with gratefulness, the late DS Nakara who fought for years to bring dignity and grace to the community, through the judgment at 17.12.1982. Late Justice YV Chandrachud, then Chief Justice of India had ruled: "Pension is neither a bounty, nor a matter of grace depending upon the sweet will of the employer, nor an ex-gratia payment. It is a payment for the past services rendered. It is a social welfare measure rendering socio-economic justice to those who in the heyday of their life ceaselessly toiled for the employer on an assurance that in their old age they would not be left in the lurch." Retired officers and workmen from nationalised banks are anxious about the lack of progress on pension updation, despite an agreement with an enabling provision made 30 years ago. In contrast, the Reserve Bank of India revised its retiree pension scheme in 2019 and again in 2023. The All India Bank Pensioners' and Retirees' Confederation (AIBPARC) and other associations have repeatedly stressed the importance of pension updation, informing members about their representations to the Indian Finance Minister. However, no progress has been made.

As a retired senior bank officer, I highlight that the bank pension scheme, effective from November 1, 1993, remains unchanged, unlike other public sector schemes that have seen periodic revisions. Despite a Supreme Court ruling affirming pensions as a right, bank pension revision has not been prioritized. The bank pension scheme, implemented from November 1, 1993, with retrospective effect from January 1, 1986, remains unchanged. This issue affects almost all pension schemes in the organised sector, yet banking is the only sector without periodic revisions. Central government services have had pension revisions alongside salary revisions since 1996.

The MC Singla case in the Supreme Court of India is a significant, long-pending legal battle for bank pensioners, primarily concerning the crucial issue of pension updation, fighting for pension revisions to match recent wage hikes, citing fundamental rights (Articles 14, 21, 300A). The case (SLP(C) No. 005561/2016) has faced numerous adjournments and delays, with recent hearings in late 2025 (Nov/Dec) seeing the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) seeking more time to finalize its stand, while pensioners advocate for timely resolution, arguing for parity with RBI/Central Govt pensioners and updated financial security.

The reality is stark - pension funds, created from our own contributions, are swelling every year, while the number of pensioners is dwindling. Yet, the remaining pensioners are struggling to make ends meet due to the lack of genuine pension updation.

Despite a favourable solution being proposed by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) long ago, the government remains unmoved. The Indian Banks Association (IBA) has not received the necessary consent to implement a just solution, leaving pensioners in limbo. The Union government must not forget the years of services rendered by the Bank retirees and they must be treated justly, enabling the retirees to lead a dignified life post-retirement. Government should not continue to ignore the demands, including that for an increase in pension, raised by retired bank employees who had a key role to play in the growth of public sector banks in the country. Even after four decades of the historic judgement, the plight of bank pensioners is very well known to us. It's time for the government to act. We urge the authorities to consider the plights of pensioners and take immediate action to update pensions, ensuring a dignified life for those who have contributed to the nation's growth.



21st century India takes big, swift decisions, delivers results in time-bound manner: PM Modi in Oman

MUSCAT, Dec 18: India of the 21st century takes "big" and "swift" decisions and moves ahead by setting big goals and delivering results in a time-bound manner, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Thursday.

Modi, who is in Oman on a two-day visit, made the remarks during an interaction with the Indian students and community members here, who welcomed him with enthusiastic chants and applause.

In his address, Modi described the audience as a 'mini-India', drawing chants of "Modi, Modi, Modi" from those present.

He noted the presence of people from various parts of India at the event and said, "Today, we have all gathered like one family. Today, we are celebrating our country and Team India. In India, our diversity is the strong foundation of our culture."

The prime minister underlined that "coexistence and cooperation" have been a hallmark of the Indian diaspora.

Highlighting India's transformational growth and development, its speed and scale of change, and the strength of its economy, Modi cited its more than eight per cent growth in the last quarter.

India is steady on the path to becoming one of the fastest-growing economies with a high growth rate,



and this has happened when the world was beset with challenges, he said.

"Twenty-first century India takes big decisions, and takes decisions swiftly, moves ahead with big goals, and doesn't settle until it delivers results within a defined timeline," Modi said.

At the 'Maitri Parv' event, the audience included more than 700 students from various Indian schools.

This year holds special significance for Indian schools in Oman, as they celebrate 50 years of their establishment in that country, the Prime Minister's Office in New Delhi said.

Emphasising that knowledge has been at the centre of India-

Oman ties, Modi said, "Now, we have to aim for the next 50 years. So, I will tell every youth -- dream big, learn deeply, and innovate boldly, so that they can contribute meaningfully to humanity."

He described the 'Maitri Parv' as one that stands for Maritime Heritage, Aspirations, Innovation, Trust and technology, Respect and Inclusive growth.

This celebration is a festival of "mutual friendship between the two countries, shared history and prosperous future," he said.

Modi also affirmed that the India-Oman partnership was making itself future-ready through AI collaboration, digital learning, innovation partnership, and entrepreneurship exchange.

He said the two nations are "tied not just by geography, but also by generations", and called the diaspora the "biggest custodian of these centuries-old ties."

In his speech, the prime minister also hailed the recent decision of UNESCO to inscribe the 'Deepavali' festival on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

"Our 'diya' (lamp) will now illuminate not just our homes, but the entire world," he said, adding that this "global recognition for Diwali is a recognition of that light of ours which spreads the message of hope, amity and humanity."

He outlined achievements of the government in the last 11 years, saying there have been "transformational changes in the country in the fields of infrastructure development, manufacturing, healthcare, green growth, and women's empowerment."

Modi said India was preparing itself for the 21st century through developing world-class innovation, start-ups, and a digital public infrastructure ecosystem.

"India's speed is seen in our resolve, and witnessed in our performance," Modi asserted, noting the growth in the number of AIIMS institutions and medical colleges in India in the last 11 years.

He also highlighted recent stellar achievements in the space sector, from landing on the moon to the planned Gaganyaan human space mission.

Modi said that space was an important part of collaboration between India and Oman, and noted that ISRO has developed the India-Oman Space Portal under a space collaboration agreement with Muscat.

He also underscored that India was not just a market, but a model for the world - from goods and services to digital solutions.

Modi, who arrived here on Wednesday, met Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said after the community meet and discussed issues of mutual and bilateral interest.

The two nations also signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), marking a major step in deepening their economic engagement.

Modi's visit is of special significance as it marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

This is his second visit to the Gulf nation.

Oman is the last leg of his four-day visit to three nations from December 15-18, which also took him to Jordan and Ethiopia. (PTI)

Israel launches intense airstrikes in Lebanon as deadline looms to disarm Hezbollah

BEIRUT, Dec 18: Israel carried out a series of airstrikes on southern and northeastern Lebanon on Thursday as a deadline looms to disarm the militant Hezbollah group along the tense frontier.

The strikes came a day before a meeting of the committee monitoring the enforcement of a US-brokered ceasefire that halted the latest war between Israel and Hezbollah a year ago.

It will be the second meeting of the mechanism after Israel and Lebanon appointed civilian members to a previously military-only committee. The group also includes the US, France and the UN peacekeeping force deployed along the border.

In Paris, Lebanon's army commander Gen Rodolph Haikal is scheduled to meet on Thursday with US, French and Saudi officials to discuss ways of assisting the army in its mission to boost its presence in the border area.

The Lebanese government has said that the army should have cleared all the border area south of the Litani river from Hezbollah's armed presence by the end of the year. The Israeli military said the strikes hit Hezbollah infrastructure sites and launching sites in a military compound used by the group to conduct training and courses for its fighters. The Israeli military added that it struck several Hezbollah military structures in which weapons were stored, and from which

Hezbollah members operated recently.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the intense airstrikes stretched from areas in Mount Rihan in the south to the northeastern Hermel region that borders Syria.

Shortly afterward, a drone strike on a car near the southern town of Taybeh inflicted casualties, NNA said.

"This is an Israeli message to the Paris meeting aiming to support the Lebanese army," Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said about the strikes.

"The fire belt of Israeli airstrikes is to honour the mechanism's meeting tomorrow," Berri added during a parliament meeting in Beirut.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war began October 8, 2023, a day after Hamas attacked southern Israel, after Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel in solidarity with Hamas. Israel launched a widespread bombardment of Lebanon in September last year that severely weakened Hezbollah, followed by a ground invasion.

Israel has carried out almost daily airstrikes since then, mainly targeting Hezbollah members but also killing 127 civilians, according to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Over the past weeks, the US has increased pressure on Lebanon to work harder on disarming Hezbollah. (AP)

India resumes visa centre operation in Dhaka

DHAKA, Dec 18: India on Thursday resumed operations at its visa application centre in Dhaka, a day after closing it over escalated security concerns, but closed two other identical facilities in other parts of Bangladesh, officials and reports said.

The Indian Visa Application Centre (IVAC) at southwestern Khulna and northwestern Rajshahi were closed on the same grounds of security concerns.

There are five IVAC centres in Bangladesh. Apart from those in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi, the two others are in the northeastern port city of Chattogram and northeastern Sylhet. The IVAC at Dhaka's Jamuna Future Park is the main, integrated centre for all Indian visa services in the capital.

"Indian Visa Application Centre in Dhaka is now operational and functioning normally," an IVAC official told PTI.

IVAC's Dhaka centre on Wednesday announced temporary closure amid escalated tensions when a large group of anti-India protesters headed towards the Indian High Commission.

But the centre, on its website, said the IVAC closed its two centres in Khulna and Rajshahi on Thursday.

"In view of the on-going security situation, we wish to bring to your kind notice that IVAC Rajshahi and Khulna will be closed today (18.12.2025)," it said, adding, "All applicants who have appointment slots booked for submission today will be given a slot at a later date."

Earlier on Wednesday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) summoned Bangladesh envoy Riaz Hamidullah and conveyed its strong concern over certain extremist elements announcing plans to create a security situation around the Indian mission in Dhaka.

"We expect the interim government to ensure the safety of Missions and Posts in Bangladesh in keeping with its diplomatic obligations," it said. The envoy was apprised of India's strong concerns about the deteriorating security environment in Bangladesh, it added. (PTI)

House rejects resolutions to limit Trump's campaign

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: House Republicans rejected a pair of Democratic-backed resolutions Wednesday that would have put a check on President Donald Trump's power to use military force against drug cartels and the nation of Venezuela.

Democrats forced the votes using war powers resolutions as Trump has stepped up his threats against the South American nation and Congress has questioned how the US military is conducting a campaign that has destroyed 26 vessels allegedly carrying drugs and killed at least 99 people, including an attack Wednesday. The legislation would have forced the Trump administration to seek authorization from Congress before continuing attacks against cartels that it deems to be terrorist organizations in the Western Hemisphere or launching an attack on Venezuela itself.

Rep Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee,

argued that Trump's aggressions in the region were really because "the president is coveting Venezuelan oil."

They were the first votes in the House on Trump's military campaign in Central and South America. A majority of Republicans in the Senate had previously voted against similar resolutions, and Trump would almost certainly veto them if they were to pass Congress. But Democrats forced the votes as a way to bring up a debate about the military campaign and force Republicans to go on the record about supporting it. Republican leaders have increasingly expressed support for Trump's campaign, even as it potentially escalates into a direct confrontation with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said earlier Wednesday that he didn't know whether the Trump administration had "publicly stated" that they wanted regime

change, but "I would certainly not have a problem if that was their position."

"Maduro is a cancer on that continent," added Thune, R-S.D. Still, the Trump administration has not sought congressional authorization for its recent actions in the Caribbean, arguing instead that it can destroy drug-carrying boats just as it would handle terrorist threats against the U.S. That rationale, however, has led to deep scrutiny of the strikes, especially after it was revealed that a September 2 operation killed two people who had survived an initial attack. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and other top national security officials briefed members of Congress on Tuesday. They defended the campaign as a successful counter-narcotic effort that has cut into the drug supply entering the US, but did not clue in Congress about its ultimate goals when it comes to Venezuela. (AP)

US announces massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than USD 10 billion

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: The Trump administration has announced a massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than USD 10 billion that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones, drawing an angry response from China.

The State Department announced the sales late Wednesday during a nationally televised address by President Donald Trump, who made scant mention of foreign policy issues and did not speak about China or Taiwan at all.

US-Chinese tensions have ebbed and flowed during Trump's second term, largely over trade and tariffs but also over China's increasing aggressiveness toward Taiwan, which Beijing has said must reunify with the mainland.

If approved by Congress, it

would be the largest-ever US weapons package to Taiwan, exceeding the total amount of USD 8.4 billion in US arms sales to Taiwan during the Biden administration.

The eight arms sales agreements announced Wednesday cover 82 high-mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, and 420 Army Tactical Missile Systems, or AT-ACMS — similar to what the US had been providing Ukraine during the Biden administration to defend itself from Russia — worth more than USD 4 billion.

They also include 60 self-propelled howitzer systems and related equipment worth more than USD 4 billion and drones valued at more than USD 1 billion.

Other sales in the package include military software valued at

more than USD 1 billion, Javelin and TOW missiles worth more than USD 700 million, helicopter spare parts worth USD 96 million and refurbishment kits for Harpoon missiles worth USD 91 million.

The eight sales agreements amount to USD 11.15 billion, according to Taiwan's Defence Ministry.

The State Department said the sales serve "US national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."

"The proposed sale(s) will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region," the statements said. (AP)

EU leaders gather to discuss massive loan to Ukraine

BRUSSELS, Dec 18: European Union leaders are gathering Thursday for a summit aimed at agreeing on a massive loan to cover Ukraine's military and other financial needs for the next two years.

The leaders will also discuss migration, the bloc's enlargement policy, trade and economics, but working out how to fund most of the 137 billion euros (USD 160 billion) the International Monetary Fund says war-ravaged Ukraine needs is top priority.

"It is up to us to choose how we fund Ukraine's fight. We know the urgency. It is acute. We all feel it. We all see it," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told EU lawmakers on the eve of the summit.

European Council President Antonio Costa, who is chairing Thursday's meeting in Brussels, has vowed to keep leaders negotiating until an agreement is reached, even if it takes days.

Many leaders will press for tens of billions of euros in frozen Russian assets held in Europe to be used to meet Ukraine's economic and military needs.

Such a decision has never been made before, and it comes with risks. The European Central Bank has warned that if Europeans appear willing to grab other countries' money, it could undermine confidence in the euro. Some member nations are also concerned

about inviting retaliation from Russia.

Belgium, where most of the frozen assets are held at a financial clearing house, is the main opponent of the plan. It fears that Russia will strike back and would prefer that the bloc borrow the money on international markets.

Last week, the Russian Central Bank sued the Belgian clearing house Euroclear in a Moscow court, raising pressure on Belgium and its European partners ahead of the summit.

Hungary and Slovakia oppose von der Leyen's plan for a "reparations loan." Some 90 billion euros (USD 105 billion) would be lent to Ukraine until Russia ends its war and pays for the damage it has caused over almost four years. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says that totals more than 600 billion euros (USD 700 billion).

The UK, Canada and Norway would fill the gap beyond the 90 billion euros (USD 105 billion).

Bulgaria, Italy and Malta also remain to be convinced. In recent weeks, EU envoys have worked to flesh out the details and narrow differences among the 27 member countries. If enough countries object, the plan could be blocked. There is no majority support for a plan B of raising the funds on international markets. (AP)

India-Oman free trade pact to infuse new energy into bilateral trade: PM

MUSCAT, Dec 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership (CEPA) will infuse new energy into bilateral trade and investment ties while creating opportunities for mutual growth.

He was addressing the India-Oman Business Forum here.

In his address, Modi highlighted the centuries-old maritime trading ties between the two countries, from Mandvi to Muscat, which today form the bedrock of vibrant commercial exchanges.

He said that 70 years of diplomatic relations represent the trust and friendship built over centuries.

India and Oman signed a free trade agreement on Thursday, which will provide duty-free access to 98 per cent of India's exports, including textiles, agri and leather goods in the Gulf country.

Describing the CEPA as the blueprint for India-Oman's shared future, the visiting Prime Minister called upon business leaders to realise the full potential of the trade pact.

"Today, we are making a historic decision whose impact will be felt for decades to come. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership

Agreement, or CEPA, will infuse our partnership with new confidence and energy in the 21st century," he said.

The pact, he said, will give new momentum to bilateral trade, instil new confidence in investment, and open new doors of opportunity in every sector.

Speaking about India's economic success in the last 11 years, he said the country was well on its way to becoming the third largest economy in the world on the back of next generation reforms, policy predictability, good governance and high investor confidence.

"In fact, over the past 11 years, India has not only changed its policies, but it has also changed its economic DNA," he said.

He further added that India's high growth of over 8 per cent in the last quarter in an environment of global uncertainty highlights its resilient nature and inherent strengths.

"India's progress has always been a story of shared progress. When India grows, it makes its friends partners in its growth. We are doing the same today," Modi said, adding that in India's growth journey, there are ample opportunities for Oman.

The Prime Minister underlined

that India is working at speed and scale to create world-class infrastructure, logistics, connectivity, trusted supply chains, manufacturing capacities and green growth to boost "ease of living" and "ease of doing business".

He informed the gathering about the reforms, including Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), that India has implemented in recent years. Modi invited Omani businesses to look beyond traditional areas of energy, oil and gas, petrochemicals and fertilisers, and explore opportunities in the fields of green energy, solar parks, energy storage, smart grids, agri-tech, fintech, AI and cyber security.

He also proposed the creation of the India-Oman Agri Innovation Hub and India-Oman Innovation Bridge to make the business partnership future-ready.

The Prime Minister emphasised that these were not just ideas, but an invitation to invest, innovate and build the future together.

Modi arrived here on Wednesday on a two-day visit.

India-Oman bilateral trade was about USD 10.5 billion (exports USD 4 billion and imports USD 6.54 billion) in 2024-25. (PTI)

Rare smog spike hits Beijing after years of pollution clean-up

BEIJING, Dec 18: Beijing was shrouded in heavy smog on Thursday with AQI climbing to "very unhealthy" levels of 215, a rare spike in pollution in the Chinese capital after years of expensive cleaning up.

China's national observatory on Wednesday issued a yellow alert for heavy fog in some parts of the country, saying that thick fog is expected to shroud parts of Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Hubei, the Sichuan Basin and Chongqing on Thursday.

The smog with polluted air quality is rare these days in Beijing, which used to witness very heavy pollution before the government initiated a series of steps, including closure and relocation of heavy polluting industries in 2016, spending billions of dollars.

Officials say the city's switch to natural gas or electric public heating in winters from the coal-fired ones, spending over USD 1 billion, has helped reduce pollution levels.

Beijing's efforts to tackle heavy pollution were in the news in recent days in the backdrop of New Delhi witnessing a deepening pollution crisis.

It sparked a debate over whether the Indian capital should follow Beijing's arduous and expensive journey to improve air quality.

The Chinese Embassy in Delhi in a post on X on Wednesday high-



lighted some of the steps taken by the Chinese government, including shutting down or removing over 3,000 heavy industries, and relocating Shougang, a major state-owned steel producer, out of the city to cut pollution levels.

Observers say the reasons for Beijing's pollution in the past and that of Delhi's at present overlap in some areas but differ in terms of sources, geography, and seasonal drivers.

While historically, Beijing's pollution was driven by coal-fired power plants, heavy industry and automobile emissions, Delhi's pollution is more structural and multi-sourced, with persistent emissions from agriculture -- especially

stubble burning -- dust, transport, and informal industries.

Researchers at China's Tsinghua University who studied the years of pollution experienced in Beijing said that stringent enforcement of industrial emissions standards significantly reduced PM2.5 concentrations in major Chinese cities.

Sceptics argue that such enforcement was possible under a one-party government headed by the ruling Communist Party and question whether it could be replicated in a multi-party democracy like India with judicial safeguards for industry and other stakeholders.

Before Thursday's smog, Beijing

municipal environmental authorities reported that in the first 11 months of this year, the city's average PM2.5 concentration dropped to 26.5 micrograms per cubic metre -- a 16.7 per cent year-on-year decrease.

During the period, the city experienced 282 days of good air quality, which was 23 days more than in the same timeframe last year, they said on Tuesday.

Under the "0.1 microgram initiative," the city has promoted the broader adoption of new energy vehicles, implemented emissions reduction measures in construction projects, and supported the green transformation of businesses, among other moves, reported the state-run Xinhua news agency, quoting authorities.

During the past five years, Beijing has achieved significant improvements in its ecological environment, Chen Tian, head of the municipal ecology and environment bureau, said during a press conference held on Wednesday. The reduction of pollution in the last four years also helped Beijing's biodiversity, which includes 7,121 species.

The population of migratory bird Beijing swifs has exceeded 10,000, and rare birds such as red-crowned cranes and white-naped cranes, which are under first-class protection in China, have been spotted at the Miyun Reservoir, Chen said. (PTI)

Arunachal Dy CM reviews major, small hydropower projects

Focus on revival, sustainable development and energy security



ITANAGAR, Dec 18: The Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Chowna Mein reviewed the status of major and small hydropower projects in the state, including Tawang I and II, Etalin, Demwe Lower, Naying, Kalai I and II, Hutong, Subansiri Upper, Kamala and the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project, as part of the government's ongoing efforts to strengthen the state's hydropower sector.

During the review, the DCM undertook detailed assessments of mega and large hydropower projects such as the Etalin Hydroelectric Project (3,097 MW), Demwe Lower Hydroelectric Project (1,750 MW), and Subansiri Upper Hydroelectric Project (1,605 MW). The operationalisation of the restructured Department of Hydro Power Development under DHPD 2.0 was also discussed, aimed at improving inter-departmental coordination and institutional mechanisms for effective project

implementation.

The Gongri Hydroelectric Project (144 MW) was highlighted as a key milestone, becoming the first project to be restored under the Arunachal Pradesh Policy for Restoration of Terminated Large Hydropower Projects under Special Circumstances, 2025. The developer, M/s Patel Engineering Limited, has committed to restore the project within 48 months, targeting commissioning by December 2029.

The DCM emphasised that the exercise forms part of a comprehensive effort to revive stalled hydropower capacity, ensure responsible and sustainable development and reinforce long-term energy security in Arunachal Pradesh.

In a separate but linked review, the Deputy Chief Minister also assessed the progress of hydropower projects under the Hydropower Development Corporation of Arunachal Pradesh Limited (HPD-

CAPL), with a focus on ongoing and proposed Small Hydro Power Projects (SHPs) across the state. Strategically important projects such as the Sumbachu and Taksang Chu Small Hydro Power Projects in Tawang were examined, with attention to construction progress, electromechanical works, inter-departmental coordination and site-specific challenges.

The readiness and status of other small hydro projects allotted to HPDCAPL were reviewed, along with strategies to accelerate implementation while ensuring environmental responsibility and local participation. The review forms part of broader efforts to strengthen HPDCAPL as a key implementing agency for small hydropower development, promote clean and decentralised energy generation and reinforce Arunachal Pradesh's long-term energy security through responsible hydropower development. (PTI)

Arunachal Cong criticises renaming of MGNREGA, calls it politically motivated

ITANAGAR, Dec 18: The Congress in Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday criticised the BJP-led central government for its move to rename and restructure the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and described the exercise as politically driven.

Amid protests of opposition MPs, the Lok Sabha passed the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAM G) Bill, which sought to rechristen the MGNREGA.

Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bosiram Siram claimed that the proposal was ideologically motivated and aimed at erasing the Congress' legacy while weakening a hard-won, rights-based welfare legislation.

Reacting to discussions in Parliament on the issue, Siram asserted that the matter went far beyond a mere change in nomenclature.

"This is not about a name; it is about diluting the very soul of a rights-based employment guarantee and converting it into a discretionary government scheme," he said.

Siram expressed solidarity with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and leaders of the INDIA bloc, who staged a protest in Parliament, opposing the proposed renaming and restructuring of the MGNREGA.

He said the protest highlighted a fundamental truth that jobs, dignity of labour and federal responsibility cannot be rewritten or weakened at the whim of a ruling party.

Terming the controversy surrounding the proposed G-RAM-G Bill as deeply unfortunate and intellectually dishonest, Siram said the ideals of Gram Swaraj and Ram Rajya were never competing philosophies.

"They were twin pillars of Mahatma Gandhi's moral and political consciousness. To replace Mahatma Gandhi's name while invoking 'Ram' is to falsely manufacture a conflict where none existed. Gandhi's last utterance was 'Ram'; his legacy should not be turned into a tool of political division," he said.

15,000-km yatra to promote modern agricultural practices concludes



ITANAGAR, Dec 18: A 15,000-km-long yatra across the country, promoting farm mechanisation and modern agricultural practices among farmers, concluded in Arunachal Pradesh's capital Itanagar on Wednesday, a statement said.

The yatra, taken out from Gujarat's Dwarka by a private firm, traversed across nine states and connected with over 10,000 farmers.

The initiative served as a platform for direct engagement with farmers, showcasing advanced mechanised solutions and spreading awareness about new technologies transforming contemporary agriculture, the organisers STIH India's marketing director Shobhit Bahel said.

The yatra focused on accelerating mechanisation in Indian agriculture to enhance productivity and reduce dependence on manual labour through innovative, efficient and reliable farming equipment.

Live product demonstrations, interactive sessions with farmers and on-ground knowledge-sharing activities formed the core of the programme throughout the journey. (PTI)

Home Minister assures action on Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway land compensation issue

ACB investigation underway, FFC report expected by today

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 18: Arunachal Pradesh Home and Border Affairs Minister Mama Natung has assured that all necessary actions will be taken as per law regarding the Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway land compensation issue in East Kameng district. His statement follows sustained democratic movements led by the All Youth Association (ANYA) East Kameng unit and central executive, supported by several organisations and individuals.

Briefing the media, Minister Natung said a meeting was held with the ANYA team at his office in the AP Civil Secretariat, Itanagar to discuss the Lada-Sarli land compensation issue and the six-point charter of demands put forward by the organisation. The movement included several protests, notably a pad yatra from Seppa to Itanagar.



The six-point charter includes revivification of the highway stretch. The government has responded with the constitution of a Fact Finding Committee (FFC), inspection of the stretch and suspension of five officers involved in a sand issue. The FFC is expected to submit its report by December 19, after which legal action will commence.

Minister Natung stated that the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has already begun investigating and seized documents related to

the land compensation from Seppa and other locations. Re-verification of the stretch, identification of mock dumping, early handing over to the user agency and recovery of misused funds will follow the ACB's investigation. Legal actions will be taken strictly as per the findings of the FFC and ACB.

Regarding justice for affected families, the Home Minister said that the law will take its course in accordance with BNS and BNSS. He emphasised that the state government seeks a fast-track investigation while adhering to the legal norms and procedures for taking action against government servants.

Highlighting the strategic significance of the Frontier Highway, Minister Natung said it will run near the international border, connecting border villages and boosting the local economy across West Kameng to Changlang districts.



Reiterating that MGNREGA is neither a charity nor a political favour, Siram said it is a legal and constitutional guarantee enacted by Parliament, ensuring the right to work, dignity of labour and livelihood security for crores of rural households across the country.

"No amount of cosmetic rebranding can erase the historical fact that MGNREGA is a transformative Congress legacy, conceptualised under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi and implemented during the tenure of Manmohan Singh," he added.

Highlighting Arunachal Pradesh's unique challenges as a remote, border and tribal state, the Congress leader said MGNREGA has served as a critical lifeline during lean agricultural seasons, natural disasters and periods of economic distress.

He questioned the Centre's priorities, asking why wages were delayed for months, funds curtailed arbitrarily, job cards deactivated and the statutory guarantee of 100 days of work routinely violated.

Calling the move a direct insult to Gandhian

values, Siram said naming the Act after Mahatma Gandhi symbolised the Indian state's moral, constitutional and ethical commitment to its poorest citizens.

"Any attempt to erase his name reflects political insecurity and a deep disregard for the principles of self-reliance, decentralisation and dignity of labour that Gandhi stood for," he said.

The APCC demanded that the Centre immediately withdraw any proposal to rename, restructure or dilute MGNREGA, restore and enhance budgetary allocations, ensure timely payment of wages without bureaucratic hurdles and strengthen implementation in tribal, remote, hilly and border areas, including Arunachal Pradesh.

Reaffirming the party's stand, Siram said history cannot be erased by changing names and rights cannot be weakened through rebranding.

"MGNREGA is not just a law; it is a promise to the poor. It will remain MGNREGA in law, in spirit and in the collective conscience of the people of India," he added. (PTI)

ASSAM ELECTRICITY GRID CORPORATION LIMITED

NOTICE

The Assam State Load Despatch Centre, (SLDC), have filed Petition before the Hon'ble Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (AERC) for approval of Truing up for FY 2024-25, Annual Performance Review for FY 2025-26 and Aggregate Revenue Requirement for FY 2026-27 (Petition No: 23/2025) for the services of the SLDC relating to scheduling and real-time grid operations, State energy accounting, operation of pool account, etc., as per provision of the Electricity Act, 2003 (EA, 2003) and Regulations made thereunder.

The Hon'ble Commission has admitted the Petition on 15-12-2025 and directed SLDC to publish a Notice giving the salient features of ARR and the Tariff Petition under Section 64 (2) of the EA, 2003. The salient features of the Petition are provided below:

Table 1: True Up of SLDC for FY 2024-25 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in T.O dt. 24-06-2024	SLDC Submission
1	O&M Expenses	13.98	9.81
a	Employee Cost	9.14	8.02
b	R&M Expenses	3.65	1.03
c	A&G Expenses	1.19	0.76
2	Depreciation	0.27	0.38
3	Interest & Finance Charges	0.01	0.00
4	Interest on Working Capital	0.69	0.48
5	Return on Equity	0.27	0.26
6	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	0.18	0.56
7	Aggregate Revenue Requirement	15.04	10.37
8	Add: Sharing of (Gains)/Loss	-	(0.22)
9	Aggregate Revenue Requirement after sharing of (Gains)/Loss	15.04	10.15
10	Revenue Surplus	-	4.89

Table 2: Annual Performance Review of SLDC for FY 2025-26 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in T.O. dt. 25-03-2025	FY 2025-26 (H1)	FY 2025-26 (H2)	SLDC Submission
1	O&M Expenses	12.48	6.95	6.95	13.90
a	Employee Cost	7.37	4.25	4.25	8.49
b	R&M Expenses	4.49	2.31	2.31	4.62
c	A&G Expenses	0.62	0.39	0.39	0.79
2	Depreciation	0.20	0.17	0.18	0.37
3	Interest & Finance Charges	0.07	0.01	0.01	0.02
4	Interest on Working Capital	0.47	0.30	0.30	0.60
5	Return on Equity	0.30	0.04	0.14	0.28
6	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	1.76	0.45	0.18	0.63
7	Aggregate Revenue Requirement	11.75	7.02	7.44	14.53
8	Revenue Gap for FY 2025-26	-	-	-	2.78

Table 3: ARR of SLDC for FY 2026-27 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in T.O. dt. 25-03-2025	FY 2026-27
1	O&M Expenses	13.29	15.35
a	Employee Cost	7.85	9.00
b	R&M Expenses	4.78	5.39
c	A&G Expenses	0.66	0.81
2	Depreciation	0.14	0.37
3	Interest & Finance Charges	0.06	0.00
4	Interest on Working Capital	0.57	0.66
5	Return on Equity	0.31	0.30
6	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	0.25	0.63
7	Aggregate Revenue Requirement	14.12	16.85

Further, the Hon'ble Commission has directed these copies of tariff petitions and other relevant documents be made available to consumers and other interested parties at the office of the Managing Director of AEGCL and at the Office of the Chief General Manager, SLDC. Accordingly, the documents may be collected from the concerned offices by paying Rs. 200/- (Rupees two hundred only) by Cash or DD drawn in favour of MD, AEGCL.

The Hon'ble Commission has further directed that any person who intends to file objection or comments in regard to proposed ARR of SLDC may do so by filing statement of objections or comments before the Secretary, Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission with copies of relevant documents and evidence in support thereof along with the affidavit as in Form - 2 of Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (Conduct of Business) Regulations, 2004 as amended from time to time. Such objections or comments shall be submitted in soft copy to gm.mpr@aegcl.in and 5 (five) copies by speed post or in person which should reach the Secretary, Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission, ASEB Campus, Sixth Mile, Dibrugarh, Guwahati-781022 on or before 12-01-2026. A copy of the filing submitted to the Secretary, AERC should also be made available within the aforesaid date to the Chief General Manager SLDC positively and proof of such submission shall be furnished to the Hon'ble Commission. A copy of the Petition is also available on the web site of the Hon'ble Commission www.aerc.gov.in and on the web site of AEGCL www.aegcl.co.in in downloadable format. The Commission may hear the persons filing objections or comments at the venue and date as may be determined by the Hon'ble Commission. The date and place shall be notified later. Person filing objections or comments on the ARR may also indicate whether they would like to be heard by the Hon'ble Commission in person.

Sd/- General Manager (M&PR), AEGCL, Bijulee Bhawan, Guwahati - 781 001

Winners to represent state at National Youth Festival 2026

Arunachal youth shine at State Youth Festival under Viksit Bharat Young Leader Dialogue

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 18: The State Youth Festival, organised jointly by the Department of Youth Affairs and MY Bharat, Arunachal Pradesh, under the Cultural and Innovation Track with the theme "Viksit Bharat - Young Leader Dialogue," successfully brought together talented and enthusiastic youth from across the state.

The programme began with a welcome address by Gopesh Pandey, Deputy Director, MY Bharat, highlighting the festival's objectives and the vital role of youth in nation-building. Ramesh Linggi, Director, Department of Youth Affairs, felicitated the Chief Guest, Guest of Honour and Jury Members. The event was graced by Gumsen Lollen, State President, BJP Kisan Morcha, as Chief Guest and Kame Yangfo as Guest of Honour.

Competitions were conducted under two main tracks. The Cultural Track featured Folk Song and Folk Dance competitions, showcasing Arunachal Pradesh's rich cultural heritage. The Innovation Track included a Declaration Contest, Painting Competition, Poetry and Story Writing and a Science Mela, allowing participants to demonstrate creativity, talent and innovative ideas.

Chief Guest Gumsen Lollen appreciated the participants and lauded the efforts of the Department of Youth Affairs and MY Bharat, Arunachal Pradesh, for the successful organisation of the festival. He highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for a Viksit Bharat by 2047 and stressed the pivotal role of youth in realising this national goal.

Winners of the festival will represent Arunachal Pradesh at the National Youth Festival and Viksit



Bharat Young Leader Dialogue 2026 in Delhi on the occasion of National Youth Day. They will be awarded cash prizes, certificates and shields.

The smooth execution of the programme was credited to the dedicated efforts of Abhishek Mandal

Deputy Director, MY Bharat (Papum Pare District), Pawan Kumar Rav District Youth Officer, Shatrughan Ganguly, Assistant Nodal Officer, Department of Youth Affairs and Vijay Gurung, Bhargava Bhuyan and Takam Regam.

LS nod to G RAM G Bill amid opposition protests



NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed a bill that seeks to replace the 20-year-old MGNREGA with a new initiative that guarantees rural jobs for 125 days every year amid vociferous protests by the Opposition, and Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan asserting that the change was necessary to fix shortcomings in the scheme.

Responding to the eight-hour discussion on the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, Rural Development Minister Chouhan lashed out at the Congress, claiming that the opposition party had "killed" the ideals espoused by Mahatma Gandhi many times over and used his name to further political gains.

Chouhan said during the UPA rule, MGNREGA was riddled with corruption and the expected amount of funds was not spent on procurement of material for designated jobs. "Funds were not allotted to the states as expected. MGNREGA was riddled with problems. As per the Act, 60 per cent of the funds were to be spent on labour and 40 per cent on material. But, only 26 per cent was spent on material and funds were siphoned off. Corruption was rampant under MGNREGA," he said.

Chouhan said the G RAM G Bill was brought after extensive deliberations as it was felt that amount to the tune of ₹ 10-11 lakh crore should not be spent on merely paying wages, but used for creating permanent assets.

"We have made provisions to improve employment. On the other hand, this vast amount will be used to build fully developed villages which has been the goal of the Modi government," he said.

He said the G RAM G initiative will focus on water security by creating lakes, micro-irrigation channels, developing core rural infrastructure, livelihood related infrastructure and special works to mitigate extreme weather events.

Chouhan said all the assets created will be aggregated to the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack. At the outset of the session, Congress member K C Venugopal urged Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to refer the Bill to a parliamentary committee for threadbare examination.

Birla turned down the demand, saying an eight-hour debate had taken place on the Bill and 98 members across party lines had spoken at length till past midnight on Wednesday night. As opposition members raised slogans and tore copies of the Bill, Chouhan hit out at the Congress for "insulting" Mahatma Gandhi and "killing" his ideals time and again.

"The opposition is murdering Bapu's ideals. I listened to the honourable members until 1:30 am at night. Just having your say and not listening to the views of others too is violence," Chouhan said.

The minister asserted that the Modi government was ensuring that the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi were upheld through various initiatives taken by it.

"Congress killed ideals of Bapu, NDA ensured Bapu lives through pucca houses built under the PM Awas Yojana, Ujjwala yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat," Chouhan said listing out government schemes for welfare of the poor. "Those in the opposition who cry in the name of Gandhi ji should remember that Gandhi ji also said now that freedom has been achieved, the Congress should be dissolved. In its place, a Lok Sevak Sangh should be formed. But Nehru ji did not dissolve Congress to cling to power and exploit the freedom movement," Chouhan said.

Opposition MPs trooped to the well of the House raising slogans against the government from dropping Mahatma Gandhi's name from the rural jobs initiative and tearing copies of the G RAM G Bill and flinging it towards the chair. (PTI)

Oppn's show of 'hooliganism' during passage of G RAM G Bill in LS 'disgraceful': Chouhan

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday termed the opposition uproar "disgraceful" during the debate on the rural employment guarantee bill in the Lok Sabha and alleged that they turned democracy into "mobocracy" and "hooliganism" with their behaviour.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP HQs, hours after the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day following uproar, Chouhan asked why the opposition was objecting to the name of the legislation -- The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill. "What was the fuss over the name of the Bill? The opposition is only concerned about the name but

we are more focused on work.

"I strongly condemn the disgraceful behaviour of the Congress and the INDI bloc MPs in Parliament. Through their behaviour, the opposition disgraced democracy, tore parliamentary traditions to shreds and turned democracy into 'bheedtantra' (mobocracy) and 'goondatantra' (hooliganism)," he said. The opposition members protested in Parliament for the "removal" of the original name of the law -- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA).

"They tore the papers, stood atop the desks. Is it not the murder of Bapu's ideals? Was it not immoral and undignified?" Chouhan asked. The minister also asked whether

Air power has emerged as a decisive force in today's times: Rajnath

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's high-impact military capability, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday as he commended the Indian Air Force for its handling of Pakistan's "irresponsible reaction" after it hit several terror targets.

In an address to top commanders of the IAF, he described the IAF as a technologically advanced, operationally agile, strategically confident and future-oriented force which is safeguarding national interests amid the constantly evolving geopolitical environment.

Singh praised the courage, speed and precision with which the IAF destroyed the terror camps during the operation.

Underscoring the importance of thoroughly understanding the enemy's offensive and defensive capabilities to maintain a decisive advantage, the defence minister urged the commanders to take lessons from Operation Sindoor, and stay vigilant and ready to deal with every future challenge.

He was addressing the Air Force

Commanders' Conclave here.

"Usually, when enemy attacks, people hide. But, when the Pakistani forces tried to target Indian installations, the people of India remained calm and continued with their daily routines," Singh said.

"This is the proof of the trust of every Indian in our operational preparedness".

Reflecting on the changing nature of warfare, Singh stated that the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Israel-Hamas war, Balakot air strikes and Operation Sindoor are proof that air power has emerged as a decisive force in today's times.

He stressed that air power is not just a tactical asset, but a strategic instrument, and speed, surprise and shock effect are its inherent characteristics. "Air power gives any leadership the capability to deliver a clear strategic message to the adversary that every step will be taken to uphold national interests," Singh said.

"Through speed, reach, and precision, air power has become an effective tool for aligning the



nation's objectives with military means."

While Singh commended the performance of India's air defence system and other equipment effectively used during Operation Sindoor, he reiterated the Modi-government's commitment to further strengthening the security apparatus of the country.

The defence minister said the

warfare in 21 century is not just a war of weapons, but it is a war of ideas, technology, and adaptability.

"Cyber warfare, Artificial Intelligence, unmanned aerial vehicles, satellite-based surveillance, and space-enabled capabilities are fundamentally changing the future of warfare," he said.

"Precision-guided weapons, real-time intelligence, and data-driven

decision-making are no longer optional; they have become basic requirements for success in modern conflicts. Those nations which master the trinity of technology, strategic vision, and adaptability will move towards global leadership," he added.

Describing Operation Sindoor as a shining example of tri-service synergy, Singh underlined the importance of jointness in today's rapidly changing times. "Jointness among the three Services is crucial as it would further strengthen our security system, and enable us to deal with our adversaries even more effectively," he said.

Singh exuded confidence that Sudarshan Chakra, which was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day speech this year, will play a crucial role in protecting national assets in the coming times.

He added that the development of indigenous jet engines has become a national mission, and the government is fully committed to achieving this objective. (PTI)

BJP alleges 'sponsored' fire in slum to protect illegal voters

KOLKATA, Dec 18: The BJP on Thursday alleged that the massive fire at Ghuni slum in New Town near Kolkata was "sponsored" to protect illegal voters amid the SIR of electoral rolls, a charge rejected by the ruling TMC and opposition Congress.

BJP leader and West Bengal co-in-charge Amit Malviya claimed that data from the ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead) list of six booths under Ghuni village raised serious questions about the blaze that broke out on Wednesday evening.

"If there was ever any doubt that the massive fire in the Ghuni slum near Eco Park, New Town was sponsored, one only needs to look at the ASD list of the six booths under Ghuni village," Malviya said in a post on Thursday, asserting that around 850 individuals featured on the list, of whom nearly 650 were Muslims, and that about 450 Muslim individuals, mostly young voters, were marked "untraceable".

He alleged that the SIR exercise was exposing an "illegal vote bank" and claimed the state's ruling dispensation was "rattled" by the clean-up of electoral rolls.

"However, there is no turning back from a constitutional exercise," Malviya said, adding that West Bengal "deserves a chief minister who owes allegiance to its people, not to illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators."

A day earlier, soon after the fire broke out, Malviya had alleged that the blaze was linked to the SIR process.

He claimed that "days before the Election



Commission of India is set to begin hearings on notices to be served to illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya settlers, a massive fire has broken out in the Ghuni slum", and alleged that visuals of abandoned huts had surfaced since the SIR began. Malviya alleged that it was an "open secret" that people from Bangladesh had settled in the area, that many residents had allegedly locked their homes and left, and that despite the scale of the blaze, fire tenders were not deployed with urgency.

He further claimed that after the draft voter rolls were published and "thousands of names were struck off", the fire was allegedly orchestrated so that residents could later claim loss of documents such as Aadhaar, ration cards and voter IDs, paving the way for fresh documentation and re-inclusion in voter lists.

Calling it "deliberate manipulation", he said, "Mamata Banerjee is playing with fire. This

time, quite literally."

The TMC dismissed the allegations as baseless and politically motivated.

TMC state vice-president Jaiprakash Majumdar said the EC's SIR draft electoral rolls had already punctured what he described as the BJP's "lies that West Bengal hosts one crore Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators".

"The Election Commission itself has exposed the lies of the BJP," Majumdar said, citing EC figures which show around 1.83 lakh voters were categorised as 'fake' or 'ghost' in the draft rolls, far short of the numbers repeatedly projected by BJP leaders.

"Now as their lies stand exposed, they are making new stories to justify their claim," said Majumdar, who had joined the TMC in 2022 after quitting the BJP.

Senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury also slammed the BJP, accusing it of pushing a "fake narrative".

"The EC data says that what BJP leaders were saying was a white lie. Now they are circulating new theories to justify their claim," said Chowdhury, a former state Congress president. Officials said a fire broke out at a cluster of shanties near Eco Park in the New Town area on Wednesday evening, with no reports of casualties.

The blaze started in one of the shanties around 7.30 pm and quickly spread to adjoining houses. Around 20 fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the flames. (PTI)

Bombay HC, local courts and banks in Mumbai

MUMBAI, Dec 18: The Bombay High Court, some local courts along with two prominent banks, most of them located in south Mumbai, received bomb threats on Thursday, but they turned out to be hoaxes as nothing suspicious was found during searches at these institutions, an official said.

A court in Nagpur received a similar bomb threat mail, which also turned out to be fake.

"The Bombay High Court, sessions court, Mazgaon and Esplanade court in south Mumbai, two magistrate courts - one each in Bandra and Andheri, along with two prominent banks received bomb threat emails in the morning. The premises were immediately vacated at most of these places. The Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS) was called in, but nothing suspicious was found anywhere in the searches," a senior police official said. A statement issued by the two bar associations of the Bombay HC said that owing to security concerns, the staff members of the high court were immediately asked to move out of the premises for a search operation.

"Due to the threat and the search operation, the regular court proceedings were disrupted for about an hour. All the courtrooms were thoroughly searched and the hearings began at 3 pm," said Nitin Thakker, president of the Bombay Bar Association. Speaking about the incident in Andheri, advocate Ali Kaashif Khan said that he had come for a hearing at the metropolitan magistrate's court.

"But the magistrate suddenly started adjourning the matter in all the cases without assigning any reason," he said. "As we came down, all the cars were asked to move out of the court premises, and there we got to know from court police officers that a bomb squad was coming to conduct a check," he added. The Bandra magistrate court received the bomb threat mail on its official email ID in the morning, a police official said. (PTI)

Jeddah-Kozhikode AI Express flight makes precautionary landing at Kochi

KOCHI, Dec 18: A Kozhikode-bound Air India Express flight with 160 passengers made a "precautionary" landing at the airport here on Thursday due to issues involving the aircraft's tyres, an airline official said.

An Air India Express spokesperson said that the Jeddah-Kozhikode flight was diverted to Cochin International Airport and "made a precautionary landing due to suspected damage to the aircraft's tyre likely caused by a foreign object on the runway at Jeddah airport".

"The aircraft landed safely in Kochi, and all guests are being connected to Kozhikode by road. We regret the inconvenience caused and reiterate that safety remains our highest priority in every aspect of our operations," the spokesperson added.

He also said that there were only the tyres burst and no issues with the landing gears. "Also, it was not an emergency landing. It is a precautionary landing to Kochi as Karipur is a table

top airport," the official said.

Tabletop runways are constructed on hilly or elevated terrains. Also, there could be low lying areas adjacent to such runways and there could be gorges at the end of such runways.

In the morning, the Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), in a statement, said that it successfully facilitated the "safe emergency landing" of Air India Express flight IX 398 from Jeddah to Kozhikode, which was diverted to Kochi due to a technical issue involving the right main landing gear and tyre failure. The aircraft landed safely at 9.08 am under full emergency conditions, it said.

"All emergency services were activated in advance, and there were no injuries reported among passengers or crew. Post-landing inspection confirmed that both right-side tyres had burst," a CIAL spokesperson said in the statement.

Subsequently, the runway was cleared and released for operations, it added. (PTI)

K'taka Assembly passes country's maiden anti-hate speech law

BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), Dec 18: The Karnataka Assembly on Thursday passed the country's maiden anti-hate speech legislation, which the BJP termed as a "Brahmastra" against the opposition and the media with an eye on "vote bank politics".

The Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill was passed in the House amid din by the BJP MLAs, with the government referring to the Supreme Court observations against hateful remarks.

The bill has a provision for a fine up to ₹ one lakh and a jail term up to seven years.

Home Minister G Parameshwara said the provision for 10 years jail term in the event of repeated offence has been reduced to seven years.

The bill, cleared by the cabinet on December 4 was presented in the House by Parameshwara on December 10.

According to the bill, any expression, which is made, published or circulated in words either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representations or through electronic communication or otherwise, in public view, with an intention to cause injury, disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred or ill-will against person alive or dead, class or group of persons or community, to meet any prejudicial interest, is hate speech.

While discussing the bill, Parameshwara said the Supreme Court had come down strongly against hate speech saying that it cannot be tolerated.

He said hate speech and hate crimes lead to murders, create social unrest and vitiate the society.

The minister pointed out that prejudices happen in the name of religion, language, disability, gender, sexual orientation, caste, race, the place of birth, tribe or

residence. "I think the law will bring a major change in the society," Parameshwara noted.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said the law will turn police into "Hitler". It violates the constitutional provision of freedom of expression.

Even cartoons and pictures have not been spared. It will also attack the freedom of press and curb digital freedom, the BJP leader claimed. "There will be rampant extortion. There will be no bail but only jail under this law. What else should we expect from those who imposed Emergency in this country," Ashoka said taking a swipe at the ruling Congress.

According to him, all the crimes mentioned in the law are already there in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the new Indian Penal Code but yet the Congress government in Karnataka has brought it.

"This is a Brahmastra (ultimate deadly weapon) against the opposition. We will be the first to bear the brunt of the law and next in the line will be the media. Ultimately, it is vote bank politics," the LoP charged.

He also said that there will be a need for more prisons in the state, "which the pauper government cannot afford". Ashoka cautioned the ruling Congress that the law was not good for it as well and advised it to be cautious while giving passage to the bill.

BJP MLA V Sunil Kumar sought to know what if someone quotes hate contents from a book, which can be religious.

In reply, the Home Minister said those books published in the past will also be covered under the law.

Sunil Kumar said the minister was inviting trouble for himself as he would quote hate contents in the religious books. (PTI)

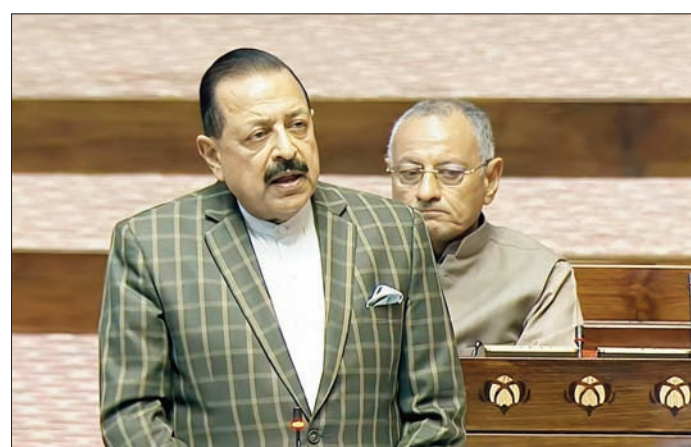
Cancer patients in India could rise to 2 million by 2040: MoS Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India is third after China and the United States in the prevalence of cancer across the world, and the country is likely to have around 2 million cases by 2040, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Responding to supplementaries during the Question Hour, the minister informed the House that the Department of Biotechnology has developed the first-ever HPV vaccine for the treatment of cervical cancer in women, and the government is working to make it available to a larger population at an affordable rate or free of cost.

"It is true that cancer incidence has increased all over the world. If you take the world statistics, we have 20 million cancer patients every year, that is around 2 crore cancer patients every year. In India alone, we have about 1.4 to 1.5 million, which is almost 15 lakh.

"The figure is expected to go up to almost 2 million by 2040 or so, which means nearly 20 lakh. We stand at number 3, after China and the USA, as far as the prevalence



of cancer is concerned," Singh told the Rajya Sabha.

He said this could have been possible due to a number of reasons -- the changing spectrum of disease in this country.

Till the 1980s, he said India was beset with communicable diseases, then the era came of non-communicable diseases. As of today, we are beset with both, he noted.

"The irony is that many of these diseases, including cancer, which were earlier happening in the later

decades of life, are now happening in the earlier decades. Cancer of a later age can now happen at an earlier age. The same is with heart attacks, which were earlier happening late in life, are now happening at a younger age," he said.

Though we take pride in the fact that India comprises 70 per cent of the population below the age of 40, the other half of the truth is that the number of citizens aged 60 and above has also gone up, the minister said, adding that this also adds

to the disease burden.

As far as the treatment is concerned, the government has started an ambitious programme to provide cancer facilities in virtually every district hospital of the country, Singh said, adding that this is a heterogeneous country, and the nature of cancer also varies. For example, in the north-east, you have head and neck cancers, he noted.

"About the vaccine, the Department of Biotechnology has come out with the first-ever HPV vaccine, which is said to have a preventive role in the prevention of cervical cancers, which are said to be more prevalent among young females in India.

"We are negotiating with the health ministry on how best to make it available to a larger population at an affordable price or free of cost," the minister said while responding to a query from Congress member Rajani Ashokrao Patil, who had asked what concrete steps the government is taking to ensure the timely availability and affordability of essential cancer medicines for poor patients. (PTI)

Cyclist crosses Manipur's Kangpokpi in security convoy amid Kuki outfit's 'warning'

IMPHAL, Dec 18: Transgender social activist Malem Thongam, who embarked on an over 2,300-km cycling expedition from New Delhi to Manipur to spread the message of peace, on Thursday safely crossed the Kangpokpi district in a security convoy amid a "warning" from a Kuki outfit.



district due to security issues and travelled in a special security convoy of central forces.

The Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU), an influential Kuki outfit, had urged the authorities to stop the expedition immediately.

It said if any untoward incidents happen when the activist crosses Kangpokpi district, "COTU and Kuki Zo people of the district will not be responsible, but rather the authority concerned will bear the

full responsibility".

Over 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in the ethnic clashes between the Kuki and Meitei communities since May 2023. Kukis and Meiteis do not venture into each other's areas after the violence broke out, leaving the state deeply divided on ethnic lines.

BJP MLA Yunnam Khemchand Singh, who belongs to the Meitei community, visited a relief camp, where Kuki people who had been displaced by the violence were staying, in Ukhrul district on December 8. He became the first leader from either side to cross the divide and visit a camp of the other community. Kuki outfits heavily criticised the overture, calling it a "calculated political exercise" rather than an act of genuine concern.

The state has been under the President's Rule since February, after BJP leader N Biren Singh resigned as the chief minister amid criticism of his government's handling of the crisis. (PTI)

Manipur Gov inaugurates Orange festival

IMPHAL, Dec 18: Governor of Manipur, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, recently inaugurated the 18th Manipur State Level Orange Festival, 2025, at the Mini Stadium in Tamenglong district headquarters. The event featured a presentation by the Orange Growers Association.

Vibrant cultural performances, including traditional war cries, folk dances and a tug-of-war demonstration involving Rongmei, Liangmai, Zeme and Inpu tribes added colour and enthusiasm to the occasion. Addressing the gathering, the Governor lauded the unity and cultural diversity of Tamenglong and reiterated the State Government's commitment to inclusive development, preservation of indigenous culture, and promotion of local livelihoods. Speaking on the theme "Celebration for a Cause," the Governor said the festival symbolises not only the celebration of the famed Tamenglong orange but also the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and tourism potential. He highlighted that Tamenglong orange, which received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2017, contributes over 50 per cent of Manipur's orange production and has emerged as a vital source of income for local farmers, with notable progress in organic cultivation. Describing orange as the One District One Product of Tamenglong, the Governor said the festival has grown into a major platform for farmers, artists and youth, conveying a strong message of peace, harmony and unity. He expressed confidence that with continued cooperation between the government and the people, Tamenglong would emerge as a model of sustainable development and social harmony. Highlighting the rich natural beauty, cultural diversity and historical significance of Tamenglong with respect to India's freedom struggle, Ajay Kumar Bhalla recalled the heroic contributions of freedom fighters Haipou Jadonang. (NNN)

High Court takes cognizance of ongoing water crisis in Shillong

SHILLONG, Dec 18: The Meghalaya High Court has taken suo motu cognizance of the ongoing water crisis in Shillong, directing the state government to submit a report on the matter by December 18.

In its order passed on Tuesday, the division bench comprising Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice HS Thangkiew directed that the matter be registered as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), expressing concern over the difficulties faced by the people of Shillong due to the crisis.

The Advocate General assured the court that he will look into the matter and file a report by Thursday.

The water crisis in Shillong has been ongoing for some time, with residents facing severe difficulties due to the shortage.

The Public Health Engineering (PHE) department had extended a four-day emergency water supply shutdown by another three days, plunging most of the city into an acute shortage. The bench has directed the matter to be listed on Thursday, indicating a sense of urgency in addressing the crisis.

Meanwhile, the opposition Voice of the People Party (VPP) has condemned the Meghalaya state government's handling of the water crisis in Shillong, stating that the administration's response to the situation has been inadequate.

In a statement, VPP spokesperson Batskhem Myrboh expressed the party's disappointment, saying, "The Voice of the People Party condemns the unthoughtful action by the government that deprived the residents of Shillong of nearly one week of water supply."

Myrboh emphasized that while emergencies are unavoidable, the government's response should be prompt and demonstrate a sense of urgency.

He further stressed that access to water is a fundamental right, and the government should have treated the matter with greater responsibility to mitigate the hardships faced by the people.

"Since accessibility to water constitutes the right to life, the government should have attended the matter with great responsibility to save the people from great hardships," he added. (NNN)

Tripura brick kiln chimney collapse toll rises to five, owner arrested

AGARTALA, Dec 18: The toll in the brick kiln chimney collapse incident in Tripura's Dhalai district rose to five as one of the injured workers succumbed to injuries at G B Hospital here, officials said Thursday.

Police have arrested the owner of the brick kiln, Sourav Pal, and the manager, Amit Deb, in connection with the incident. Four workers were killed and four others injured after the chimney of a brick kiln collapsed on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Manik Saha expressed deep grief over the loss of lives and directed officials to ensure proper medical care for those undergoing treatment.

In a Facebook post, the CM announced that Dhalai district administration has sanctioned Rs 25.16 lakh as ex-gratia assistance for families affected by the tragic incident. An amount of Rs 4 lakh each has been approved for the families of the deceased, along with financial assistance for critically and less critically injured workers from SDRF funds.

"We stand firmly with the bereaved families and injured persons, ensuring timely relief and assistance during this difficult period," the CM said. An investigation has been initiated to ascertain the exact cause of the collapse. Local authorities said the inquiry would examine whether mandatory safety norms were followed and assess the structural condition of the chimney at the brick kiln. (PTI)

11 murder cases registered in Mizoram's Aizawl district this year; 10 probed

AIZAWL, Dec 18: At least 11 murder cases have been registered in Mizoram's Aizawl district since January, of which 10 have been fully investigated, a senior police officer said on Thursday. Aizawl SP Zosangliana told reporters that a total of 1,764 criminal cases have been

registered in various police stations under Aizawl District Executive Force (DEF) from January to December 17. Theft and burglary accounted for the highest number of offences, with 1,176 cases, constituting about 66 per cent of the total cases, he said. (PTI)

ASSAM ELECTRICITY GRID CORPORATION LIMITED

NOTICE

The Assam Electricity Grid Corporation Ltd. (AEGCL), a State Transmission Utility have filed Petition before the Hon'ble Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (AERC) for approval of Truing up for FY 2024-25, Annual Performance Review for FY 2025-26 and Aggregate Revenue Requirement for FY 2026-27 (Petition No: 22/2025) for the energy to be transmitted and wheeled to the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) and Open Access (OA) Consumers from different generating stations under Assam Power Generation Corporation Limited (APGCL), Central Sector Generating Stations and other sources as per provision of the Electricity Act, 2003 (EA, 2003) and Regulations made thereunder.

The Hon'ble Commission has admitted the Petition on 15/12/2025 and directed AEGCL to publish a Notice giving the salient features of ARR and the Tariff Petition under Section 64 (2) of the EA, 2003. The salient features of the Petition are provided below:

Table 1: Transmission Loss for FY 2024-25

S.N.	Particulars	FY 2024-25
1	Energy Injected (MU)	12829.19
2	Energy Sent Out to APDCL (MU)	12396.30
3	Energy Sent Out to OA Consumers (MU)	17.00
4	Total Energy Sent Out (MU)	12413.30
5	Transmission Loss (MU)	415.89
6	Transmission Loss (%)	3.24%

Table 2: True Up of AEGCL for FY 2024-25 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in TO dt 27-06-2024	AEGCL Submission
1	O&M Expenses	252.55	250.54
a	Employee Cost	207.87	206.07
b	R&M Expenses	32.33	32.13
c	A&G Expenses	12.35	12.34
2	Depreciation	98.37	84.03
3	Interest & Finance Charges	0.40	5.61
4	Interest on Working Capital	20.21	19.23
5	BST for Pension Trust Fund	260.69	247.93
6	Return on Equity	125.96	111.95
7	Other Debits	-	0.56
8	Contribution to Contingency Reserve	-	3.25
9	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	85.33	103.95
10	Aggregate Revenue Requirement	672.85	619.13
11	Add: Incentive on higher transmission availability	-	3.98
12	Add: Sharing of (Gains)/Loss	-	2.05
13	Less: Revenue from STOA/MTOA Charges	4.58	0.95
14	Net Aggregate Revenue Requirement	668.27	620.12
15	Revenue surplus for FY 2024-25	-	48.16

Table 3: Transmission Loss for FY 2025-26

S.N.	Particulars	FY 2025-26
1	Energy Injected (MU)	14194.28
2	Energy Sent Out to APDCL (MU)	13689.57
3	Energy Sent Out to OA Consumers (MU)	47.50
4	Total Energy Sent Out	13737.08
5	Transmission Loss (MU)	457.20
6	Transmission Loss (%)	3.22%

Table 4: Annual Performance Review of AEGCL for FY 2025-26 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in T.O. dt 25.03.2025	FY 2025-26 H1	FY 2025-26 H2	AEGCL Submission
1	O&M Expenses	262.43	135.99	135.99	271.98
a	Employee Cost	206.12	109.14	109.14	218.27
b	R&M Expenses	40.79	20.46	20.46	40.92
c	A&G Expenses	15.52	6.40	6.40	12.79
2	Depreciation	82.40	40.72	40.72	81.45
3	Interest & Finance Charges	1.38	0.58	0.58	1.16
4	Interest on Working Capital	14.78	8.43	8.43	16.87
5	BST for Pension Trust Fund	253.83	123.21	123.21	246.41
6	Return on Equity	116.15	56.41	56.41	112.82
7	Contribution towards Contingency Reserve	3.53	1.70	1.70	3.40
8	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	119.80	43.84	60.22	104.06
9	Less: Revenue from STOA/MTOA Charges	2.36	1.23	1.13	2.36
10	Net Aggregate Revenue Requirement	612.34	321.97	395.69	627.66
11	Revenue Gap for FY 2025-26	-	-	-	15.32

Table 5: Projected Transmission Loss for FY 2026-27

S.N.	Particulars	FY 2026-27
1	Energy Injected (MU)	14557.37
2	Energy Sent Out to APDCL (MU)	13825.99
3	Energy Sent Out to OA Consumers (MU)	267.00
4	Total Energy Sent Out (MU)	14,092.99
5	Transmission Loss (MU)	464.38
6	Transmission Loss (%)	3.19%

Table 6: ARR for 2026-27 (Rs. Crores.)

S.N.	Particulars	Approved in order dt 25.03.2025	FY 2026-27
1	O&M Expenses	268.16	278.02
a	Employee Cost	219.54	231.20
b	R&M Expenses	31.98	33.56
c	A&G Expenses	16.64	19.26
2	Depreciation	81.26	100.77
3	Interest & Finance Charges	0.00	0.00
4	Interest on Working Capital	16.68	17.51
5	BST for Pension Trust Fund	274.20	248.87
6	Return on Equity	116.15	117.36
7	Contribution to Contingency Reserve	3.79	3.82
8	Less: Non-Tariff Income/ Other Income	125.79	104.06
9	Aggregate Revenue Requirement	634.45	662.29
10	Less: Revenue from STOA/MTOA Charges	2.36	2.36
11	Net Aggregate Revenue Requirement	632.09	659.93

Further, the Hon'ble Commission has directed these copies of tariff petitions and other relevant documents be made available to consumers and other interested parties at the office of the Managing Director of AEGCL. Accordingly, the documents may be collected from the concerned offices by paying Rs. 200/- (Rupees two hundred only) by Cash or DD drawn in favour of MD, AEGCL.

The Hon'ble Commission has further directed that any person who intends to file objection or comments in regard to proposed ARR of the AEGCL may do so by filing statement of objections or comments before the Secretary, Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission with copies of relevant documents and evidence in support thereof along with the affidavit as in Form - 2 of Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (Conduct of Business) Regulations, 2004 as amended from time to time. Such objections or comments shall be submitted in soft copy to gm_mpr@aegcl.co.in and 5 (five) copies by speed post or in person which should reach the Secretary, Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission, ASEB Campus, Sixth Mile, Dwarandhar, Guwahati-781026. A copy of the filing submitted to the Secretary, AERC should also be made available within the aforesaid date to the General Manager (M&PR), AEGCL, Bijulee Bhawan, Paltan bazar, Guwahati-1 positively and proof of such submission shall be furnished to the Hon'ble Commission. A copy of the Petition is also available on the web site of the Hon'ble Commission www.aerc.gov.in and on the web site of AEGCL www.aegcl.co.in in downloadable format. The Commission may hear the persons filing objections or comments at the venue and date as may be determined by the Hon'ble Commission. The date and place shall be notified later. Person filing objections or comments on the ARR may also indicate whether they would like to be heard by the Hon'ble Commission in person.

Sd/- General Manager (M&PR), AEGCL, Bijulee Bhawan, Guwahati - 781 001

OFFICE OF THE ALL ASSAM CENTRAL ENVIRONMENT & FOREST PROTECTION N.G.O.

Under Ministry of Social Welfare, Govt. of India.

Under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 Govt. Regd. No. RS/KAM/240/G/1 of 1998-99

Head office: Dilaji, Mithiphang, P.O. & P.S. Diphu, Karbi Anglong (Assam)

Ref. No.....

Date 16/12/2025

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public, members, donors, stakeholders, and all concerned Authorities that pursuant to the resolution passed by the Governing Body/Executive Committee of "ALL ASSAM CENTRAL ENVIRONMENT & FOREST PROTECTION", an NGO, registered under Society Registration Act XXI of 1860, bearing Govt. Regd. No. RS/KAM/240/G/1 of 1998/99 having its Head Office at Dilaji, Mithiphang, P.O & P.S - Diphu, Dist. Karbi Anglong, Assam 782460, duly convened on dt. 15.12.2025, the following office bearers have been removed from their respective posts and active primary membership with immediate effect by invoking Article 13 of the MOA of the NGO:

1. Sri Micheal Baglary, S/o. Lt. Mohen Baglary (President)
2. Sri Dilip Daimary, S/o. Lt. Dinesh Daimary (General Secretary)
3. Sri Tiken Brahma, S/o. Lt. Lal Mohon Brahma (Ex-President/Executive Member)

The said decision has been taken after due deliberation on acts and conduct found to be contrary to the aims, objectives, rules, and interest of the NGO, and for actions detrimental to the functioning and reputation of the organization.

Accordingly, their names have been struck off from the official records and rolls of the NGO, and they cease to hold any position, authority or representative capacity whatsoever in "ALL ASSAM CENTRAL ENVIRONMENT & FOREST PROTECTION".

It is hereby further notified that any act, decision, representations, communications, or transactions made by the aforesaid persons on behalf of or in the name of the NGO, from the date of this Notice onwards, shall be deemed unauthorized, illegal, and null and void and the NGO shall not be responsible or liable for same in any manner.

All concerned persons, Institutions, Banks, Government Departments, Donors and members of the public are advised to take note of this notice and act accordingly.

Issued in the interest of transparency and to safeguard the lawful functioning of the organization.

By order of the Governing Body/Executive Committee:

ALL ASSAM CENTRAL ENVIRONMENT & FOREST PROTECTION

Date: 16/12/2025

Place: Diphu

Authorized Signatory
Name: Ananda Basumatary
Designation: General Secretary
Contact number: 9101469799

Sd/-
General Secretary
All Assam Central Environment
& Forest Protection, Society, NGO

IN THE COURT OF THE CIVIL JUDGE (SENIOR DIVISION) NO.1, KAMRUP (M) AT GUWAHATI (Under Order 5, Rule 1 and 5 of the CPC) **TITLE SUIT NO. 163 OF 2025** Sri Pramod Kumar Agrawal ...Plaintiff Vs. M/S Shiv Ganesh Traders & Anr. ...Defendants To. 1. M/s Shiv Ganesh Traders, Having it's office at-3rd floor, Royal Plaza, G.S. Road, Christian Basti, Guwahati - 781005, District- Kamrup(M), Assam. Represented By It's Proprietor, Sri Panna Deb. 2. Sri Panna Deb, Son of Sri Dharendra Deb, Resident of 2, Kundil Nagar, Birkuchi Narengi, Panikhati, Guwahati- 781026, District- Kamrup (M). **...DEFENDANTS** WHEREAS the Plaintiff above named have instituted a suit against you for declaration, ejectment and recovery of arrears rents. You are hereby summoned to appear in this Court in person or by a pleader duly instructed and able to answer all material questions relating to the suit, or who shall be accompanied by some person able to answer all such questions on the 04th day of February, 2026 at 10 O'clock in the forenoon to answer the claim and further you are hereby directed to file on that day a written statement of your defence and to produce on the said day all documents in your possession or power upon which you base your defence or claim for set off or counter claim and where you rely on any other document whether in your possession or not, as evidence in support of your defence or claim for set off or counter claim, you shall enter such documents in a list to be annexed to the written statement. Take notice that, in default of your appearance on the day before mentioned, that the suit will be heard and determined in your absence. Given under my hand and seal of this Court, on this 16th day of December, 2025
By Order
Administrative Officer
Civil Judge (Senior Division) No 1
Kamrup (Metro), Guwahati

'MAMI Select: Filmed on iPhone' returns for 3rd edition with four acclaimed mentors

The Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), organizers of the prestigious MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, on Thursday announced the third edition of their acclaimed "MAMI Select: Filmed on iPhone" initiative, which will feature Sriram Raghavan and Dibakar Banerjee among the four mentors.

The platform, aimed at empowering aspiring filmmakers by providing them with the tools and resources necessary to create compelling short films, also features award-winning directors Geetu Mohandas and Chaitanya Tamhane as mentors.

From pre-production to post-production, these mentors will guide the filmmakers in pushing the boundaries of storytelling using cutting-edge technology.

Aspiring filmmakers can submit their application till January 4.

The completed short films will premiere at a special screening event, followed by their release on the MAMI YouTube channel, ensuring widespread accessibility and audience engagement.

"After a very successful edition of MAMI Select: Filmed on iPhone this

year, I am delighted to announce the third edition of this programme through which MAMI supports emerging independent filmmakers with technological support, a fantastic cohort of mentors and a platform to showcase their work.

"This year we are fortunate to have on board four superb mentors: Sriram Raghavan, Dibakar Banerjee, Geetu Mohandas and Chaitanya Tamhane and once again we are looking for regional short films in Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam and, for the first time, in Bengali," festival director Shivendra Singh Durgapur said in a release.

Raghavan, who is awaiting the release of "Ikkis", said, "A short film can go a long way. I totally look forward to the MAMI Select: Filmed on iPhone programme. It's a terrific opportunity for budding filmmakers. I hope to learn a few things too."

Banerjee, the director of films such as "Khosla Ka Ghosla", "Shanghai" and "Sandeep Aur Pinky Farar", said, "This is one of the most exciting mentorship roles I've ever stepped into. A young film maker, an iPhone and sky is the limit. I wish I had this when I was start-

ing out. Kudos to MAMI."

Mohandas, known for films such as "Liar's Dice" and "Moothon", said she was excited to be mentoring as part of the MAMI Select: Filmed on iPhone programme.

"... Filmmaking isn't defined by equipment, but by intention, imagination and courage. What excites me most is not just the technical exploration, but the opportunity to witness each filmmaker discover their own voice. I'm looking forward to learning together, questioning together, and most importantly- making cinema together. Being able to pass that energy forward is an honour."

Tamhane, who has won acclaim internationally with "Court" and "The Disciple", said, "I'm thrilled and honoured to associate with MAMI and be part of this endeavour. It's a programme that empowers filmmakers to tell their stories using imagination, clarity and the tools at hand. It embodies the true spirit of independent filmmaking, and I'm eager to see what emerges from this year's edition. I look forward to supporting another filmmaker's vision — and to learning from the creative dialogue that unfolds along the way." (PTI)



Classical music stalwarts to perform at 27th 'Swami Haridas Tansen Mahotsav'

Legendary flautist Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, acclaimed vocalist Begum Parveen Sultana, sitar maestro Shujaat Khan, Grammy Award-winning musician Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, and his son Pandit Salil Bhatt, the creator of the Satvik Veena, are among the artistes performing at the much-awaited 27th edition of the "Swami Haridas Tansen Sangeet Nritya Mahotsav", starting January 9.

Scheduled to be held at Shankar Lal Hall, Modern School, Barakhamba, the three-day event, widely rated among India's prestigious festivals of classical music and dance, will also showcase celebrated Hindustani vocalists Ashwini Bhide Deshpande and Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar.

The festival lineup further features Kathak legend Uma Sharma, who will perform alongside her disciples, as well as sarod player Amaan Ali Bangash, the eldest son and disciple of the Sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan, and well-known santoor expo-

nent Pt. Rahul Shivkumar Sharma.

It is organised by the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts under the guidance of Padma Bhushan awardee Uma Sharma and Vinay Bharat Ram.

"While today's youth gravitate toward Western and pop music, it's imperative to preserve and promote the timeless legacy of Indian classical arts. This festival aims to inspire the next generation to cherish our musical heritage," said Sharma in a statement.

Conceived as a tribute to the legendary Swami Haridas and his illustrious disciple Tansen, the festival has, over the past 25 years, evolved into a significant platform for showcasing India's classical traditions in music and dance.

Known for its intimate 'mehfil andaaz', the event reflects the traditional 'guru-shishya parampara' and seeks to engage younger audiences with India's cultural heritage.

The festival will come to a close on January 11. (PTI)

Comedian Russell Peters to return to India with 'Relax World Tour'

Global comedy superstar Russell Peters is set to bring his critically acclaimed 'Relax World Tour' to India, promising electrifying shows in seven prominent cities, including Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata in March next year. The Emmy-winning comedian, who has toured India multiple times, will also perform in Mumbai, Pune and Chennai.

His 2026 Relax World Tour marks Peter's biggest, most expansive tour of India to date, giving fans across the country the chance to experience his all-new material as well as his signature, razor-sharp crowd work.

Earlier, the Emmy, Gemini, and Peabody Award-winning comedian had toured India five times, beginning with his Somebody! Tour in 2007, followed by the Notorious World Tour in 2013, the Almost Famous World Tour in 2015, the Departed World Tour in 2019, and most recently the Act Your Age World Tour in 2024.

Presented and promoted by BEW Live in association with EVA Live, the Russell Peters Relax World Tour powered by Mastercard is poised to become one of the biggest comedy events of 2026.

The multi-city India leg of the Relax World Tour will kick off in March 2026 and travel to Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune, Mumbai, and Kolkata over a span of one month.

Speaking about the event, Peters shared, "I love coming to India. It's home. It's my roots and one of my favourite places to visit. Performing here is always an incredible experience — the energy, the food, hospitality and the audiences, who are smart, lively and have supported me from day one. I can't wait to come back!"

Deepak Choudhary, Founder & Managing Director, EVA Live, added, "As someone who has seen the evolution of live entertainment and comedy in India, it is truly special to present an artist of Russell Peters' calibre. His comedy cuts across ages, cultures and generations. His ability to innovate while staying true to the humour people admire makes this massive comedy tour a must-attend experience."

He stated, "Only a few iconic comedians of our time have sustained such incredible relevance and popularity over thirty years. Hosting Russell Peters' Relax World Tour in India reflects EVA Live's commitment to delivering world-class and multi-genre live entertainment experiences." (PTI)



We want nation's prayers that 'Homebound' does us proud by landing an Oscar nod: Karan Johar

Filmmaker Karan Johar on Thursday said "Homebound" making it to the top 15 shortlist in the best international feature category is an achievement in itself and now the team hopes that the film makes India proud by earning an Oscar nomination.

Produced by Johar and Adar Poonawala's Dharma Productions and directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, "Homebound" on Wednesday moved a step closer to Oscar nomination by getting into the shortlist of final 15 movies from across the world.

Johar said he was excited and nervous to have reached the top 15 in the category

"It is such an honour. I am so grateful to the selection process that allowed us to be India's official entry to the Academy Awards. We have been doing everything in our capacity and now we are part of the top 15, which I believe is an achievement in itself. "Now we just hope and we want the nation's prayers that 'Homebound' does us proud and lands a final nomination. We will do everything in our capacity," Johar told reporters here at an event in Mumbai.

The award for best foreign film, now re-categorised as best international feature, has so far eluded India.

Only three Indian films have received nominations in the category -- Mehmood Khan's "Mother India", Mira Nair's "Salaam Bombay" and Ashutosh Gowariker's "Lagaan". Deepa Mehta's "Water", starring John

Abraham and Lisa Ray, also received a nomination but it was submitted from Canada.

Gujarati film "Chhello Show" in 2023 was the last film to get short-listed.

Featuring Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa and Janhvi Kapoor, "Homebound" portrays the childhood friendship between a Muslim and Dalit who chase a police job that promises them the dignity they have long been denied due to their surnames.

The film premiered in the Un Certain Regard category at Cannes in May and has Hollywood legend Martin Scorsese as an executive producer.

Johar was speaking at an event for India's International Moment of United Nations (IIMUN), which organised the 11th edition of its flagship Role Model Series on Thursday. He is part of the advisory board of IIMUN.

At the event, the "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani" filmmaker also congratulated Ranveer Singh and director Aditya Dhar for their new hit "Dhurandhar".

"I love the film and I am very, very elated with its massive box office success, appreciation and acclaim. I look forward to what Aditya Dhar does next. I want to congratulate the entire cast and crew of that film. Ranveer Singh, Extraordinary Akshaye (Khanna), Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt, everybody is so similar. Aditya Dhar is the man of the moment and more power to him," Johar said. (PTI)

I'm manifesting action films and more romantic leads: Dino Morea



Actor Dino Morea says he is happy to play romantic roles on the screen but he also hopes that directors imagine him in an out and out action avatar in movies and shows.

Morea, who was most recently on shows like "The Empire" and "The Royals" and the movie "Housefull 5", is the new entrant in the Prime Video show "Four More Shots Please!". In the final season of the show, Morea will be seen as the love interest to Kirti Kulhari's character. The series, about the friendship between four women, also stars Sayani Gupta, Bani J and Maanvi Gargoo.

"I would like to think that I'm adding a lot of sexiness, hotness and coolness, and a lot more fun to the show," the actor told PTI in an interview.

The 50-year-old model-actor said he is comfortable being seen in a romantic role and he will continue to play these roles in future as well.

"Having said that, I've also done a lot of action in the course of my career. I think, I've the trappings for all. So, whatever works and whatever is telling a better story, I'd be a part of. I'm manifesting that (action films) and more romantic leads," the actor, who made his debut with 1999 film, "Pyaar Mein Kabhi Kabhi", and later appeared in movies like "Raaz", "Gunaah", "Aksar", "Rana Naidu", said.

Created by Rangita Pritish Nandy and Ishita Pritish Nandy, the final season brings back the lead quartet -- Gupta, Bani and Kulhari, and Gargoo. The show is developed and written by Devika Bhagat, with dialogues by Ishita Moitra. It will debut on Prime Video on December 19.

Actors Prateik S M Patil, Milind Soman, Rajeev Sid-dhartha, Lisa Ray and Ankur Rathee, Anasuya Sengupta and Kunaal Roy Kapur round out the cast of "Four More Shots Please!". (PTI)

Watching Dharamendra for one last time in 'Ikkis' will mean the world to all of us: Karan Johar

Filmmaker Karan Johar on Thursday extended his good wishes to "Ikkis", which will be actor Dharamendra's last movie and said it's going to be a treat for him and cinegoers to watch the last star on the screen one more time.

The war drama, directed by Sriram Raghavan, was earlier set to arrive in theatres on December 25, and will now hit the big screen on January 1, 2026. Johar's home production, "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri", starring Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday is now releasing on December 25. "I'm looking forward to watching 'Ikkis'. It's such a special film to all of us. For me, for personal reasons, we have such great regard, respect and reverence for Dharam ji and it's been a tremendous loss to all of us. And watching him for one last time will mean the world to all of us as fans and cinegoers.

"Also, it's Agastya's film, like I've known

Ananya (Panday), I've known Agastya and Dinu's (Dinesh Vijan, producer) a great friend," Johar told reporters here at the trailer launch press conference of "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri".

"Ikkis" narrates the story of youngest Param Vir Chakra recipient Arun Khetarpal, a second Lieutenant, who was martyred at the age of 21 during the Battle of Basantar in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. Agastya Nanda plays the role of Khetarpal.

When asked about releasing "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri" at a time when Ranveer Singh-fronted "Dhurandhar" is doing well in theatres and James Cameron's "Avatar: Fire and Ash" has also released, Johar said there is scope for all kinds of films in theatres.

"I'm incredibly proud of the success of 'Dhurandhar' and my congratulations to the entire team. It's a phenomenal film. I've heard the best things about 'Avatar', but I've also heard amazing things about



our film. I know that it's a Christmas release and it's a festive release," the producer said.

"I believe, as a producer of a multitude of films, that there is scope for every film to perform. Also I felt that our film "Tu Meri Main Tera..." is very

different from every other film that is being played in cinema halls. I think all of us can do exceedingly well in the cinemas," Johar added.

he upcoming film is directed by Sameer Vidwans of "Satyaprem Ki Katha" fame. (PTI)

Latham and Conway's record stand puts New Zealand in control against West Indies

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 18: Tom Latham took a close look at the pitch at Bay Oval Thursday and made the inspired decision to bat first.

Inspired ultimately because at stumps New Zealand was 334-1 against West Indies, Devon Conway was 178 not out and nightwatchman Jacob Duffy was 9.

Latham and Conway put on 323 for New Zealand's first wicket in a partnership that ended just three overs from stumps when Latham was out for 137. The partnership was New Zealand's second-highest opening stand in tests and the highest for all wickets and all teams in 2025.

Latham faced 245 balls before falling to a slip catch shortly after the arrival of the second new ball. Conway faced 279 deliveries, batted throughout the day and at stumps was approaching his highest test score — his 200 on debut against England in 2021.

Latham's decision to bat first was bold because the pitch was unusually green for Bay Oval. Bold because he had to back his play, pad up and bat first.

Inspired also because the pitch's appearance was deceptive. It was much drier under its carpet of grass than it outwardly appeared. West Indies had planned to bowl first, anyway.

"I guess we left the decision about what we were going to do a bit longer than we usually do," Latham said. "We were going back and forth and we obviously ended up going with a spinner and decided to bat first."

"It was obviously a great day, a great partnership between Dev and myself and I'm obviously happy with the day's work."

New Zealand captains don't usually choose to bat first after winning the toss in tests at home. The last time, before Latham took that gamble Thursday, was 14 years ago in January, 2011 when Daniel Vettori chose to bat against Pakistan at the Basin Reserve. Vettori made 110 in the first innings of that match as the gamble paid off for the captain on that occasion as well.

The last time both openers scored centuries in a test for New Zealand was in 2019 when Latham made 161 and Jeet



Raval 132 against Bangladesh in Hamilton. That was an opening stand of 200 or more, of which there have been only six for New Zealand. Latham has been part of two.

There have been only two of 300 or

more. Latham and Conway on Thursday approached the highest, 387 between Glenn Turner and Terry Jarvis against the West Indies at Georgetown in 1972.

At 277, Thursday's partnership between Latham and Conway became the

second highest for the first wicket for New Zealand, overtaking the 276 between Stu Dempster and Jackie Mills against England at Wellington in 1930.

At 304, it became the highest partnership for any test wicket in this calendar year.

The pitch wasn't lifeless Thursday. There was seam movement early and bounce for most of the day. Kumar Roach and Jayden Seales discharged their opening spells with the new ball cheaply: Roach conceded 12 runs from six overs and Seales 10 runs from five overs.

But West Indies made the decision to select an extra batter — Alick Athanaze — at the expense of a bowler and as the New Zealand openers batted on and on, the toll on the attack of three seamers, one allrounder and one spinner became intense.

The West Indies bowled good balls throughout the day — Latham was dropped on 104 by wicketkeeper Tevin Imlach off Anderson Phillips — but there were not enough good balls in succession to create pressure.

Latham and Conway put on 83 in the first session, then Conway stepped up the pace as New Zealand scored 50 in the first 31 minutes after lunch and 133 runs from 29 overs between lunch and tea.

Conway's century came from 147 balls and included 17 boundaries. It was the sixth century of his career, the second in his last six innings but only the third in his last 39 innings.

Latham batted with immense patience to reach his 15th test century, his second of the series, from 183 balls with nine fours and a six.

Conway played forcefully in an arc between backward point and mid off. Latham was more selective in his shots but he also hit crisply through backward point and cover, occasionally through third man and fine leg.

The West Indies took the second new ball after 83.2 overs Thursday, in the last passage of play before stumps.

New Zealand leads the three-match series 1-0 after the first test was drawn and the Black Caps won the second by nine wickets. (AP)

Conference League completes first phase with Crystal Palace looking to reach last 16

LONDON, Dec 18: The Conference League concludes its first phase with the sixth round on Thursday and Strasbourg the only team to have already secured a direct spot to the round of 16.

The French side tops the standings after four wins and a draw, and closes at home to Breidablik from Iceland.

The 36 clubs in the third-tier European competition play six different opponents and are ranked in a single-standings format. The clubs in the Champions League and Europa League each play eight matches.

The top eight teams in the Conference League go directly to the round of 16 in March. Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the two-leg knockout playoffs in February. The bottom 12 teams are eliminated.

Crystal Palace, making its European debut after winning the FA Cup last season, is in ninth place — a point behind AEK Athens, Samsunspor, Sparta Prague, Rayo Vallecano and Mainz.

A home win at Selhurst Park over another newcomer, KuPS from Finland, could send the Eagles directly to the last 16.

Two-time runner-up Fiorentina is at Lausanne-Sport. Dutch side AZ Alkmaar, Slovenia's Celje and Cyprus' AEK Larnaca also need to win in their last game to have a chance to advance directly. (AP)

Ecuadorian police say soccer player Mario Pineida has been shot dead in an apparent attack

QUITO (ECUADOR), Dec 18: Ecuadorian police said on Wednesday that Mario Pineida, a 33-year-old Barcelona de Guayaquil defender, was shot dead in an apparent attack as violence escalates in the Andean nation.

Another person who police did not identify was also killed in the incident, and a third was wounded.

Ecuador's Interior Ministry confirmed Pineida's death without providing details. Barcelona de Guayaquil said in a statement its fans are saddened by Pineida's death.

Pineida started his professional career at Independiente del Valle, where he played from 2010 to 2015. He then moved to the club of the coastal city of Guayaquil in 2016 and won two league titles there. The defender also had a brief spell at Brazil's Fluminense in 2022.

Ecuadorian media reported the incident took place in the region of Samanes in the north end of Guayaquil, which lies 265 kilometers (165 miles) southwest of the capital Quito.

Ecuador is expected to have its most violent year on record with more than 9,000 homicides, according to the Ecuadorian Observatory of Organized Crime. That figure was at 7,063 violent deaths last year and a then-record 8,248 in 2023.

President Daniel Noboa has pledged to fight criminal organizations that have expanded their operations in Ecuadorian territory in connection with international drug cartels.

In November, a 16-year-old footballer of Independiente del Valle died from a stray bullet, also in Guayaquil. Two months earlier, Maicol Valencia and Leandro Yépez, both players of Exapromo Costa, and Jonathan González, of 22 de Junio died from gunshot wounds. (AP)

Bumrah's demanding action and high pace make workload management a necessity: Uthappa



LUCKNOW, Dec 18: India's star fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah's "demanding action" and "high pace" put immense pressure on his body, and managing his workload is absolutely necessary to keep him match fit, former cricketer Robin Uthappa has said.

Bumrah was rested for the three-match ODI series against the visiting South Africans and returned for the five-match T20I series. He played a key role in the hosts' massive 101-run win in the first T20I at Cuttack.

The 32-year-old was also rested

for the ODIs against Australia in October but played the T20I series.

"He is an absolute match-winner, and managing his workload is crucial. Fast bowling is probably the toughest skill in the sport, and Bumrah does it at high pace with a demanding action," said Uthappa on JioStar's 'Cricket Live'.

"You want to protect that, but at the same time, you want him to play enough cricket. We've seen glimpses of his brilliance, and hopefully he can build consistency over the next few games heading into the World Cup," added the former

India cricketer, who retired from all forms of cricket in 2022.

The fourth T20I here was abandoned without a ball being bowled on Wednesday due to poor visibility caused by dense layer of smog, and the final match of the series in Ahmedabad on Friday is a must-win for the Proteas to level the series.

Uthappa opined that while the visitors have been very competitive, inconsistency has let them down in the white-ball games.

"South Africa have played very competitively, but they've been a bit hot and cold in the T20I series. That said, it has still been very entertaining. I thought they bowled really well, while their batting has been a little inconsistent."

"It's going to be an interesting contest (in Ahmedabad) because they will want to level the series. Overall, they've had a great tour. They dominated the Test series (2-0) and were competitive in the white-ball formats as well. India came back strongly, but South Africa will want to win the next one and head home with their heads held high," said Uthappa.

Former South African pacer Dale Steyn, however, said his team had "exceeded expectations" on their tour of India.

"Winning the Test series was outstanding, and they were very competitive in the ODIs. They

might feel they let the first ODI slip after winning the toss and losing early wickets while chasing. Had they won that, they could have finished the ODI series 2-1," said Steyn.

The pace legend added that if India win the T20I series it would be a well-deserved triumph.

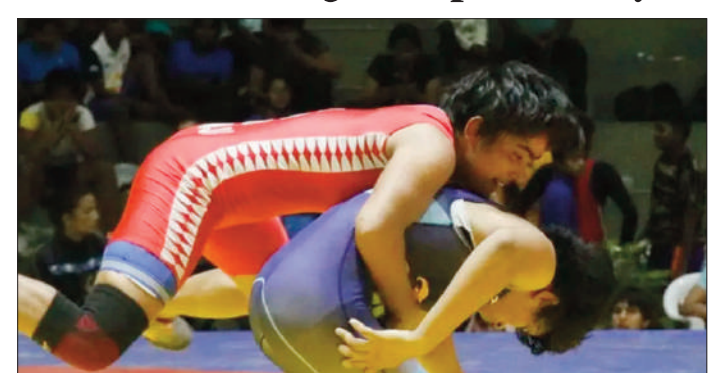
"Out of the three T20Is so far, India have been the better team. They bowled South Africa out cheaply in one game, conceded runs in another, but then dominated again in Dharamshala. If India win the series, I would say well played — they would deserve it. But I'm hoping South Africa turn it around. They've had a wonderful tour," he said.

He acknowledged that Abhishek Sharma's batting, especially the young opener's cover drive, was a treat to watch.

"Abhishek Sharma hits a lot of sixes and plays fearless shots, but I personally enjoy watching a classical cover drive or someone walking down the wicket and hitting straight back over the top. When Gill gets going, it's great to watch."

"I remember Shubman Gill scoring heavily against SRH when I was the bowling coach there. He played beautifully. Even when you're on the losing side, you enjoy watching someone like him bat. He makes it look very easy — elegant and pleasing on the eye," said Steyn. (PTI)

WFI makes presence at national camp mandatory; bars wrestlers from training independently



NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has unveiled a new selection policy that makes attendance at national camps mandatory to be eligible for national selection, bars wrestlers from training independently and mandates Olympic Games quota-winning athletes to appear in a final one-bout selection trial.

The policy was discussed and cleared at WFI's recent General Council meeting during the Nationals in Ahmedabad.

It was also presented to the Sports Authority of India (SAI) for feedback and a review.

No National camp, no India jersey

"Participation in the National Coaching Camp is mandatory for all wrestlers, including elite and iconic athletes. To be eligible for the camp, a wrestler must have won a medal in the National Championship of the concerned year," the policy under the sub-head National Coaching Camps, stated.

"Once selected, wrestlers are required to train exclusively at the designated national camp. No athlete is permitted to train independently at any other venue," it added.

It means that Vinesh Phogat, who recently announced her comeback from retirement, will have to prove herself at the domestic level before being reckoning for a spot in the national team.

The policy made it clear that a failure to attend the camp will make the wrestler "ineligible to participate in the selection trials".

The policy has also made a provision to keep a list of reserve wrestler, who will be asked to do the national duty in case of injury to selected athlete.

The WFI policy makes it clear that "past performances will not be considered for selection trials."

"We are not going to give trials exemption to anyone. No athlete can sit on past achievements. In the past, few athletes had asked for exemption which is not fair to up and

coming wrestlers, WFI will give equal opportunity to all," a WFI official told PTI.

The policy mentions, that "to be eligible, a wrestler must have won a medal in at least one of the following competitions of the concerned year: National Championship, Federation Cup and any other WFI-recognised competition."

Selection trials must for international competitions

The policy also states that trials are mandatory for teams representing India in major international competitions such as Olympic Games, Asian Games, Continental Championships and World Championships.

The objective of the trials is to provide fair opportunity, assessment of form and fitness, transparency, accountability and merit-based representation.

The WFI asserted that Olympic quotas are awarded to the nation and not to individual athletes and it reserves the right to conduct trials for Olympic participation.

WFI made it clear that quota winner will not compete in the initial trials and will fight it out with the winner of the trials and if he/she loses, will be given a second chance to reclaim the quota.

The selection committee will be headed by the WFI President. It will also include the Secretary General or Vice President and will have either a Dronacharya/Arjuna/Dhyanchand awardee apart from chief coach of that discipline and the foreign coach.

Apart from this, the chief coach can recommend barring a wrestler from trials on count of indiscipline or poor attendance. The selection committee may uphold the recommendation and WFI reserves the right to take disciplinary action against wrestlers found overweight during international competition.

The WFI had recently banned Paris Games bronze winner Anan Sehrawat for being overweight before lifting the suspension. (PTI)

Pakistani kabbadi player faces disciplinary action for representing Indian team

KARACHI, Dec 18: A popular Pakistani international kabbadi player, Ubaidullah Rajput, faces the prospect of a severe disciplinary action after he appeared for an Indian team in a private tournament in Bahrain on December 16.

Ubaidullah found himself in big trouble after videos and pictures of him wearing Indian shirt and waving the Indian flag in the GCC Cup went viral.

The secretary of the Pakistan Kabbadi Federation, Rana Sarwar, said an emergency meeting of the PKR had been called on December 27 in which the matter would be discussed and decision taken on disciplinary action against Rajput and some other players.

"I can confirm it was a private event with private teams formed under the names of India, Pakistan, Canada, Iran etc. in the competition by the organisers. But all the teams had players of their own origin. Indian players represented the Indian private side and Ubaidullah played for them which is unacceptable in these circumstances," Sarwar said.

He also claimed 16 Pakistani players had gone to Bahrain in their personal capacity without taking any permission from the federation or the Pakistan Sports Board.

"So action will also be taken against these players for falsely playing under the names of Pakistan team." Rajput has issued an apology and clarified that he



was invited to play in the event in Bahrain and was included in a private team.

"But I didn't know until later they had named the side Indian team and I told the organizers to don't use names of India and Pakistan."

"In private competitions in the past Indian and Pakistani players have played together for a private team but never under the names of India or Pakistan."

"I was not under the impression until I found out later that I was misrepresented as playing for the Indian team which I can't think of doing after the conflict." (PTI)

Villarreal can launch an outsider La Liga title bid if it beats Barcelona

BARCELONA (SPAIN), Dec 18: Villarreal has quietly mounted a potential dark horse title campaign through most of the first half of La Liga.

Now it has a chance to make it official when the "Yellow Submarine" hosts Barcelona on Sunday.

The team coached by Marcelino García Toral is in third place at eight points behind leader Barcelona and four behind second-placed Real Madrid. But it has played two fewer games than the powerhouses so it could easily be in an even stronger position.

Villarreal has disappointed in the Champions League and was eliminated from the Copa del Rey by a lower-division side this week. But La Liga is a different story. Villarreal is on a six-game winning run and its only two losses have come at Madrid and Atletico Madrid.

The game will pit the league's top defense in Villarreal with 13 goals allowed against the league's top attack. Barcelona has poured in 49 goals and more than made up for a sometimes shaky defense by



outsourcing its opponents.

Key matches
Barcelona will look to both

thoughts of a challenge by Villarreal and close 2025 on a high note this weekend.
An eighth consecutive league victory for

Lamine Yamal and company would also keep the pressure on a Madrid side which is struggling.

Madrid hosts Sevilla on Saturday with coach Xabi Alonso in need of a convincing victory before they have the two-week winter break to ponder the team's future.

Madrid needed a last-minute save by goalkeeper Andriy Lunin to avoid a potential embarrassment against a third-tier club in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday. That came after a lackluster win at Alaves in the Spanish league and back-to-back losses at home to Manchester City in the Champions League and Celta Vigo in La Liga.

Atletico Madrid, in fourth, visits Girona on Sunday, while fifth-placed Espanyol takes its surprising four-win run to Athletic Bilbao on Monday.

Players to watch
Villarreal has based its success on a team effort with several goal-scorers and playmakers. But left winger Alberto Moleiro stands out. He is having a breakout first season with the team and leads

Villarreal with six league goals. Tajon Buchanan has added five goals, and midfielder Santi Comesaña helps a solid midfield.

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick has so far succeeded in making a left-side center back of Gerard Martin, who struggled to fill in at left back when Alejandro Balde was injured late last season.

Martin has five consecutive starts in the center of the defensive line as Flick tries to find a replacement for Inigo Martínez, who left last summer for Saudi Arabia. Martín may be tested by Villarreal's attack.

Out of action
Villarreal will be missing injured veteran striker Gerard Moreno and defensive midfielder Pape Gueye, who is with Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Madrid's backline remains diminished even after getting Antonio Rudiger and Dean Huijsen back healthy. Eder Militao, David Alaba, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Dani Carvajal and Ferland Mendy are all injured. Alvaro Carreras is serving a suspension. (AP)

Women's Club World Cup dates confirmed for January 2028

DOHA, Dec 18: The inaugural Women's Club World Cup will be staged in January 2028, FIFA said Wednesday. No host nation has been confirmed, but the tournament — Jan. 5-30 — likely will be staged in a country with a warm climate at that time of the year.

In March, FIFA confirmed plans for a 16-team Club World Cup, following on from the expanded men's Club World Cup, which was held in the United States this past summer.

World soccer's governing body approved the dates at a meeting of its council in Doha, Qatar.

The timings mean the tournament would clash with top European domestic league seasons such as the Women's Super League in England, but not the Women's Champions League, which takes a break during January. America's NWSL would be in its offseason. (AP)

Lyon moves to second on Australia's all-time bowling list as England struggles in 3rd Ashes test

ADELAIDE, Dec 18: Nathan Lyon took two wickets to surpass Glenn McGrath at No. 2 on Australia's all-time bowling list, and returning skipper Pat Cummins took his first wickets of the series as a relentless bowling attack kept England in trouble in the third Ashes test.

Australia resumed Day 2 at 326-8 and was out for 371 with Mitchell Starc posting a half-century before Jofra Archer finished off the tailenders to return 5-53, his fourth five-wicket haul in test cricket.

By stumps England had struggled to 213 for eight, still 158 behind.

England was coasting at 37-0 in reply until Cummins struck. Lyon then took two wickets in his first over as England lost three wickets in 15 balls.

It was a struggle the rest of the day for England, which needs to bat long to revive its chances in this five-test series on a pitch and conditions that traditionally favor batting at the Adelaide Oval.

The Australian bowlers and fielders spent most of the day in the field in temperatures hitting 40C (104F), but most of the heat was on England skipper Ben Stokes.

He spent around four hours at the crease, getting hit on the helmet and the body and appearing to struggle with cramping. His mood wasn't helped by more contentious outcomes from the Decision Review System technology.

His defiant, unbeaten 45 from 151 balls and his unbroken 45-run stand with No. 10 Archer (30) at least helped England's innings go into another day.

Early wickets

Cummins was recovering from a back injury when he missed the wins in Perth and



Brisbane which gave Australia a 2-0 series lead. In his first spell on return, he dismissed opener Zak Crawley (9) to trigger a top-order slide.

Lyon was introduced for the 10th over and the 38-year-old offspinner had immediate success with two wickets in four balls to remove Ollie Pope (3) and Ben Duckett (29) as England slumped to 42-3.

Pope's wicket allowed him to equal retired paceman McGrath's career haul of 563.

Lyon soon bowled Duckett with a drifting delivery that took off stump. TV coverage showed McGrath in a stadium commentary booth pretending to throw a chair around in mock annoyance.

Only Shane Warne — with 708 wickets in 145 tests from 1992-2007 — is above Lyon

on the Australia's list of test wicket-takers. It was a huge comeback for Lyon, who only bowled two overs in Perth and was omitted from the lineup that won the second test in Brisbane.

He bowled 22 overs for figures of 2-51. Cummins had 3-54 and Scott Boland returned 2-31.

"It's a pretty big effort so (we'll) rest up, recover and we'll have another crack in the morning," Lyon said of Australia's bowling attack. "We're in a great position."

Stokes innings

England needs victory in Adelaide to have any chance of reclaiming the Ashes, and is relying on a big performance from Stokes.

He weathered all kinds of pressure after going to the crease at 71-4 when Cummins

dismissed Joe Root. Stokes was hit on the side of the helmet by a 145 kph (90 mph) Starc bouncer. A thick inside edge onto his thigh had him hopping around on 41, too.

"Ben obviously scrapped hard," England's assistant coach Marcus Trescothick said. "It's almost like he focuses his best when ... it's really tricky and tough and it's conditions or situations that other people don't succeed in."

Key moment

Cameron Green struck on his third delivery to end a 56-run fifth-wicket stand, getting the edge of Harry Brook's bat with a ball that moved away.

Brook scored 45 before he was out in the 37th over, adding just one run after getting a reprieve when he was given out caught behind off Lyon's bowling but successfully reviewed the decision with the TV umpire.

DRS

There were more DRS dramas, on top of the contentious review on Wednesday that gave Australia's Alex Carey a reprieve on 72 on the way to his first Ashes century.

Jamie Smith was on 16 when he appeared to glove a catch to Usman Khawaja in the slips. On-field umpires referred the catch to the TV umpire, who ruled it didn't hit the glove or the bat before clipping Smith's helmet and deemed it was not out. The Australians were in disbelief, with one player saying: "Snicko needs to be sacked."

The next call went against England when Cummins got a thin edge from the toe of Smith's bat as it carried to Carey. The on-field umpire gave it out, a decision confirmed by the TV umpire despite a seemingly indecisive spike as the ball went past the bat. (AP)

Hills United FC clinch 17th KASA Football Club Championship title in Diphu



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 18: Hills United FC of Diphu emerged champions of the 17th Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) Football Club Championship (Men) 2025 by defeating Young Guns FC in a closely contested final played under floodlights at the KASA Stadium here on Wednesday evening.

The month-long championship, organised by KASA, was held in memory of late Kajok Intipri, wife of late Monsing Tisso, with Member of Parliament from the 6-Diphu ST Parliamentary Constituency, Amarsing Tisso, as the donor.

The final match marked the culmination of an intense tournament that began on November 18 and featured wide participation from across the district. For lifting the championship trophy, Hills United FC received a cash prize of ₹ 50,000 along with the coveted title trophy, presented by the chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and president of KASA, Tuliram Ronghang.

The runners-up, Young Guns FC, were awarded a trophy and a cash prize of ₹ 30,000 by Member of Autonomous Council Johnny Timung.

The prize distribution ceremony was attended by family members of late Kajok Intipri and dignitaries including KACA Deputy Speaker Avijit Kro, KASA general secretary Pankaj Teron, District Sports Officer Rlip Ronghang, KASA football secretary Horen Ingü Kathar and other officials of the association.

The championship witnessed participation from as many as 40 clubs, with matches played across eight venues in Karbi Anglong.

The teams were divided into five groups, and the group-stage matches followed a league format.

From the quarter-final stage onwards, the tournament adopted a knockout system, with eight teams qualifying for the quarter-finals and four advancing to the semi-finals.

Hills United FC and Young Guns FC emerged as the strongest contenders after impressive semi-final performances, setting the stage for a much-anticipated final clash.

The final, played on a cold December evening, lived up to ex-

pectations as the two local football giants battled fiercely for supremacy.

Young Guns FC, donning white jerseys, drew first blood in the 17th minute when Archim Hanse found the back of the net to give his side an early lead.

Hills United FC, playing in red and white, responded with renewed aggression and restored parity in the 35th minute through Binson Rongpi, who converted a well-worked move to level the score.

Despite several attacking attempts by both sides in the closing minutes of the first half, no further goals were scored, and the teams went into the break locked at 1-1.

After resumption, Hills United FC asserted greater control over possession and launched sustained attacks.

Their efforts paid off in the 55th minute when Binson Rongpi struck again, scoring his second goal of the match to put Hills United FC ahead.

Young Guns FC tried hard to regain control and equalise, but Hills United's defence held firm.

After 90 minutes of intense football, the match ended 2-1 in favour of Hills United FC, sealing their championship triumph.

With this victory, Hills United FC has now qualified to represent the district in the upcoming Assam Football Association Club Championship, marking another milestone in the club's growing football journey.

Individual honours were also presented at the closing ceremony. Komalson Rongphar of Ranjalu FC, Langhin, was awarded the Highest Scorer Award after netting 12 goals during the tournament, with the prize presented by Narlong Tisso.

Binson Rongpi of Hills United FC was adjudged the Best Player of the Championship and received his award from Diphu Municipal Board Vice Chairman Meera Tisso.

The Best Goalkeeper Award went to Friendship Terang of Young Guns FC, with the prize presented by Athik Tisso.

The successful conclusion of the championship once again highlighted the growing popularity of football in Karbi Anglong and reaffirmed KASA's role in nurturing local talent and promoting competitive sports across the district.

GS Shiva Shankara's 67 in vain as India A beat India Seniors in Physical Disability Series contest

MUMBAI, Dec 18: GS Shiva Shankara scored 67 off 43 balls but his effort went in vain as India A got the better of India Seniors in the third and final match of the Physical Disability T20 series, here on Thursday.

India A, who had lost both the matches of the series here at the Wankhede Stadium, posted 164 for eight in the third match and restricted the India Seniors side for 136 in 19.3 overs.

Nonsola Adil claimed 3/40 while G Prashant and Mohammed Sadiq claimed two wicket apiece for the winning side.

GS Shiva Shankara struck four boundaries and five sixes to revive India Seniors, who had slipped to 38 for five at one stage, but his effort was not enough in averting a defeat.

The Player of the Match in each of the three T20s got Rs 11,000 as prize money while the Player of the Series, India Seniors' Wasim Iqbal, was given a prize money of Rs 21,000 by the MCA.

On organising the series at the iconic Wankhede Stadium, the MCA secretary Dr Unmesh Khanvilkar said, "It reflects our collective belief in inclusivity, equality, dignity, and opportunity for every sportsperson, irrespective of physical or intellectual ability. Sport has always been a powerful platform for empowerment." (PTI)

Harmanpreet still the best person to lead India, says Anjum Chopra

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Former India player Anjum Chopra believes Harmanpreet Kaur remains the "best person" to lead the women's national team even as debates around captaincy resurface ahead of a busy international season and the upcoming Women's Premier League (WPL).

With the Indian women's team returning to action in a T20 series against Sri Lanka after their World Cup triumph, Chopra feels the focus should be firmly on sustaining momentum rather than speculating about leadership changes.

"My personal view over the past so many years has been that Harmanpreet Kaur is a match winner. I don't think I need to say anything further," Chopra told PTI Videos.

"She's the best person to lead this Indian team."

Chopra dismissed recent suggestion from former India captain Shantha Rangaswamy to change the captain, stressing that such views are personal.

"Everybody has their right to share what they feel... There's nothing right or wrong. It's just the timing of it," she said.

"I still feel that she's the correct person and the apt person to lead India."

Looking ahead to the Sri Lanka series, Chopra underlined the importance of quickly shifting focus back to cricket after weeks of celebrations.

"The quicker they get back into playing... everybody wants to continue that winning momentum," she said.

"The moment you step back onto the park, you want to start exactly from where you left."

She added that the five-match T20 series is crucial preparation with another T20 World Cup on the horizon.

The former opener also spoke at length about the evolving power game in women's cricket, acknowledging comparisons with teams like Australia and New Zealand.

"Power is not something that everybody is born with," Chopra said.

"There are certain players... like Harman (Harmanpreet Kaur) and Richa (Ghosh)... the power they possess is possibly natural power."

However, she stressed that power can be developed.

"Power is something that you can always gain. And there are techniques, there is a proper training to it," she said, adding that Indian players have made significant progress.

"You can't be chasing down 340 runs without having those big hits... they are improving on that."

Chopra credited leagues like the WPL for accelerating that growth.

"Tournaments like the WPL, tournaments where the international players rub shoulders with our domestic players... that awareness will keep happening," she said. (PTI)



Shooting League of India: New franchise on board



NEW DELHI, Dec 18: UP Prometheans was on Thursday announced as the latest addition to the franchise-based Shooting League of India (SLI), whose inaugural edition will be held from February 16-26 next year.

"Uttar Pradesh has immense sporting potential, and the entry of a franchise driven by a strong educational and developmental philosophy adds great value to the league," said National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) President Kalikesh Singh Deo.

SLI will feature top Indian and international shooters competing in a mixed-team format across pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines.

The competition will feature team events in multiple categories -- pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3P), and shotgun (trap and skeet). The teams will be divided into two pools for the league stage, followed by knockout rounds.

Players will be drafted across four tiers -- Elite Champions, World Elite, National Champions, and Junior & Youth -- ensuring a mix of international stars, Indian shooters, and emerging talent. (PTI)

Curacao qualified for FIFA World Cup, what's our long-term plan? Indian football comes up in RS

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India's footballing future was brought up in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday by Congress member Jose K Mani as he cited tiny Dutch-Caribbean island Curacao's World Cup qualification to ask Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya about the long-term plan for the game that is on a downward spiral.

Mani, who represents Kerala, asked whether the government has noted that Curacao, with a population of 158,000, recently qualified for next year's FIFA World Cup.

He also asked whether the government has long-term plans to help India qualify for the premier competition and the steps taken at the grassroots level to develop football talent in the country.

"Qualifying for FIFA world cup is based on the criteria laid down by FIFA, international governing body for football sport discipline," Mandaviya responded without making any reference to Curacao.

"Responsibility for development of a specific sports including taking steps for participation in World Cup/World Championships is that of concerned National Sports Federation (NSF)."

"All India Football Federation (AIFF) has been recognised by the ministry as the NSF for the promo-



tion and development of the football sport discipline in the country. AIFF has informed that it has a long term plan to help India qualify for FIFA World Cup, with a focus on both the men's and women's national team," he added.

Curacao became the smallest nation in both size (area of less 450km) and population to qualify for the elite event earlier this year from the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF).

In contrast, India, despite a population of over a billion, has struggled to deliver good results. The AIFF brass, currently headed by Kalyan Chaubey, is currently faced with a massive crisis as it is strugg-

ling to find a commercial partner for its domestic leagues, which have been brought to a halt.

The governing body has drawn sharp criticism for failing to manage the sport, which has led to Supreme Court's intervention.

Mandaviya said the AIFF, however, has a plan for junior level players.

"...AIFF has launched the first FIFA-AIFF Boys Under-13 Football Academy in Bhubaneswar, FIFA-AIFF Boys Under-13 and FIFA-AIFF Girls Under-14 Football Academy in Hyderabad.

"In addition, through the Khelo India Asmita League, the AIFF organised Girls' Football competitions, conducting 87 leagues & 68 leagues, across the country, during 2023-24 and 2024-25 season, respectively," Mandaviya said.

Over 20,000 athletes benefitting from Khelo India

Mandaviya was also asked about the progress made by the government's flagship Khelo India Scheme.

"A total of 28214 athletes have been trained at Khelo India Centres across the country as of April 2024 under Khelo India Scheme. A total of 991 Khelo India Centres are operational across the country," he responded. (PTI)

Cherki pulls out Haaland celebrations after wonder goal in Man City's win in the English League Cup

LONDON, Dec 18: Rayan Cherki recreated teammate Erling Haaland's goal celebrations after curling an exquisite shot into the top corner in Manchester City's 2-0 win over Brentford in the English League Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday.

The France playmaker pulled out some robot moves and then sat down cross-legged in a yoga pose after giving a much-changed City team a 32nd-minute lead.

With his tricks, skills and wonderful technique, Cherki is already proving a fans' favorite in his first season in Manchester after moving from Lyon. In a win over Sunderland this month, he produced a "rabona" cross that was headed in by Phil Foden but left City manager Pep Guardiola urging Cherki to play with "simplicity" like Lionel Messi.

The goal against Brentford was one Messi would have been proud of. Collecting a headed clearance at the edge of the box, Cherki deceived an opponent by switching the ball to his right foot and then whipped a shot into the top corner.

Savinho added a second goal for City in the 67th minute with a shot that was aided by a huge deflection that looped over Brentford goalkeeper Hakon Valdimarsson.

Haaland was named as a substitute for the game, didn't come on, and was seen shaking the hand of Cherki when the midfielder was replaced in the second half.

City advanced to the last four of the League Cup for the first time since 2021, the year it won the competition for the fourth straight season and the eighth time overall.

Its opponent in the semifinals will be defending champion Newcastle, which scored a stoppage-time goal to beat Fulham 2-1 on Tuesday.

Cherki will play either Arsenal or Crystal Palace in the other matchup in the semifinals.



Newcastle's late winner

Miley glanced home a header from a corner in the second minute of added-on time for Newcastle, just as the game seemed destined for a penalty shootout.

Yoane Wissa, recently back from a long-term injury, put Newcastle ahead in the 10th minute with his first goal since a summer move from Brentford. Saša Lukic equalized for Fulham in the 16th.

Newcastle is already stretched defensively because of injuries — Miley, a midfielder, was playing as an emergency right back against Fulham — and lost full back Tino Livramento to a knee problem midway through the second half.

"It doesn't look good," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said. "The fact he came off is a worrying sign and we're so stretched in that area."

Chelsea already into semifinals

Chelsea beat third-tier Cardiff City 3-1 on Tuesday to become the first team to reach the semifinals.

The quarterfinals will wrap up next week when Arsenal hosts Fulham on Tuesday. (AP)

Samrat's gold-winning show at Worlds rated among top-5 by ISSF

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Indian pistol shooter Samrat Rana's showing at the World Championships in Cairo last month has been rated among the top five performances of the year by the International Shooting Sport Federation. The 20-year-old marksman from Karnal in Haryana made history by winning the men's 10m air pistol gold at the Worlds, becoming the first Indian to clinch a senior individual world title in the event.

The ace shooter, whose journey began when his father built him a basic shooting range in their backyard, also bagged the mixed team silver with multiple Asian medallist Esha Singh in his favourite event at the same venue.

"The only man to defeat Hu Kai (China) this season, Samrat Rana was composed under pressure to pull off an upset no one expected," said ISSF, while revealing the top-five performers of the season.

"The 20-year-old had a narrow lead in the men's 10m air pistol final at the ISSF World Championship and would be closely matched by Hu, before the Chinese took the lead with six shots to go. Two consecutive series featuring 10.9s would keep him in the hunt. He would go ahead of Hu but then behind again by 0.1 into the last two shots. A 10.2 and 10.6 would give him the lead and ultimately, the victory. A superb run of form," ISSF wrote. (PTI)