

**6 NATION**

- Parliamentary panel discusses MGNREGA shortcomings, ways to adopt VB-G RAM G Act smoothly
- SC keeps in abeyance its Nov 20 directions, says further probe needed to prevent regulatory gaps

**7 NORTHEAST**

- Pradyot announces ₹ 10 lakh reward for info on prime accused
- SEC briefs Arunachal Governor on Panchayat, civic polls

26 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

# THE HILLS TIMES

Voiced of the hills people

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Vol .No. XXVI Issue No.344 RN-ASSENG/2000/12862 DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2025 PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

## Shah blows poll bugle with infiltrator drive-out pledge

**Guwahati gets 5,000-seat auditorium, the largest in NE**  
**● Union Home Minister visits Swahid Smarak Kshetra**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday exhorted the people of Assam to elect a government in next year's assembly polls which will work against infiltration and in favour of development of the state. He accused the Congress of encouraging infiltration for the sake of 'vote bank' politics, which led to a threat to the identity of the Assamese people from the illegal migrants.

"It had been like a long bad dream for Assam till 10 years ago. Bandhs, blockades, firings, and bomb blasts were rampant. There were numerous insurgent groups, agitations were happening," Shah said after inaugurating a 5,000-seat auditorium here, the largest in the North East region.

He claimed that Assam has made progress over the last 10 years of the BJP regime in the state, and 11 years of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre.

"Much progress has been achieved in the last 10 years in Assam under the BJP governments, but we cannot be happy



with just that. Bless the BJP with another five years, and every infiltrator will be identified and sent back. This will protect Assam's identity, language, culture and food," he asserted.

"In elections in March-April next year, elect a government that doesn't allow infiltration and works for the progress of Assam," Shah said to the people of the state.

The BJP leader took a swipe at the Congress, blaming it for the

state's infiltration problem.

"For the sake of vote bank, the Congress encouraged infiltration which has threatened the identity of Assam today," he alleged.

"Those who talk about Assam's culture and identity had themselves brought a law in 1983," Shah said, in an apparent reference to the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) (IMDT) Act.

The Act was repealed by the Supreme Court in 2005 as it held

that the law "has created the biggest hurdle and is the main impediment or barrier in the identification and deportation of illegal migrants".

Shah asserted that the BJP-led government is now working for "cultural and economic renaissance" of the state, and the auditorium, 'Jyoti-Bishnu Antaratik Kala Mandir', inaugurated by him at the event, is a symbol of the state's growth.

Shah maintained that the programmes attended by him during the day were testimony to the state's development. He inaugurated the redeveloped Batadrava Than, the birthplace of Vaishnavite saint and Assamese icon Srimanta Sankardeva, and a new police commissionerate office and surveillance system in Guwahati.

"Development, identity, culture, safety -- all dimensions of progress have been covered in a single day's programmes," he said.

Referring to the Swahid Smarak Kshetra, which he visited earlier in the day, Shah said the memorial for the

## PM now following Sankardeva's 'Ek Bharat' call: Shah

*Redeveloped Batadrava Than, birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva, inaugurated*

**BORDUWA, Dec 29:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday inaugurated the Rs 227-crore redeveloped Batadrava Than, the birthplace of Vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva, in Assam's Nagaon district.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union ministers Sarbananda Sonowal and Pabitra Margherita, and state Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Bora, were present during the inauguration of the project.

The home minister was accorded a traditional 'satriya' welcome by the 'gayan-bayan' (singers and drummers).

He also went around the main central building where the 'Guru Asana' (seat of the revered saint) is placed.

The decision to redevelop the site, named 'Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva Abhirbhav Kshetra', was first proposed in the 2021-22 state budget.

The project has been designed not only to make the historic site a major tourist attraction but also to reflect on the life, ideals and artistic heritage associated with Srimanta Sankardeva and the broader cultural traditions of the state.

Sarma said that the project honouring Srimanta Sankardeva's legacy, strengthens "our commitment to preserving Assam's satras, namghars and cultural heritage".

He said that the project will elevate Batadrava Than into a national and international destination

for cultural and spiritual tourism, taking Sankardeva's legacy to future generations.

An eviction drive was carried out in December 2022 to clear encroachments from the satra land in Batadrava.

The chief minister had earlier said that the state government has taken all efforts to restore the sanctity and grandeur of the place.

"Batadrava Than, freed from encroachments, is now a shining example of what steely resolve can do for the protection of our heritage," the CM said.

The foundation of the redevelopment project was laid by Shah in December 2020.

The Assam government had announced (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Amit Shah unveils new Guwahati Police Commissionerate building, city surveillance system

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday inaugurated a Rs 111-crore permanent building of Guwahati Police Commissionerate and a surveillance system, comprising 2,000 CCTVs, for the city.

Shah also inaugurated an exhibition on new criminal laws, organised by the state Criminal Investigation Department (CID), at the newly unveiled Guwahati Police Commissioner's office.

At a function here, the Union home minister unveiled the two projects, developed at a total cost of Rs 292 crore.

The 10-storey office building, including ground floor and basement, of the Commissionerate of Guwahati Police has been constructed at an expenditure of Rs 111 crore and is located in Khanapara area.

The building will house all branches of Guwahati Police and will have a seating capacity for 400 officers, besides a library and an archive.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was present with Shah at the inaugural ceremony, later in a series of posts on X said: "Taking Assam's policing to the next level, Adarniya Shri @AmitShah Ji inaugurated the new building of Commissioner of Police, Guwahati."

This state-of-the-art and eco-friendly police hub will boost efficiency and empower the state's law enforcing agency to serve the people even better, he added.

Along with Sarma, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal was also present at the event.

During the function, Shah also inaugurated the Intelligence City Surveillance System (ICSS) inside the new building.

As part of this system, developed at an investment of Rs 181 crore, an advanced command and data facility -- Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) -- has been set up. The project was established by Guwahati Smart City Ltd.

The unit comprises 2,000 CCTV cameras and has 60 citizen safety and alerting systems, considerably enhancing the

## Himanta seeks action against those behind Tripura student's killing

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma urged his Uttarakhand counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhama to bring those behind the alleged racist attack on a Tripura student, which led to his death, to justice.

He also extended his condolences to the family of Anjel Chakma.

Twenty-four-year-old Chakma of Nandannagar in West Tripura district was attacked by a group of six people when he objected to a racial slur at Dehradun on December 9. He succumbed to his injuries on December 26 while undergoing treatment.

In a post on X, Sarma said, "The tragic death of Anjel Chakma from Tripura following brutal racial abuse in Dehradun is heartbreaking and unacceptable."

"I urge the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, @pushkardhami to ensure strict action against the culprits so that justice is served," he added.

Sarma extended his deepest condolences (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## People from northeastern states are Indians, not Chinese: Gaurav Gogoi

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The people of northeastern states are Indians and not Chinese, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi said on Monday as he condemned the killing of a Tripura student in Dehradun.

The student, Anjel Chakma (24), from Unakoti district of Tripura, was attacked by a group of six people when he objected to racial slurs hurled at him and his younger brother by them on December 9. Chakma succumbed to his injuries at the hospital on December 26.

"I am Indian, not Chinese. The people of the northeast are Indians, they are not Chinese," said Gogoi, who hails from Assam and is the Congress' state unit president, at a press conference here.

"This is exactly what 24-year-old Anjel Chakma had to say on December 9, when he was returning from the market on an ordinary day and was harassed by some people who called him Chinese," the Jorhat MP said.

He said this is something that has happened with many from the northeastern states.

"He (Chakma) could have left quietly after hearing those insulting words. Perhaps if he had done that, he would still have been alive. But he could not tolerate it that day and he said, 'I am Indian, not Chinese,'" Gogoi said.

Dehradun police have arrested five of the six accused. One of them, Yagyraj Awasthi, a resident of Kanchanpur district of Nepal, is absconding.

Gogoi slammed the delay in registration of the FIR in the case and said it (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Along dismisses B'desh threats, reaffirms Northeast's unity with India

**HT Correspondent**  
**ITANAGAR, Dec 29:** Nagaland Minister for Tourism, Higher and Technical Education Temjen Imna Along on Monday strongly reacted to provocative statements attributed to certain Bangladeshi activists, who have claimed that the Northeast could be separated from mainland India by targeting the Siliguri corridor, often referred to as the "chicken-neck".

"There is no 'chicken-neck' for us. This is a term coined by the media. We are strongly connected with India, and we are proud Indians," Along told reporters, rejecting the narrative outright.

The minister warned against making threats directed at India's territorial integrity.

"We know Bangladesh's intentions. If they dare to try anything, they should try us," he said, asserting confidence in the strength and unity of the region.

Along was speaking on the sidelines of Atal Smriti Varsh celebrations, which he attended as chief guest.

He, however, clarified that such remarks should not be attributed to the people of Bangladesh as a whole.

"Not all Bangladeshis are bad. There are only a few individuals making nonsensical and provocative statements. They should refrain from doing so," he said.

The senior Naga leader also recalled India's role in the 1971 Liberation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## KAAC-agitators talks on PGR/VGR eviction hit legal roadblock

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Dec 29:** A high-level meeting between the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and agitators demanding eviction of encroachers from Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserves (VGR) was held on Monday at the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre in Matipung, but ended without a breakthrough due to legal constraints.

The meeting, chaired by KAAC Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, lasted over two and a half hours.

Addressing the media afterwards, the CEM said the Council agrees in principle that encroachments on PGR and VGR land must be cleared, but a stay order issued by the Gauhati High Court has temporarily stalled the eviction process.

Ronghang said a Division Bench of the High Court has suspended the eviction order issued by the KAAC Principal Secretary, seeking production of original Gazette notifications.

He revealed that Council representatives were sent to Shillong and London for about 15 days in an effort to trace the original documents, but without success.

"It is a crime to submit photocopied documents in court. Since the matter is sub judice, immediate eviction is not legally possible," the CEM said.

Despite the court-imposed restriction, Ronghang announced a series of administrative steps. He said a formal notification regarding the remaining encroached government land would be issued on Tuesday.

Schools, Anganwadi centres and other government offices currently located on reserve land will be shifted after identification of alternative sites, with a tentative timeframe of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## TU unrest: Stakeholders stage 24-hr hunger strike to mark 100 days of protest

**TEZPUR, Dec 29:** All stakeholders of Tezpur University, which has been witnessing sustained protests since mid-September against irregularities allegedly committed by Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh, began a 24-hour hunger strike on Monday on completion of 100 days of their agitation without any success.

The institute, located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in Sonitpur district of Assam, has been paralysed with more intense protests since November 29 as a joint forum of all stakeholders demanded the removal of the beleaguered VC for his alleged involvement in corruption and other forms of irregularities, and the start of an inquiry into his actions.

Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF), a joint platform of students, teachers and non-teaching staffers, expressed disappointment that even after 100 consecutive days of peaceful protest, no concrete resolution or actionable assurance had been provided to remove the VC.

"The stakeholders have strongly condemned the continued impunity enjoyed by the absentee VC Shambhu Nath Singh, despite grave allegations and sustained opposition from within the university community," a TUUF volunteer told PTI.

Singh's prolonged absence, coupled with the inaction of authorities, has pushed the institution into administrative paralysis and eroded public trust, she said.

"The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA), Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) and the student community have commenced a 24-hour-long hunger strike from 12 am on Monday, which will continue till 11.59 pm.

"This collective action marks 100 days of continuous democratic struggle -- a period defined not by resolution, but by silence, delay and deepening disappointment," the TUUF member said.

She asserted that through this hunger strike, the stakeholders seek to draw national attention to what they describe as a systemic failure of governance.

"We reiterate that this is not merely a university-specific issue, but a question about the credibility of public institutions and the moral conscience of the system that governs them. We affirm that our movement remains determined and our demand for justice will not fade with time or fatigue," the student added.

The TUUF member further said that the hunger strike stands as a powerful expression of frustration and moral anguish over the "complete lack of accountability" even after 100 days of peaceful protests, memoranda, inquiries and appeals.

"The university fraternity asserts that their struggle has laid bare a deeply disturbing reality -- a system that appears more invested in protecting individuals in power than in safeguarding institutional integrity and student futures," she added.

The situation in Tezpur University had been tense since mid-September, with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg, even as the state was mourning his death.

Apart from fiscal irregularities, the varsity community is also protesting against the alleged deforestation and ecological destruction at the picturesque campus carried out under Singh's administration.

The VC abstained from the campus after the university witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

time or fatigue," the student added.

The TUUF member further said that the hunger strike stands as a powerful expression of frustration and moral anguish over the "complete lack of accountability" even after 100 days of peaceful protests, memoranda, inquiries and appeals.

"The university fraternity asserts that their struggle has laid bare a deeply disturbing reality -- a system that appears more invested in protecting individuals in power than in safeguarding institutional integrity and student futures," she added.

The situation in Tezpur University had been tense since mid-September, with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg, even as the state was mourning his death.

Apart from fiscal irregularities, the varsity community is also protesting against the alleged deforestation and ecological destruction at the picturesque campus carried out under Singh's administration.

The VC abstained from the campus after the university witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Soot-stained homes, glowing plants and quiet stories collide in an art space that refuses to forget

## Artist Dhiraj Rabha's work casts long shadows of insurgency

**KOCHI, Dec 29:** Fragments of an Assamese household are alive within artist Dhiraj Rabha's installation at Kochi-Muziris Biennale, only covered in soot, partially burnt and carrying a fragile memory of the state's troubled past during the insurgency of the 1990s.

A deeply immersive installation by Rabha, "The Quiet Weight of Shadows" excavates the long and fraught history of insurgency in Assam under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Rabha, who was born in Borali Gaon in 1995, was raised in a former United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) detention camp in Goalpara after his father, an ex-militia, surrendered his arms.

Rabha's practice draws from installations, photography, film, and archival documentation to reflect on displacement, surveillance, and



resilience within communities shaped by the insurgency. I, as he looks back and attempts to distinguish his lived experiences from those presented "to the world outside those camps".

"I spent my entire childhood and

taller watchtowers," Rabha told PTI.

The 30-year-old started working on the project in 2021, primarily to listen to the stories of people who had lived inside camps, ex-ULFA members and their kins to make a record of lives that were different from the state and media narratives.

The household installation comes alive in a solemn light with fragments of real archival materials, newspapers, books, pamphlets, and documents related to the ULFA movement and student protests from the 1990s.

Photographs displayed here depict everyday life in camps: training sessions, weddings, soldiers, and fleeting domestic moments.

At the heart of the installation is a luminous but disconcerting garden of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Fire guts 'Molai Kathoni 2.0' on Brahmaputra sandbar, thousands of saplings destroyed



**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Dec 29:** A massive fire has gutted Molai Kathoni 2.0, a newly developed forest area on a sandbar of the Brahmaputra near Mahabahu, destroying thousands of saplings and triggering serious concern among environmentalists and local residents.

The incident is suspected to be the result of deliberate arson, with fingers being pointed at possible involvement of illegal sand mining interests operating in the area.

The forest initiative was inspired by Padma Shri

awardee and noted environmentalist Jadav Payeng, widely known as the "Forest Man of India".

Following his lifelong work in afforestation, his daughter Munni Payeng, along with around 70 young volunteers, has been working since 2022 to develop Molai Kathoni 2.0 on a fragile Brahmaputra sandbar.

Under the banner of the Sustainable Green Initiative, the team had planted nearly 7,000 saplings of indigenous and ecologically significant species to check erosion, protect biodiversity and restore the riverine ecosystem.

However, the fire, which broke out on Sunday, engulfed the area in thick smoke and is believed to have destroyed a large number of saplings along with habitats for birds and other wildlife.

The sudden outbreak has raised questions over its origin, with locals and environmental activists suspecting sabotage rather than a natural cause.

The strategic location of the sandbar and persistent issues related to illegal sand mining along the Brahmaputra have further fuelled suspicions of a sand mafia angle.

Members of the Molai Kathoni 2.0 initiative expressed deep anguish over the incident, stating that years of collective effort (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Banks post robust performance in FY25; GNPA declines to multi-decadal low: RBI

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Commercial banks maintained robust performance in 2024-25, with the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio declining to a multi-decadal low of 2.2 per cent at March-end, according to a RBI report released on Monday.

The banking sector remained resilient during 2024-25, supported by a strong balance sheet, sustained profitability and improved asset quality, said the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25.

Bank credit and deposit growth continued in double-digits, albeit with a moderation. Capital and liquidity buffers remained well above the regulatory requirements across bank groups.

"Strong banking sector fundamentals provide a buffer against risks, which, together with prudent regulation, create conditions for sustained credit flow," the report said.

Net profits of commercial banks increased during 2024-25, albeit at



a slower pace compared to the previous year, it added.

Combined net profit of all scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) rose 14.8 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 4.01 lakh crore during 2024-25. In 2023-24, their profit had increased by 32.8 per cent to about ₹ 3.5 lakh crore.

The RBI report said the profitability of the SCBs remained ro-

bust with the return on assets (RoA) at 1.4 per cent and return on equity (RoE) at 13.5 per cent in 2024-25.

During H1: 2025-26, RoA and RoE of the SCBs stood at 1.3 per cent and 12.5 per cent, respectively.

The capital-to-risk-weighted assets ratio of SCBs was 17.4 per cent at March-end 2025 and 17.2

per cent at the end of September 2025, the report said.

"Asset quality strengthened further, with the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio declining to a multi-decadal low of 2.2 per cent at end-March 2025 and 2.1 per cent at end-September 2025," it pointed out.

Also, the consolidated balance sheet of urban co-operative banks recorded higher growth in 2024-25 than the previous year.

Their asset quality improved for the fourth consecutive year, alongside the strengthening of their capital buffers and profitability.

According to the report, the non-banking financial companies continued to record double-digit credit growth along with robust capital buffers. Their asset quality also improved during the year.

The report presents the performance of the banking sector, including commercial banks, co-operative banks and non-banking financial institutions, during 2024-25 and 2025-26 so far. (PTI)

## Sensex declines for 4<sup>th</sup> day on foreign fund outflows, thin year-end trading; Nifty ends below 26,000

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 346 points while Nifty closed below 26,000 on Monday due to selling in utilities, IT and blue-chip oil & gas shares, foreign fund outflows and thin year-end trading. Extending the downturn to the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 345.91 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 84,695.54. During the day, it dropped 403.59 points or 0.47 per cent to 84,637.86. Registering its third day of decline, the 50-share NSE Nifty edged lower by 100.20 points or 0.38 per cent to 25,942.10.

Among 30 Sensex firms, Adani Ports was the biggest loser, dropping by 2.22 per cent. HCL Tech fell by 1.86 per cent, Power Grid by 1.85 per cent, Trent by 1.36 per cent, Bharat Electronics by 1.26 per cent and Bharti Airtel by 1.14 per cent.

Reliance Industries was a major drag on key indices, closing 0.88 per cent lower. According to sources, the government is seeking over USD 30 billion from Reliance Industries and BP as compensation, alleging the partners built larger-than-required facilities at the KG-D6 fields and subsequently failed to meet natural gas output targets.

Tata Steel was the biggest gainer among Sensex shares, rising by 1.83 per cent. Asian Paints, Hindustan Unilever, and Eternal also advanced.

"The market appears short on catalysts for further upside, with investors largely in holiday mode, signalling a potential consolidation phase in the near term," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said that market sentiment continues to be guided by global cues and stock-specific developments. "Trading volumes remained light, with participants preferring selective exposure rather than broad-based positions in the absence of any major triggers."

Broader markets also came under pressure as the BSE smallcap gauge declined by 0.58 per cent and midcap index dipped by 0.45 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, utilities tanked the most by 0.91 per cent, followed by power (0.86 per cent), IT (0.80 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.79 per cent), realty (0.76 per cent) and capital goods (0.71 per cent).

BSE telecommunication, PSU bank, oil & gas and FMCG ended higher.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi jumped over 2 per cent. Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled marginally higher, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower. Equity markets in Europe were trading mostly lower.

US markets ended flat on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 317.56 crore on Friday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 1,772.56 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 1.70 per cent to USD 61.67 per barrel.

On Friday, the Sensex dropped 367.25 points or 0.43 per cent to settle at 85,041.45. The Nifty declined by 99.80 points or 0.38 per cent to 26,042.30. (PTI)g in blue-chip bank stocks and Reliance Industries, and persistent foreign fund outflows.

## 2025: Jute industry under stress with raw material crunch, price surge

**KOLKATA, Dec 29:** The jute industry went through another year of crisis with a sharp raw material shortage, record-high prices and a growing dependence on plastic bags for food grain packaging, unsettling the sector.

What began as a mismatch be-

tween raw jute availability and statutory packaging demand earlier in the year gradually intensified into a deep-rooted crisis by December, with farmers shifting towards alternative crops such as maize, a key factor behind the decline in jute cultivation.

According to government data, jute acreage during the Kharif season stood at around 5.56 lakh hectares as of late September 2025, marking a decrease from the normal area of about 6.60 lakh hectares and also lower than the previous year's sown area. This fall in acreage came despite the government fixing the minimum support price (MSP) of raw jute (TD-3 grade) at Rs 5,650 per quintal for the 2025-26 season.

The tightening of supply forced the government to increasingly dilute jute bag usage in foodgrain procurement by allowing plastic substitutes, even as the labour-intensive industry grappled with production cuts, mill shutdowns and mounting financial stress, officials at a millers' association said.

The ₹ 10,000 crore sector in West Bengal supports over 2.4 lakh direct mill workers and nearly five lakh farmers.

At the centre of the turmoil was an unprecedented surge in raw jute prices. After bottoming out at around ₹ 4,700 per quintal during the 2024-25 crop year (July-June), prices crossed ₹ 11,000 per quintal in several markets this month, reflecting acute physical scarcity rather than speculative volatility, industry players said.

Stakeholders noted that the current crisis was shaped by extreme price swings over the past 15 months. Om Prakash Soni, an official with the Jute Balers Association, said the sector moved rapidly from surplus to shortage.

"Initially, lower government orders in the 2024-25 crop year caused prices to crash to ₹ 4,700 per quintal. This was followed by a drastic reduction in acreage and production in the current 2025-26 season, driving prices to a record high of ₹ 11,000 per quintal," Soni said.

Farmers, who had been facing years of unremunerative jute prices that often ruled below the MSP, gradually shifted to crops such as maize, which offered better realisation and more assured offtake from the poultry feed and ethanol sectors. Industry experts said maize

emerged as a strong competing option at a time when farmer confidence in jute had already weakened.

Delayed and limited procurement by the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) during periods of low prices further eroded incentives to continue jute cultivation, they added. Government data and satellite-based assessments during 2025 indicated visible changes in cropping patterns in parts of West Bengal and Bihar.

While maize acreage expanded amid rising demand, stakeholders cautioned against attributing the shift to a single cause, pointing instead to a broader erosion of policy support during earlier low-price cycles. Under the Jute Packaging Materials (JPM) Act, a significant portion of foodgrains is mandated to be packed in jute bags at prices fixed monthly by the Office of the Jute Commissioner.

For decades, the cost-plus pricing mechanism ensured a relatively stable ecosystem—assured demand for farmers, predictable pricing for mills and eco-friendly packaging for government procurement. In 2025, however, this balance came under severe strain. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Shah blows poll

martys of the six-year-long anti-infiltration Assam Movement was a long overdue tribute to their sacrifice. The agitation ended in the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. He paid tribute to state's first chief minister Gopinath Bordoloi, musical maestros Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg, legendary Ahom general Lachit Bor-phukan. Shah also emphasised on the contributions of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rava, in whose names the auditorium has been dedicated, to the state, recalling how they instilled the spirit of nationalism in the people during the British rule. Besides the main auditorium, other facilities in the complex include a convention centre, five VIP suites, multi-level car parking for 450 vehicles, a state-of-the-art audio-visual system and digital infrastructure, they said. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had on Sunday said that the auditorium complex would be run on green energy with solar panels installed on top of the auditorium.

One thousand beneficiaries of the Congenital Heart Disease programme were also present at the event. Appreciating the initiative of the state government to help the children, Shah said, "This is an extremely welcome step taken by Himanta Biswa Sarma. This initiative has ensured that these children will lead a healthy life, become engineers, DMs, IPS officers, and take the state and country forward."

He lauded that monitoring of the treated children was also being done by the government, with over 13,000 children with defects in their hearts at birth benefiting over the last 15 years. (PTI)

## PM now following

the redevelopment of the spiritual site in the budget proposal of the 2021-22 fiscal and had initially earmarked ₹ 188 crore for the project, which has been implemented on 165 bighas of land in three phases.

The entire complex has been conceptualised in the form of a tree, with the 'Guru Asana', the seat of the revered saint, at the centre, from which all other buildings extend like interconnected branches.

The project incorporates traditional Assamese architectural elements and cultural motifs, along with a detailed visual representation of Sankardeva's life. The various buildings have been constructed in the shape of traditional instruments, dance forms, performance styles and aspects of the Assamese lifestyle.

The project also includes an exhibition depicting the life of Lord Krishna, a theatre hall designed for drama, 'bhaona' performances and other cultural presentations along with a centre for performing arts.

The project also includes guest houses for tourists, a tribal guest house, a health centre and the 'Manikanchangriha' -- a space designed to introduce tourists to the artistic dimensions of the 'namghar' (prayer halls) culture intrinsic to Assamese life. The 'Manikanchan' Jalarashi, a viewing tower for security and surveillance, walkways and designated parking areas for vehicles have also been integrated into the project. (PTI)

## Himanta seeks action

to Anjel's family, tagging Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha in the post. Uttarakhand Police have said that five people have been apprehended for the incident, while another accused, who was from Nepal, may have fled to his native country. (PTI)

## Amit Shah unveils

overall security apparatus of the Northeast's largest city. Commenting on the surveillance system, Sarma said, "With the inauguration of Intelligence City Surveillance System by Adarniya Shri @AmitShah Ji, Guwahati is now equipped with 2000+ cameras, advanced command & data facilities and robust citizen safety systems." This entire mechanism is a big step towards a safer and smarter city for all, he added. The 'Exhibition on Naveen Nyaya Sanhita' has been organised by the CID of the Assam Police to create awareness of the new laws among the public.

The presentation will also showcase the key features, objectives and implementation of the newly enacted legislations. "It may be noted that Assam has been consistently ranked first among all the states regarding implementation of Naveen Nyaya Sanhita as per the Ministry of Home Affairs. Assam has scored 81.20 per cent as against the national average score of 57.02 per cent in NCLI dashboard," Chief Minister's Office said in a statement. Assam is the first state to achieve 100 per cent 'geo fencing' of all police stations in PM Gati Shakti portal, and also the first to enroll DNA samples in the MCU, it added.

The capital city of Assam got its first Police Commissioner on January 1, 2015. Earlier, the city's security was looked after by a Senior Superintendent of Police. Since then, the Office of Guwahati Police Commissioner has been operating in different temporary sites. It has changed its address multiple times and used three different government offices so far before getting the permanent building, inaugurated by Shah.

The newly commissioned environment-friendly structure has the facility for 100 per cent rainwater harvesting with a water treatment and sewage treatment plants, along with solar panels to generate 42.3 KW of electricity. The complex is planned to support high footfall of the public and officers with strong emphasis on safety, security, sustainability and public convenience. Sarma had laid the foundation stone for construction of the new Police Commissionerate on January 5, 2023. It was scheduled to be completed in 24 months with a spending of ₹ 95 crore, which has escalated to Rs 111 crore now. At the same function, Shah flagged off 39 mobile forensic vans under the Assam Police as part of an initiative to strengthen scientific crime investigation.

"This is part of a larger effort to enhance the use of forensic science in India's criminal justice system, especially following the enactment of new criminal laws that makes visit of forensic experts mandatory for offenses carrying a punishment of more than seven years," the CMO release said. (PTI)

## Along dismisses B'desh

War, stating that Bangladesh owed its independence to India's support. "It was India that liberated Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. How can they forget India's role in their liberation?" he asked. Referring to extreme rhetoric used in some statements, Along cautioned against irresponsible language, adding in a lighter vein that such remarks should not be made casually, underscoring the need for restraint and mutual respect.

## People from northeastern

must be probed. "It took the police 12 days to register an FIR. Only when students held a demonstration was the FIR registered," he alleged. He said similar incidents happen in other parts of the country as well, when police do not register complaints of people from the northeastern states.

Quoting the family members of Chakma, Gogoi said the delay in registration of the FIR gave the main accused enough time to escape. He demanded that the case be investigated in a time-bound manner and the guilty be given the harshest punishment to convey a message across the country that there is zero tolerance for such crimes. He also called for raising awareness about the history, culture, languages and literature of the northeast. He said Tripura's Unakoti, where Chakma came from, is home to some ancient Shiva temples.

Gogoi said students from the northeast travel across the country for studies and Chakma had gone to Dehradun for the same reason, but "paid with his life".

In Karbi Anglong districts of Assam, Gogoi said, the Karbi tribes are being called Chinese on their own land. On Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks during his visit to Assam on Monday that "infiltrators" in Assam and the rest of India will be identified and sent back, Gogoi said, "The home minister is visiting Assam, the main issue today is the Sixth Schedule. The house of the chief of the council, a BJP member, ... was burnt by protesters. The Sixth Schedule is overseen by the home minister."

The Congress leader was referring to protesters setting ablaze the residence of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) chief Tuliram Ronghang in Assam's Diphu on December 22. (PTI)

## KAAC-agitators talk

15 days. He also said the Council intends to cancel trade licences of businesses operating within PGR and VGR areas. Agitation leader Litsong Rongphar said the movement would continue both legally and socially.

He noted that certain Karbi villages, including Dikreng, would be protected under the Forest Rights framework, but pressure would be maintained on other encroached areas.

"We will fight to prove that the land is PGR and VGR. Notices will be issued to encroachers in Uttar Borbil PGR tomorrow," Rongphar said, adding that discussions on land and trade licences remained inconclusive.

The meeting was attended by MP Amarsing Tisso; MLAs Darsing Ronghang, Rupsing Teron and Bidyasing Englang; Karbi traditional king Longsing Ronghang; former KAAC CEM Jotson Bey; and representatives of the KSA, KFA, KNCA and JCCPA.

The next round of talks is scheduled on January 17, when the agitators will meet the Government of Assam, followed by another meeting with the KAAC on January 20.

## TU unrest: Stakeholders

between him and students on September 22, leading to a situation where Singh had to nearly flee from the spot. Already at least 11 faculty members and senior officials have either resigned from the posts or the university itself since the protests began in September. (PTI)

## Fire guts 'Molai Kathoni

had been reduced to ashes. The group has informed the Forest departments of Jorhat and Majuli districts as well as the State government, seeking immediate intervention and protection.

Taking note of the incident, Assam Forest Minister Chandramohan Patowary spoke to the concerned parties over the phone and assured prompt action, stating that illegal sand mining activities would not be allowed to continue in the area. Following the assurance, officials of the Majuli Forest Division visited the site on Monday, carried out a preliminary assessment and began documenting the extent of damage, including the number and species of trees destroyed. The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. Meanwhile, demands are growing for a thorough investigation to identify those responsible and to ensure stronger protection for community-led environmental initiatives along the Brahmaputra.

## Artist Dhiraj Rabha's

carnivorous plants glowing under blue UV light. The brightly coloured plants, with small speakers emitting broadcasts from the 1990s to 2010 related to the ULFA movement in Assamese, Hindi and English, project the duality of lives inside the detention camps. "The carnivorous plants represent power. They represent the dominating news. It is actually about who holds power. News spreads from everywhere, and it consumes everything," Rabha said.

This metaphor of consumption lies at the core of Rabha's work. The plants embody how media narratives devoured complexity, flattening lived experiences into headlines. "There is a deliberate duality in their form. From a distance, the flowers look beautiful. But when you come closer, there are layered stories inside. Videos are playing, voices are speaking. It looks different from far away, but closer, the contradictions appear," he explained. The garden of the ominous plants is surrounded by eight watchtowers, modelled on surveillance structures commonly found in detention camps.

The watchtowers invite visitors to peek inside where video interviews with former ULFA members play on loop. The watchtowers, a metaphor for repressive rules meant for liberation, at once become repositories of quiet and reflective testimonies about loss, violence, fear, and the aspirations of ex-ULFA members for themselves and their families. "When I lived inside the detention camp, I would often look at the guards inside these watchtowers. They could look at the outside world and inside the camp at the same time. Now I feel I am playing the role of a watchtower," Rabha said. The installation also includes Rabha's film "Whispers Beneath the Ashes" (2025), a poetic and surreal work that departs from linear storytelling.

It follows a group of children wandering through a forest, encountering mysterious figures as they search for a sense of home, an allegory for generations growing up amid instability and inherited trauma.

"It was important for me because these stories never came out. So I felt, let's share these stories. It's important for me because people will get to know about the stories of these people in a very different way from what they heard in that time," the artist said. (PTI)

### LOST

I RIJUMONI TALUKDAR daughter of Sarat Ch. Talukdar have lost my HSLC Admit Card bearing Roll-B07-431; No-0049 for the session 2007 , of "SEBA" board. Anyone find please return to my following address or call me on my cello phone. Home address- Bakalia Irrigation Colony P.O.+P.S.- Bakaliaghat; Dist - Karbi-anglong (Assam) Phone - 8638068682

CORRIGENDUM-1 AGAINST TENDER NOTICE NO. CON/2025/DEC/02 DATED: 08-12-2025

Corrigendum-1 has been issued against Tender No. CE/CON/BLD/2025/05. For details please visit www.ireps.gov.in

Chief Engineer/Con/Lumding Project/Malgauz NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY (Construction Organisation) Serving Customers With A Smile

# Prateek Bordoloi emerges as possible Margherita candidate

## Congress steps up 2026 poll preparations in Assam

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Dec 29:** The Indian National Congress (INC) has stepped up preparations for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, with party leaders indicating a renewed focus on blending experience with younger leadership as part of its candidate selection strategy.

Sources in the Margherita Block Congress Committee said Prateek Bordoloi, co-chairman of the social media department of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), is emerging as a potential candidate for the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency. Bordoloi, an alumnus of Delhi University and the University of Exeter, is the son of former Margherita MLA and cabinet minister and sitting Nagaon Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi.

Party sources said Bordoloi's growing grassroots engagement, organisational work and outreach among party workers and local communities have strengthened his profile as part of the Congress's effort to reconnect with younger voters and revitalise its base ahead of the crucial elections.

The development comes amid the Congress's statewide outreach programme, "Rai-



por Podulit, Rajior Congress", aimed at preparing a people's manifesto based on public feedback.

Local leaders said Bordoloi's recent organisational role and sustained interaction with party cadres and senior leaders in

Margherita have helped build confidence in the party at the grassroots.

Margherita Block Congress Committee vice-president Toufik Khan claimed that over 32,000 active Congress members are working across the constituency and ex-

pressed confidence that Bordoloi could be a strong contender in the 2026 polls.

Khan also criticised the sitting BJP MLA Bhaskar Sharma, alleging failures on issues such as unemployment, price rise, women's safety, illegal coal syndicates, corruption in the Jal Jeevan Mission, deforestation and the outmigration of educated youth.

He said these issues would dominate the election discourse in the constituency.

"The Congress believes in a balanced approach where fresh talent is given an opportunity alongside experienced leadership. Leaders like Prateek Bordoloi represent the youthful energy the party wants to harness to challenge the ruling BJP," Khan said.

With Assembly elections due in early 2026, the INC, under APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, is expected to contest around 100 of the 126 seats, with the remaining seats likely to be allocated to allies including regional and Left parties.

As candidate selection gathers pace in the coming months, political observers are closely watching how the Congress balances veteran leaders with emerging faces as it seeks to mount a credible challenge to the BJP-led government in Assam.

## Joint session of five Bodo organisations highlights unity, self-reliance at Howraghat



**HT Correspondent**

**HOWRAGHAT, Dec 29:** The playground of Langhin Pangaon Higher Secondary School came alive with cultural assertion and social dialogue on Monday as the second day of the mega joint annual session of five prominent Bodo organisations unfolded.

The three-day event, being held from December 28 to 30, marks a rare convergence of the Kachari Samaj (75th annual session), United Bodo People's Organisation (4th session), All Bodo Employees' Association (36th session), All Bodo Farmers' Association (27th session) and the Bodo Cine Art Association (3rd session).

The day began with a ceremonial display of organisational unity as the presidents of the five bodies—Dalsing Basumatary, Dilip Daimari, Jaydhvaj Khakhlari, Tanuram Daimari and Jousang Basumatary—jointly hoisted their respective flags to formally open the day's programme.

Vice-president of the Kachari Samaj, Sukursing Basumatary, performed Shahid Tarpan in memory of those who sacrificed their lives for the community.

In a symbolic gesture promoting

peace and harmony, Sahitya Akademi awardee Premananda Mosahary and Dalsing Basumatary released white pigeons into the sky.

The event souvenir, 'SWRJI', was formally released by Sahitya Akademi award winner Rituraj Basumatary.

An awareness session held in the afternoon was chaired by Dalsing Basumatary, with Assam Gaurav awardee Manoj Kumar Basumatary as the guest speaker.

Basumatary, a former banker-turned-entrepreneur from Tezpur, spoke on the importance of economic self-reliance and shared his experience of setting up a scientific piggy farm after leaving a banking career. He said the venture has created direct employment for around 50 youths and urged the community to adopt scientific farming practices to address unemployment and strengthen the rural economy. The day concluded with an interactive session involving intellectuals and community leaders, who deliberated on the future roadmap for the Bodo community in Karbi Anglong, with emphasis on social integration and cultural preservation.

## Erosion threat looms over Ramkha Pith, Ajan Peer Durgah

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Dec 29:** Continuing erosion along the southern bank of the Brahmaputra between Desangmukh and Dikhowmukh has triggered concern among residents of riverine villages in Sivasagar district, with fears growing over the safety of two historic pilgrimage sites — Deoghar Ramkha Pith and Ajan Peer Durgah.

Locals said the erosion has been intensifying in recent days, posing a serious threat to Ramkha Pith at Deogharia on the western bank of the Dikhow river and Ajan Peer Durgah located on the eastern side.

The sites are regarded as important centres of religious and cultural significance in the region.

Residents of Aphala, Saraipora, Alimur, Saraguri, Dikhowmukh and Ruphimukh expressed anxiety over the situation, stating that despite repeated assurances, no concrete long-term measures have been implemented to address the erosion problem.

## GUICE launches free APSC interview guidance programme at Gauhati University

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** The Gauhati University Initiative for Competitive Examinations (GUICE) on Monday formally launched the first session of its Free Interview Guidance Programme, aimed at assisting candidates appearing for the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) personality test.

The inaugural session was held in the presence of Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta, Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University, and Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury, former chairman of the Assam Public Service Commission.

Addressing the gathering, Prof Mahanta said such guidance programmes play a vital role in strengthening both the knowledge base and overall personality of civil services aspirants.

He added that Gauhati University remains committed to providing all necessary academic and



mentoring support to help candidates prepare effectively for the interview stage, with the larger goal of grooming responsible and capable civil servants.

Former APSC chairman Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury, while interacting with the candidates, underlined the importance of confidence, appropriate body language, decency and genuineness in responses during the interview.

He also shared practical insights into key aspects candidates should

focus on while facing the personality test.

The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer segment, with candidates actively engaging with the speakers.

Nearly 50 candidates have registered for the Free Interview Guidance Programme.

The event was also attended by Dr Sanjay Kumar Dutta, deputy director of the Pre-Examination Training Centre, Gauhati University, and Vidyarthi Mahanta, programme coordinator of GUICE.

## Rangia Police seize 1.4 kg fake gold, three arrested

**HT Correspondent**

**BOKAJAN, Dec 29:** In a significant crackdown on smuggling activities, Rangia Police intercepted a consignment of counterfeit gold weighing around 1.4 kg at Tarani on Monday.

The seizure was made along the India-Bhutan international highway, leading to the arrest of three persons and the impounding of the vehicle used to transport the consignment.

Acting on specific intelligence, police intercepted a Mahindra Bolero (registration number AS-03-AK-7115) at Tarani.

A search of the vehicle led to the recovery of the fake gold, which was allegedly being transported from Tamulpur to Karbi Anglong.

The arrested persons have been identified as Abhishek Badaya of Jaipur in Rajasthan, Kalpanesh Choudhury of Bokajan in Assam, and Santosh Jain, whose address is being verified.

Police said the vehicle used in the operation has been seized as evidence. Senior officials confirmed that the accused are being interrogated at Rangia Police Station to ascertain the source of the counterfeit gold and to identify any wider network involved in the racket.

## Banga Sena observes founder's death anniversary, reiterates 'Bangabhumi' demand

**HT Correspondent**

**HOWRAGHAT, Dec 29:** Against the backdrop of renewed calls for an independent "Bangabhumi" for Hindus in Bangladesh, the Banga Sena recently observed the 15th death anniversary of its founder and commander-in-chief, Kalidas Baidya, with a day-long programme at Rajagaon Colony in Nagaon district. The observance began with the hoisting of the Indian national flag by Bimal Majhi, followed by the hoisting of the organisational flag by local unit leader Haridhan Das.

Members and leaders from various districts participated in the programme, including North East chief commander Narayan Das and Karbi Anglong general secretary Nakul Das.

Representatives from Kolkata and Uttar Pradesh were also present. During the gathering, speakers strongly condemned the recent killing of a youth, Dipu Das, in Bangladesh, describing it as an act of fundamentalist violence. The organisation observed prayers in memory of the victim and adopted a resolution appealing to the United Nations and the Government of India to intervene and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. The programme also witnessed a reiteration of the Banga Sena's long-standing political demand for the creation of an independent "Bangabhumi" within Bangladesh.

## ABSU, AASAA condemn attack; demand arrest of culprits

Stabbing incident sparks tension in Chirang



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 29:** Tension prevailed in the Laoti picnic spot area under Gurubhasha police outpost in Chirang district on Sunday evening after a youth was stabbed by unidentified miscreants at Nang-dorbari.

According to sources, the incident occurred around 7 pm when two youths on a motorcycle allegedly attacked a man with a sharp weapon and fled the scene immedi-

ately. The victim, identified as Simon Kisku (20), sustained a stab injury to the abdomen.

Preliminary reports suggest the attack followed an altercation after Kisku objected to the loud noise created by the motorcycle, which reportedly enraged the assailants.

He was first taken to Jhwlaow Swmba Basumatary (JSB) Civil Hospital in Kajalgaon for emergency treatment and was later referred to Barpeta Medical College

and Hospital due to the seriousness of his injuries.

The incident occurred at a time when a mela was underway in the area, having begun on Saturday and attracting large crowds to the picnic spot.

Following the stabbing, local residents rushed to the mela venue, creating unrest and demanding immediate closure of the fair, citing concerns over public safety.

On Monday, hundreds of people from the greater Gurubhasha area staged a protest in front of the Gurubhasha police outpost, demanding the immediate arrest of those involved.

Protesters alleged that the attack was targeted at an innocent local youth and urged the authorities to take strict action against the culprits.

A police team from the Gurubhasha outpost rushed to the spot soon after the incident and began an

investigation.

A senior police officer in Chirang said police have gathered necessary inputs and expressed hope that the accused would be arrested soon.

Meanwhile, several student and social organisations, including the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and AASAA, strongly condemned the incident and demanded swift action. ABSU president Dipen Boro described the stabbing as a reflection of growing social disorder in the Bodoland Territorial Region.

He alleged that the unchecked mushrooming of picnic spots and melas often leads to the open circulation of gambling, alcohol and drugs, resulting in violence and loss of lives.

Referring to recent incidents, Boro cited the accident during the Aie River Festival as an example of administrative failure, alleging lack of effective governance and law enforcement.

## DCC/DLRC meeting reviews banking performance, scheme implementation in Sonitpur

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Dec 29:** The District Consultative Committee/District Level Review Committee (DCC/DLRC) meeting for the quarter ended September 2025 was held at Conference Hall-I of the Office of the District Commissioner, Sonitpur, on Monday.

The meeting was presided over by the District Development Commissioner, Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, and reviewed the performance of banks in the district in terms of deposits, advances, credit-deposit (CD) ratio and the disbursement status of various government schemes.

Convened by the Lead District Manager, Sonitpur, Acharya Sonowal, the meeting also assessed the progress of banks in implementing schemes such as Kisan Credit Card, PM Surya Ghar, PMEGP, PMFME, ASRLM and different social security schemes of the government.

Stress was laid on timely disposal of applications and strengthening coordination between banks and line departments to reduce delays and improve service delivery.

Chief Executive Officer, Sonitpur Zilla Parishad, Jayanta Kumar Borah, suggested adopting a convergence approach during financial literacy camps organised by rural bank branches.

He said facilitation of Aadhaar seeding, E-KYC and resolution of issues related to DBT



beneficiaries could be undertaken simultaneously to ensure easier access to banking services.

Issues relating to ATM availability, timely disposal of loan applications under flagship schemes and the need for better coordination among stakeholders were also discussed.

The meeting further reviewed the settlement of claims under the Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund special campaign initiated by the Government of India since October 2025.

Banks were directed to submit branch-wise lists of government accounts maintained by them, while line departments were asked to nominate dedicated nodal officers to coordinate with banks on submitted proposals and their status.

The meeting was attended by the LDO, RBI (Assam), Bedabrata Saikia; DDM, NABARD, Suman Chatterjee; officials of Assam Gramin Bank and R-SETI, Sonitpur; branch managers of district coordinating bank branches; and officials from various departments of the district administration.

## NFR introduces multiple new train services in 2025 to boost connectivity

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) introduced several new train services during 2025 with the aim of enhancing rail connectivity, improving passenger convenience and strengthening regional as well as inter-state travel across the North-east and adjoining areas.

As part of the expansion, Train No 12047/12048 Guwahati-North Lakhimpur-Guwahati Jan Shatabdi Express was introduced on a bi-weekly basis from January 7, 2025.

Train No 55817/55818 New Bongaigaon-Guwahati-New Bongaigaon Passenger began daily operations from January 4, while Train No 15911/15912 Tinsukia-Naharlagun-Tinsukia Express commenced tri-weekly services from January 5, significantly improving regional connectivity.

To strengthen long-distance travel, Train No 13115/13116 Sealdah-Jalpaiguri Road-Sealdah Weekly Express was introduced from June 20, 2025.

In the Darjeeling hill section, Train No. 52592 Darjeeling-Ghum-Darjeeling was launched



from September 20, 2025, catering to tourism and heritage travel.

September 2025 saw the introduction of several key services. Train No. 20507/20508 Sairang-Anand Vihar Terminal-Sairang Rajdhani Express began weekly operations from September 19.

Train No 15609/15610 Guwahati-Sairang-Guwahati Express was introduced as a daily service from September 13, while Train No 13125/13126 Kolkata-Sairang-Kolkata Express started tri-weekly operations from September 16.

In addition, Train No. 26302/26301 Danapur-Jogbani-Danapur Vande Bharat Express

was introduced with six-day-a-week services from September 17.

Train No 15702/15701 Siliguri-Katihar-Siliguri Express commenced daily operations from September 16, and Train No 16601/16602 Erode-Jogbani-Erode Amrit Bharat Express was introduced as a weekly service from September 25.

NFR officials said the introduction of these services during 2025 reflects the railway's continued commitment to expanding rail connectivity, improving accessibility and supporting the socio-economic development of the Northeast region.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Sincerity is the way to heaven.*  
- Mencius

## Rahul's leadership questioned within Cong?

After poll routs in Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi and poor performance in the assembly elections of Bihar, the voices for Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have grown stronger. The rumbling heard within the party is "Rahul hatao, Priyanka laao", publicly calling for a meaty centre role for Priyanka. This calling was led by senior Odisha leader Mohammed Moqim, who, in his letter to Sonia Gandhi, questioned the Congress leadership under Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge, and has asked for a far bigger role for Priyanka. It must be noted that the Congress has subsequently expelled Mohammed Moqim from the party for anti-party activities. On the other hand, Saharanpur MP Imran Masood went a step further and asserted that the Wayanad MP would make for a great prime minister like the late former PM, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Masood, who is known to be close to Priyanka, made the remarks when he was asked about the Congress general secretary's recent comment on the violence against Hindus in unrest-hit Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections proved to be a major setback for Priyanka. She was given charge of the state and ran an aggressive campaign. Consciously targeting women voters, she attracted large crowds, but failed to make an electoral impact.

Riding on welfare-ism and Yogi Adityanath's Hindutva popularity, the BJP swept the state. In fact, the Congress vote share in UP fell from 6.25 per cent to an abysmal 2.33 per cent, and its tally from seven seats to two. Since then, she has campaigned in Maharashtra, Haryana, Bihar, and Delhi, but her star power has consistently failed to translate into votes. This has led to the view that her charisma has been overhyped, and she will not be able to do any better than her brother. Meanwhile, the Bharat Jodo Yatra has presented the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi as a biggest popular leader and the main challenger to the RSS-BJP juggernaut led by PM Narendra Modi. Rahul's personal stature has improved considerably and offers a humane, democratic and inclusive alternative to Modi's unabashed Hindu majoritarianism. Rahul's secular image in the public eye attracts women, youth, the middle class and increased his popularity amongst EBC, OBC, Dalits and Muslims in the country. What is good for Rahul Gandhi, who is the visible face of the Congress, should help the party too.

The Congress is in need of an awakening and revival after successive electoral blows at the centre and in the states as seen in deserts, infighting, factionalism and loss of power and stature. Now despite the pressure from below, party insiders say that the close bond between the siblings rules out the possibility of Priyanka carrying centre stage and Rahul will continue to lead the party from the front.

## How to make 2026 Blissful?

## Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



The world is entering another year at full speed, but speed alone no longer guarantees progress. Many people are carrying too many goals, too much noise, and too little clarity into the future. That is why 2026 does not need to be louder or faster. It needs to be lighter. A blissful year is not built by adding more targets to the calendar. It is shaped by choosing carefully what truly deserves attention. The coming year offers an opportunity to rethink how we live, work, and measure success. The central idea is simple, yet powerful. Less can genuinely lead to more.

Over the years, life has quietly turned into a race of accumulation. More projects. More notifications. More expectations. More comparisons. Somewhere in this rush, peace became optional, and rest felt like guilt. The cost of this overload is now visible in rising anxiety, constant fatigue, and a sense that time is slipping away without meaning.

## Pause for Clarity

2026 can be different if the approach changes. Fewer goals do not mean a lack of ambition. They mean clarity. When everything becomes important, nothing truly is. A small set of well-chosen goals allows deeper focus and better outcomes. It becomes easier to finish what is started. Progress feels tangible. Confidence grows naturally. The mind stops jumping between unfinished tasks and starts experiencing completion.

Less speed does not mean slowing life to a halt. It means restoring rhythm. Constant urgency creates stress, not efficiency. When days are paced more thoughtfully, decisions improve. Conversations deepen. Health stabilises. Productivity becomes sustainable instead of exhausting. Slower mornings, realistic schedules, and fewer rushed commitments allow energy to last through the day.

## Clarity Over Clutter

Noise is another silent disruptor. Digital alerts, breaking news, opinions, and constant updates fragment attention. Less noise creates mental space. It becomes easier to think clearly, listen fully, and respond rather than react. A quieter information diet allows the mind to recover its natural ability to process and prioritise. A blissful 2026 will also depend on how people treat their bodies. Overworking, overeating, and overscheduling are often mistaken for discipline. In reality, they drain vitality. Lightness in routine, food, and movement keeps energy available for meaningful work. When the body is not burdened, the mind performs better.

Relationships, too, benefit from a "less is more" approach. Fewer superficial interactions create room for genuine connections. Presence becomes more valuable than availability. Listening becomes more important than responding quickly. Emotional well-being improves when expectations are realistic and boundaries are respected.

## Respect the Planet

This philosophy extends naturally to how we treat the planet. Excessive consumption, unnecessary extraction, and constant expansion strain natural systems. A lighter footprint supports balance. Mindful choices around resources, energy, and waste align personal well-being with planetary health. This thinking quietly reflects the spirit of the BlissEarth Mission, where mindful living contributes to a healthier world without grand declarations.

The idea of less is not about denial. It is about design. Designing days that feel complete rather than chaotic. Designing goals that inspire rather than overwhelm. Designing systems that support life instead of exhausting it. As 2026 approaches, the question is not how much can be achieved, but how well life can be lived.

The quality of attention matters more than the quantity of activity. Calm minds make better decisions. Balanced lives sustain success longer. A blissful year is built gently. By subtracting what no longer serves. By protecting energy. By choosing clarity over clutter. The invitation for 2026 is simple. Reduce the unnecessary. Strengthen what matters. Let life breathe a little. Bliss On.



# The power of predictability: India's 2025 story

In a world that felt increasingly fractured in 2025, with nations pulling apart over trade disputes, shifting alliances, and fierce rivalries in technology, India's economy emerged as a quiet beacon of steadiness. Geopolitical tensions simmered, supply chains twisted and turned to avoid new barriers, and uncertainty hung over global commerce like a persistent fog. Yet amid all this, India posted numbers that turned heads: an impressive 8.2 percent growth in the July to September quarter, inflation dipping to record lows, and a fiscal deficit kept firmly in check. It was the kind of performance that reminded everyone why this vast, vibrant nation continues to stand out.

The year began with the usual mix of hope and caution. Global headlines were dominated by escalating trade frictions, particularly the steep tariffs imposed by the United States, which threatened to disrupt flows of goods across borders. Many economies braced for slowdowns, rerouting their supply chains or scrambling for new markets. But India, drawing on years of careful policy-making, navigated these waters with remarkable poise. Domestic demand proved resilient, fueled by a growing middle class eager to spend after years of pent-up aspirations. Rural incomes benefited from good harvests and targeted government support, while urban consumers found relief in falling prices.

What made this stability possible was a deliberate focus on reforms that prioritized trust, simplicity, and predictability. Policymakers seemed to recognize that in turbulent times, citizens and businesses crave clarity above all else. Tax systems, long criticized for their complexity, underwent meaningful streamlining. The Goods and Services Tax regime saw rationalization of rates, reducing the endless disputes over classifications that had bogged down courts and companies alike. Income tax slabs were adjusted to put more money in people's pockets, with higher exemptions and simpler filing processes that felt like a genuine effort to build goodwill. These changes were not just about boosting consumption in the short term; they signaled a commitment to a fairer, more transparent framework that businesses could rely on for planning years ahead.

Labor laws, too, received long-overdue attention. New codes consolidated dozens of



outdated regulations into a more coherent set, balancing worker protections with the flexibility employers need in a fast-changing world. Decriminalization of minor compliance issues removed the fear that had often paralyzed small entrepreneurs. For gig workers and those in informal sectors, extensions of social security brought a sense of inclusion that had been missing for generations. These steps fostered trust, encouraging investment and job creation without the old overhang of regulatory uncertainty.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

On the fiscal front, the government walked a tightrope with skill. The deficit target for the year was set at a prudent 4.4 percent of GDP, a step down from previous levels, reflecting a steady path toward consolidation. Capital expenditure remained a priority, pouring resources into infrastructure that connects remote villages to markets and modernizes ports for smoother trade. Even as revenues faced pressures from global slowdowns, a bumper dividend from the Reserve Bank provided breathing room. The central bank itself played a pivotal role, easing interest rates gradually as inflation cooled, ensuring that borrowing costs did not choke growth.

Inflation's dramatic decline was perhaps the most heartening story. From hovering around familiar levels in prior years, consumer prices tumbled, hitting historical lows like 0.25 percent in October. Food prices, often the culprit behind spikes, softened

thanks to abundant supplies and effective buffer stocks. Fuel costs eased with stable global oil markets. For ordinary households, this meant real gains in purchasing power. Essentials became more affordable, leaving room for discretionary spending on education, health, or even small luxuries. It was a rare "goldilocks" moment: growth humming along without the usual inflationary overhang.

This macroeconomic calm stood in sharp contrast to the storms elsewhere. While other nations grappled with stagflation risks or sharp contractions, India's growth accelerated. The first half of the fiscal year clocked around 8 percent expansion, driven by manufacturing revival, construction booms, and a services sector that continued to punch above its weight globally. Private investment picked up, encouraged by the predictable policy environment. Foreign direct inflows, though selective, targeted high-value areas like technology and renewables, underscoring India's appeal as a stable alternative in fragmented supply chains.

Of course, challenges persisted. Exports faced headwinds from tariffs and sluggish demand in key markets, prompting a swift pivot toward diversification. New trade agreements with partners in the Gulf, Pacific, and beyond opened doors, while domestic reforms made Indian goods more competitive. The rupee's managed depreciation offered some cushion, though it reminded everyone of the interconnectedness

of global finance. Equity markets experienced volatility, with foreign outflows testing resilience, but domestic investors stepped in with confidence, supported by a surge in systematic investments.

Looking deeper, the year's successes stemmed from a human touch in policymaking. Reforms were not imposed in isolation but designed with feedback from stakeholders, aiming to ease daily frictions. For a street vendor navigating compliance, or a factory owner planning expansion, the emphasis on simplicity translated into real relief. Predictability bred confidence: businesses hired more, families spent freely, and investors committed long-term. Trust grew when actions matched words, when tax relief arrived as promised, and when labor protections extended without stifling enterprise.

As 2025 drew to a close, India found itself in an enviable position. The world remained unpredictable, with battles over tech dominance and resource access likely to intensify. Yet the foundations laid this year, through thoughtful reforms and steadfast management, positioned the economy to weather future shocks. Growth projections for the coming years hovered around 7 percent or higher, a testament to sustained momentum. More importantly, the benefits trickled down: rising employment, especially for women entering the workforce in greater numbers; improved livelihoods in rural areas; and a sense that progress was inclusive.

In conversations across cities and villages, people spoke of tangible changes. A young entrepreneur in a tier-two town talked about easier access to credit and fewer bureaucratic hurdles. A farmer credited better market linkages for steady prices. An office worker appreciated the extra disposable income from tax cuts. These personal stories wove together into a larger narrative of resilience and optimism.

India's journey in 2025 was not about dramatic leaps but steady, purposeful strides. In an era of fragmentation and uncertainty, it chose the path of internal strength, building an economy rooted in trust between government and people, simplicity in rules that govern daily life, and predictability that allows dreams to flourish. As the year ended, the message was clear: stability is not the absence of challenges but the quiet confidence to face them. And in that, India shone brightly.

## Let society be illuminated with the Light of knowledge in the New Year

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

As time flows ceaselessly, one year is bidding farewell to our lives, and another new year full of possibilities, 2026, has arrived before us. This continuous journey of time is not merely a change of days, dates, and months; it is a golden opportunity to reshape the world of human consciousness and thought. The essence of the New Year lies in brushing aside the gains and losses, disappointments, and failures of the old year and embracing life with renewed enthusiasm. However, this welcome must not be confined to external celebrations or festivities alone; rather, it should be a bold step toward mental transformation. Let 2026 become a symbol of resolve for us—a resolve through which we can free our society from the dark clouds of ignorance, superstition, and blind belief, illuminating it with the pure light of knowledge. The true development of a society does not depend solely on skyscrapers, roads, or economic prosperity; the real backbone of a society is the intellectual level and depth of knowledge of the people who inhabit it. Only when an individual learns to seek truth through reasoning and critical thinking can they truly claim to be modern. Therefore, in this new year, our primary goal should be to awaken a deep thirst for knowledge at every level of society—from the urban elite to the ordinary farmers in villages—because only knowledge can liberate people from narrow-mindedness and lead them toward expansiveness.

When we look at our current social structure, one thing becomes clear: we have indeed progressed considerably in terms of material comfort and convenience, yet mental and intellectual poverty still grips us. Due to the rapid spread of technology, the entire world has come into the palm of our hands, but the doors of our minds seem to be closing gradually. In 2026, we must end this mental contradiction, and for that, a profound self-analysis will be necessary. Knowledge does not mean merely acquiring degrees from schools or colleges or scoring high marks in examinations; knowledge is the ability to understand life and the world in their true form. Education that does not make a person humble, knowledge that does not sow the seeds of human values in the heart, is meaningless. Today, we

see that even highly educated individuals often fall victim to blind beliefs or take the lead in spreading communal hatred. The root cause is that our education system has given us information but not wisdom. Information fills the brain, but wisdom illuminates the soul. In this New Year, we must resolve to become seekers of wisdom rather than mere storehouses of information. Only when every individual in society learns to verify the truth of any matter or news using their own logic and judgment, rather than believing blindly, will the chaos and anarchy prevailing in society come to an end. The light of knowledge is that power which leads people toward unity instead of division and teaches love instead of hatred.

In the social context of Assam, 2026 is likely to be of immense importance, for as a community we are currently at a complex crossroads. In the struggle to protect our language, culture, and heritage, it is now the call of the time to rely on knowledge and reason rather than being swayed by emotion. History has taught us repeatedly that no community can secure its existence through emotion alone; for that, far-sighted thinking and intellectual planning are required. In this new year, our younger generation must prepare themselves through deep study of literature, history, and science so that they can showcase their talent and capability anywhere in the world. True knowledge teaches a person to be dignified but not arrogant. The rich cultural treasure we have inherited—from the great saints Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva to Jyoti, Bishnu, and Bhupen—should not be confined merely to tributes or festivals; we must apply their philosophy in our daily lives. Sankardeva's Ekasarana Nam Dharma or the great message of equality is not just religious ritual; it is a scientific document for building an ideal society. In 2026, we must strive to connect this ancient knowledge with modern science to create a new Assamese society where tradition and modernity harmoniously blend.

When discussing knowledge, the education system naturally comes to mind, and in this area, the need for radical change is keenly felt. The current education system teaches students only to chase marks, depriving them of the true joy of knowledge. A society will be illuminated by the

***In the social context of Assam, 2026 is likely to be of immense importance, for as a community we are currently at a complex crossroads. In the struggle to protect our language, culture, and heritage, it is now the call of the time to rely on knowledge and reason rather than being swayed by emotion. History has taught us repeatedly that no community can secure its existence through emotion alone; for that, far-sighted thinking and intellectual planning are required***

light of knowledge only when free thinking is practised in its educational institutions. In 2026, parents must realise that every child has their own unique talent and interest, and forcing comparisons with others is a form of mental torture. We must create an environment where children learn to ask questions rather than merely memorise textbook content. When a student moves forward seeking answers to "why," "how," and "for what purpose," true knowledge will dawn in their mind. Understanding the vast world beyond the school walls—nature, society, and human psychology—is also an indispensable part of education. In this new year, we must resolve not only to prepare our children for careers or jobs but to mould them into good human beings, conscious citizens, and individuals responsible toward society. Knowledge without ethics and values can sometimes be dangerous for society, so the highest emphasis should be placed on character building.

In the age of technology and the internet, the nature of knowledge has changed, and the explosion of information has created a storm in our world of thought; managing it properly will be a major challenge for us in 2026. The unrestricted use of social media has made it difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood in society. Often, fake news and propaganda create confusion, which is merely another name for ignorance. To build a society illuminated by the light of knowledge, we must tread cautiously in this digital world. Technology is like fire—we can use it to dispel darkness or burn down our own home. Our resolution in the New Year should be to become masters of technology rather than its slaves. We must encourage our youth to seek knowledge in the pages of books rather than being confined to smartphone screens. Cultivating the habit of reading books is not

just a hobby; it is mental exercise and the key to the development of thought. When a person studies deeply, their mental horizon expands, and they learn to accept others' opinions with respect. This mindset is essential for a tolerant and democratic society. Therefore, in 2026, we can consider practising "digital fasting"—periodically stepping away from technology to spend time with ourselves and our families—which will help maintain our mental health.

The role of knowledge in socio-economic development is undeniable, and only when knowledge is linked with work culture can a society become self-reliant. The inferiority complex still prevalent in our society regarding manual labour stems solely from ignorance. In 2026, we must change the notion that only government jobs or desk work are respectable. A truly knowledgeable person knows that no work is small or big; every task performed with honesty and dedication is important for society. Only when modern knowledge and techniques are applied in agriculture, industry, trade, and commerce will Assam's economy become strong. If our young men and women emphasise technical and practical knowledge alongside traditional education, solving the unemployment problem will become easier. When a farmer tests soil quality and cultivates scientifically, when a businessman expands trade by understanding market demand, it will prove that the light of knowledge is reflected in our workplaces. To free ourselves from dependency, we must rely on knowledge and skill. In this new year, we need deep research and planning on how to present Assam's indigenous resources to the global market with the help of knowledge and technology.

For societal change, the personal responsibility and conscious effort of every citizen are

required. We must not confine the New Year of 2026 to mere exchange of greetings but give it the form of a social movement—a movement for knowledge. Each of us can turn our home into a centre of knowledge practice. Instead of spending evenings glued to TV serials or mobiles, family members can discuss a meaningful topic together, or read stories or biographies of great people to children—these small steps can bring about major changes in society. The issue of women's dignity and safety is also deeply intertwined with knowledge. A society that does not respect women can never be called knowledgeable or civilised. This year, we must vow to break down all walls of gender discrimination and build an egalitarian society where both women and men receive equal opportunities and respect. Only when the light of knowledge removes the veil of patriarchal arrogance from our eyes will we truly recognise the power and capability of women.

In conclusion, it can be said that 2026 is a year of dreams and possibilities, but to turn these dreams into reality, knowledge must be our guide. A society illuminated by the light of knowledge is one where poverty cannot strip away human dignity, where blood is not shed in the name of religion or caste, and where the solution to every problem is dialogue and reason rather than guns or violence. We are optimistic that in this new year, the skies and air of Assam will resound with the mantra of knowledge. New creative fervour will awaken in our educational institutions, research laboratories, fields, and factories. Hope will replace despair, trust will replace doubt, and light will replace darkness. May 2026 bring unblemished happiness, peace, and prosperity to everyone's life, and may our society truly shine with the flame of knowledge—that is our earnest wish.

# 2025: A year of integrated progress and responsible innovation

By: Dipak Kurmi

The year 2025 stands as a defining moment in the long arc of scientific and technological progress, marked less by isolated breakthroughs than by the visible convergence of multiple fields reshaping human life. Science and technology during this period did not merely produce new tools or discoveries; they altered the tempo of innovation itself. Artificial intelligence matured from a powerful assistant into an embedded cognitive infrastructure, biotechnology crossed critical thresholds in precision and personalization, space exploration regained strategic and philosophical significance, and climate science moved decisively from warning to large-scale intervention. Together, these achievements reflected a world increasingly aware that scientific advancement is inseparable from ethical responsibility, social impact, and global cooperation.

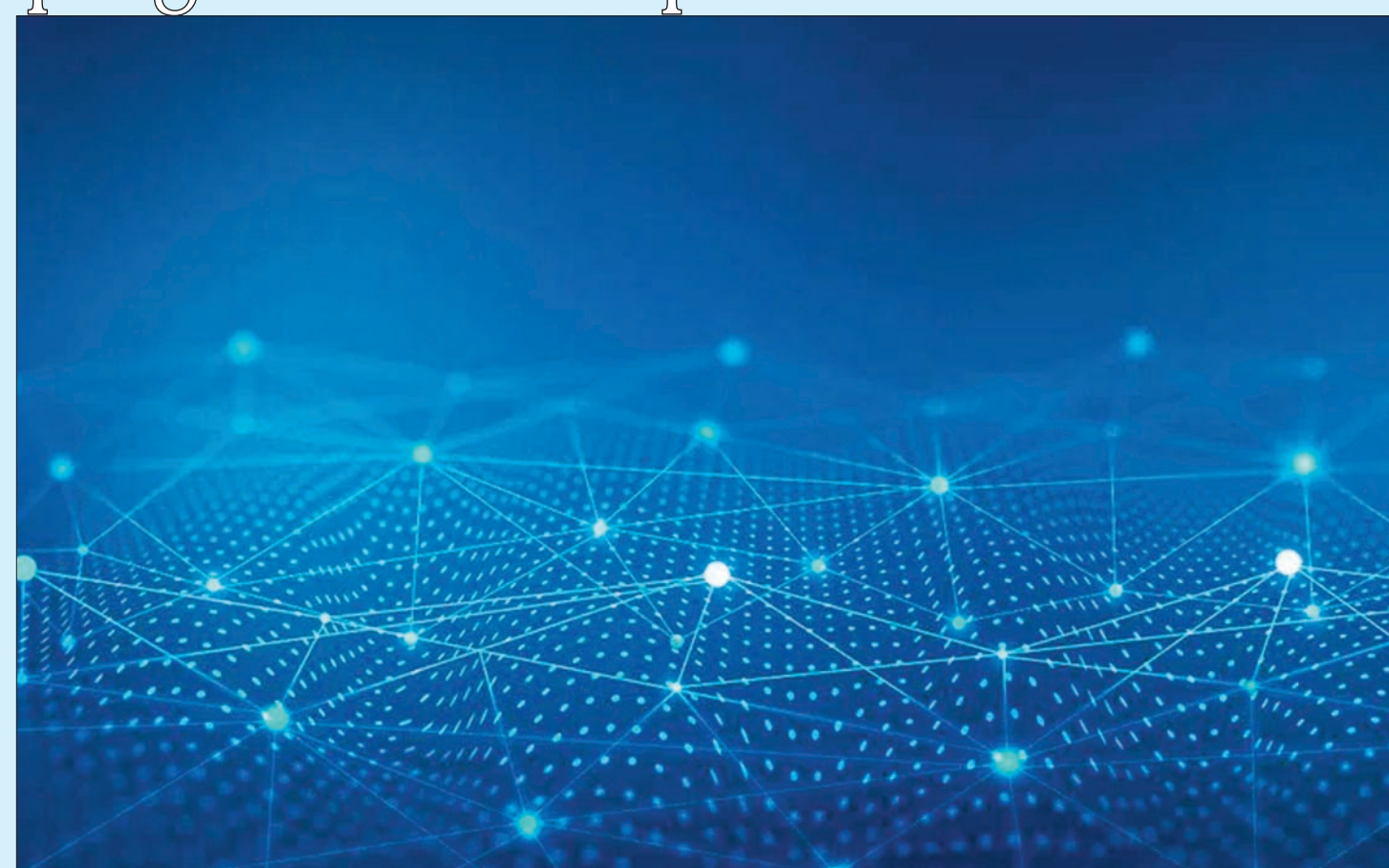
One of the most consequential achievements of 2025 lay in the consolidation of artificial intelligence as a general-purpose technology influencing nearly every domain of human activity. Advances in machine learning models emphasized reasoning, contextual understanding, and multimodal intelligence, allowing systems to integrate text, images, audio, and real-world data with unprecedented coherence. In healthcare, AI-driven diagnostics reached levels of accuracy rivaling expert clinicians, enabling early detection of diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disorders, and neurological conditions through non-invasive screening methods. In scientific research, AI accelerated discovery by simulating molecular interactions, predicting protein structures, and optimizing experimental design, reducing years of trial-and-error into months or even weeks. Yet equally significant was the global push in 2025 toward AI governance, transparency, and alignment, reflecting a growing consensus that technological power must be guided by human values rather than unchecked efficiency.

Biotechnology and medical science also witnessed transformative achievements in 2025, particularly in the areas of genetic medicine, regenerative therapies, and personalized treatment. Gene-editing technologies advanced beyond experimental promise into regulated clinical practice, offering targeted therapies for inherited disorders once considered incurable. Breakthroughs in mRNA and next-generation vaccine platforms extended beyond infectious diseases to cancer immunotherapy and autoimmune condi-

tions, demonstrating the adaptability of these technologies. Regenerative medicine made notable strides through lab-grown tissues and organoids, providing viable pathways for transplantation research and drug testing without reliance on animal models. These achievements were underpinned by improved bioinformatics and data-sharing frameworks, allowing global research communities to collaborate at a scale previously unattainable, while simultaneously raising critical debates about bioethics, consent, and equitable access.

The year 2025 was also remarkable for renewed momentum in space science and exploration, signaling humanity's deepening engagement with the cosmos. Advances in reusable launch systems significantly reduced the cost of access to space, enabling a surge in scientific missions, satellite deployment, and commercial experimentation. Lunar exploration programs progressed from symbolic presence toward sustained infrastructure planning, with robotic missions contributing valuable data on resources, geology, and long-term habitability. Mars research benefited from enhanced autonomous systems capable of conducting complex analyses without constant human intervention, expanding understanding of planetary climate history and the potential for ancient microbial life. Beyond exploration, space-based technologies in 2025 strengthened Earth observation, improving climate monitoring, disaster prediction, and global communication networks, reinforcing the idea that space science is as vital to life on Earth as it is to human curiosity.

Climate science and environmental technology achieved a new level of practical relevance in 2025, as the urgency of ecological crises translated into measurable technological responses. Renewable energy technologies reached significant efficiency milestones, with solar, wind, and energy storage systems becoming more affordable, scalable, and resilient. Advances in battery chemistry and grid management addressed long-standing challenges of intermittency, making clean energy integration more reliable for both urban and rural regions. Carbon capture and utilization technologies moved from pilot projects to early industrial deployment, reflecting cautious optimism about mitigating emissions while transitioning away from fossil fuels. At the same time, climate modeling became more precise through high-resolution simulations powered by advanced computing, enabling policymakers to design region-specific adaptation strategies rather



than relying on broad projections.

Computing and information technology in 2025 entered a phase of architectural transformation, driven by the limits of traditional scaling and the search for new paradigms. Quantum computing, while still in a developmental stage, achieved demonstrable progress in error correction, stability, and problem-specific applications, particularly in cryptography, materials science, and complex optimization. High-performance computing systems supported climate research, astrophysics, and pandemic modeling at unprecedented levels of detail, while edge computing and advanced semiconductor design reduced latency and energy consumption across digital infrastructure. Cybersecurity also evolved significantly, as cryptographic systems adapted to emerging threats and global awareness increased regarding data sovereignty and digital trust. These

developments underscored that computational power in 2025 was not merely about speed, but about reliability, resilience, and responsible stewardship of information. Equally important were the social and cultural dimensions of scientific achievement in 2025, particularly in education, communication, and public engagement. Digital learning platforms integrated adaptive technologies that responded to individual learning styles, bridging gaps in access to quality education across socioeconomic boundaries. Scientific communication embraced new forms of visualization and interactive modeling, making complex concepts accessible to broader audiences without diluting rigor. Interdisciplinary research gained institutional support, recognizing that challenges such as public health, climate change, and technological ethics cannot be solved within isolated silos. This shift reflected a broader understanding

that science in 2025 was as much about collaboration and inclusivity as it was about discovery.

Taken together, the achievements of science and technology in 2025 reveal a world standing at a threshold rather than a destination. The year demonstrated that progress is no longer defined solely by novelty, but by integration, responsibility, and foresight. Scientific advances showed remarkable capacity to improve human well-being, expand knowledge, and address existential risks, yet they also highlighted the need for careful governance and moral clarity. As the boundaries between the digital, biological, and physical worlds continue to blur, the legacy of 2025 lies in its affirmation that the true measure of technological achievement is not how fast humanity can innovate, but how wisely it can choose the direction of that innovation. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))

## 2025, the year that was; 2026, the year that will be

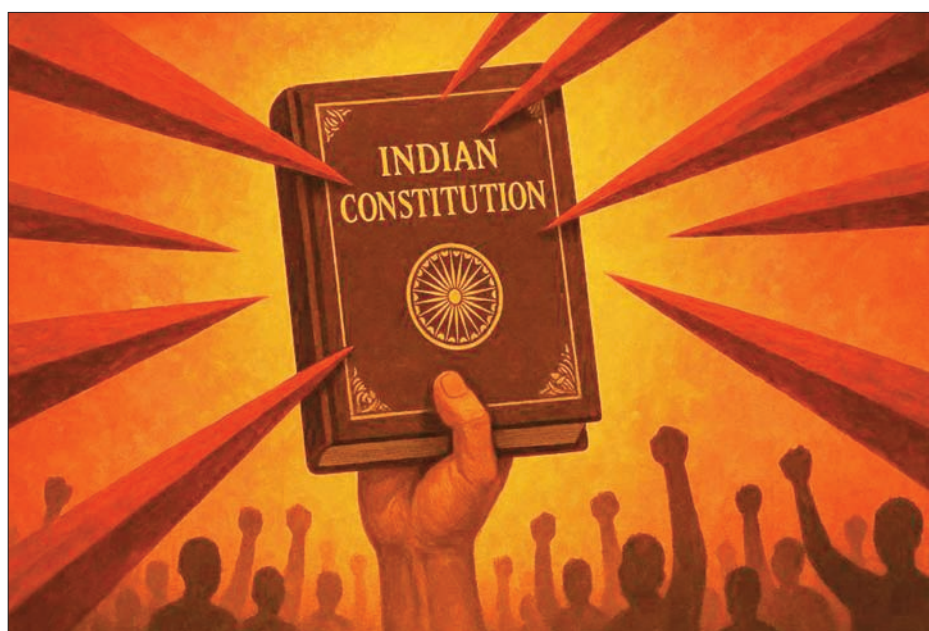
By: Nilotpal Basu

Reviewing the year gone by is important, as the past gives us the wherewithal to understand the present and step into the future with all our energy and purpose, particularly in an environment which is engulfed by a mainstream media which is increasingly hegemonised by corporate ownership. No less important is the growing influence of social media where India has emerged as the prime hub of fake news and disinformation. It will be a cliché to point out that this space as well is dominated by the capital-intensive activities of the BJP IT Cell, whose principal occupation is to generate mutual hate and enmity among the people.

In such a vitiated atmosphere, we reassure our readers that we will rededicate ourselves to the task of cutting through the clutter and bring out reports and analyses with the Indian people's interests as its center piece. People have to win over profit; unity has to win over hate and division. But it is also equally important to clarify who constitutes the 'collective' people. Doubtless, it is the working people – the working class, the peasantry, the agricultural workers – and the millions of democratic and secular minded citizens including students and young people, women who are marginalised and suffer social inequality and persecution, the tribals, the Dalits, the minorities – who fight for their existence and survival.

2025 has witnessed a pernicious growth of inequality across the globe, and particularly in India. Just one per cent have come to own over 40 per cent of wealth and income. It is, however, heartening to see that economists, scholars and researchers have got together to lay bare this obnoxious tendency of vulgar wealth and deprivation. Together with inequality, the other bane that afflicts the people in India is the growing unemployment which is assuming astronomical proportions. Obviously, these two factors impact aggregate demand in the economy and hold back the economy from growing in a manner which could be beneficial to all; but the burden disproportionately impacts people's lives adversely. Certainly, the recent notification of new labour codes and the legislation for doing away with MGNREGA and the right based entitlements of rural poor, pompously named G RAM G, will further aggravate the employment question. Therefore, while the mainstream media puts one dimensional emphasis on GDP and the brave projections about relative size of the Indian economy, it obfuscates the harsh reality that the overwhelming majority of Indian citizens have come to suffer. Naturally, the five basics of human need – food, clothing, shelter, education and health – are in a state of worst crisis.

What is happening to education deserves special mention because it is here that the current regime has embarked upon the severest assault. Implementation of National Education Policy with emphatic bias for commercialisation and corporatisation is leading to large-scale shutdown of government schools. The entire architecture of educational governance which was premised in decentralisation and legitimate rights of the state governments is being substituted by extreme centralisation. The winter session of Parliament saw the desperate attempt to pass the legislation for creation of Higher Education Council which will act like a super apex body by rendering all earlier structures irrelevant. This trend of centralisation has a second



objective of communalising the content and capture institutions by bringing in wholesale communalisation and enmesh attacks on history and science to ensure the destruction of reason.

The question of justice, which is an essential ingredient of our Constitution, has also come under serious strain in 2025. Despite repeated demands of conducting a caste census, and notwithstanding the agreement that the government had to announce under insistent pressure, nothing has moved on the ground. On the contrary, Dalits and tribals faced the worst attacks during the year. Jal, jangal, zameen is further threatened by the corporate greed for encroaching forest land, particularly the mining corporates baying for eviction of the tribal people. Now, the question is also becoming linked to climate justice and overall degradation of environment. The air pollution levels in urban centres and the raid on Aravallis display a new obnoxious offensive. The issue of justice and equality of all vulnerable social groups along with Dalits, tribals, minorities and women, are merging with the issue of climate justice. Particularly, the gender question has assumed a precarious situation with the full-fledged offensive of Hindutva and the pursuit of Manuvadi dictums.

It is not difficult to understand the fallout of all these processes and their disastrous impact on political democracy and secularism. On the question of democracy, what has stood out in 2025 is the situation facing the constitutional right to vote. The attack is twofold. Even after the scrapping of the electoral bonds, the latest figures show that the BJP is being handed over almost 90 per cent of the corporate contributions through electoral trusts. The other more vital question is the degeneration of the Election Commission of India into a pocket borough of the BJP. There is a heartening fight back by the people on the question of SIR. But latest facts show that the ECI did not even follow its own procedural requirements to decide on this bizarre campaign. Figures also show that SIR has become the biggest exclusionary exercise, compounded by the additional attempt to link voting rights with citizenship to be determined by the ECI. No law, no rule, but Amit Shah's coinage of 'detect, delete and deport', is the SOP. In a true sense, we are heading towards a

sham. The world around us has seen major upheavals. 2025 has witnessed the site of the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza, with all our support from United States. In fact, the attempt was to wipe out Arabs from Gaza. But heathening was the fight-back by the people all over the world, ultimately forcing even the governments who in the past were sympathetic to Zionism, to push for a ceasefire. But violations continue to take place. Unless Netanyahu and his genocidal gang is held accountable for their crimes against humanity, this will persist. Elsewhere, the US is trying to take up fresh adventures, as in Venezuela. But here again, due to growing signs of multi-polarity and assertions of China, US unilateralism is not being as decisive as in the past. Trump's tariff terrorism has failed to secure the kind of dominance that it was aimed for.

The situation has become alarming in neighbouring Bangladesh. There are visible signs of fundamentalist aggression against not just minorities, but all signs of sanity which emerged in the aftermath of the victory of Liberation Struggle in 1971. What comes to the fore is that in India as also in Bangladesh, it is not just exacerbation of fundamentalist and communal forces, but an attempt to completely overhaul national identity to transform secular democracies regressively into religious identity driven sectarian nationhood.

2026 therefore underlines mightier challenges. In Dickensian terms 'it is the winter of despair', but offers to march on to 'the spring of hope'. People and their broadest unity and conscious, vigorous struggles can ensure this change over. Along with this broad-based unity, with clarity for an alternative and the pursuit of that course which will make the unity sustainable. People are the key link in the way all that which needs to be discarded along with 2025, to usher in new hope and happiness for 2026, can be ensured. The call for a nationwide strike by the united platform of trade unions and supported by the SKM on February 12, 2026, to express all out opposition to the labour codes and all other anti-people moves by the government is a concrete opportunity to forge that broadest possible unity which will have the potential to break new ground for such mighty struggles. (IPA Service)

## The New Year and the Burden of unanswered questions

By: Lalit Garg

Another year has quietly entered the pages of history. The year 2025 was not merely a numerical transition on the calendar; it was a profound convergence of events, warnings, achievements, and contradictions that compelled society, politics, and development itself to stand trial before the court of conscience. As we step into a new year, this moment is not meant only for celebration, resolutions, and greetings—it is equally a moment for deep introspection. The real question is not what the new year will offer us, but what the departing year has taught us, and how sincerely we have absorbed those lessons into our lives, policies, and priorities. Every new year arrives bearing the light of fresh hope, yet it is never free from the shadows of the past. Understanding those shadows and learning from them is the true beginning of a meaningful new year.

A glance back at 2025 reveals that progress and crisis moved in parallel, both in India and across the world. On one hand, India strengthened its presence in the digital economy, space science, infrastructure development, and global diplomacy. On the other, unresolved and deepening challenges—such as the Pahalgalam terror attack, environmental disasters, inflation, unemployment, rising costs of education and healthcare, widening social inequality, and political distrust—continued to trouble the nation's conscience. These are unanswered questions, without whose resolution the vision of a "New India" or a "Strong India" remains incomplete. The data and events of the departing year made one truth unmistakably clear: a nation's true condition cannot be measured solely by the glitter of economic statistics. Understanding the realities of everyday life is indispensable. The terror attack in Pahalgalam once again exposed the brutal face of terrorism. However, the success of Operation Sindoor demonstrated that India is no longer merely a victim—it is now a nation capable of decisive and courageous retaliation. This precise and resolute action exposed Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and sent a clear message to the world: India will not compromise on its security, sovereignty, or the lives of its citizens. India's counter-terrorism doctrine—neither reckless provocation nor silent endurance—has become the hallmark of a mature, confident, and capable nation, delivering a firm response to terror patrons across the border. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign engagements and global leadership image further elevated India's international stature. India's role in diplomacy, invest-

ment, technology, and global supply chains has grown stronger, fostering renewed confidence and optimism at home. With stable governance, policy continuity, and strategic global partnerships, India's journey toward becoming the world's third-largest economy no longer appears distant—it seems increasingly attainable. A firm stand against terrorism, the vision of a Naxal-free India, and a self-reliant, innovation-driven economy together have positioned India as a decisive force on the global stage. Yet, the environment emerged as the most urgent warning of 2025. Climate change is no longer confined to scientific reports or international summits; it has become a harsh reality of everyday life. Landslides in the Himalayan regions, record-breaking heatwaves in northern India, suffocating pollution in metropolitan cities, and intensifying cyclones along coastal areas are varied manifestations of a single crisis. Natural disasters across Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala, the Northeast, and other regions revealed a painful truth: the poorest and most vulnerable pay the highest price for ecological recklessness.

When mountains are carved, rivers dammed indiscriminately, and forests destroyed in the blind pursuit of development, devastation becomes inevitable. The new year confronts us with a fundamental question: Is development merely about roads, bridges, tunnels, and skyscrapers, or is it equally about safeguarding life, nature, and the future? Unless environmental balance is placed at the core of development policy, every new year will arrive with fresh disasters in its wake. The lessons of 2025 compel us to recognize that harmony with nature is the only path to sustainable progress.

The crisis of pollution and public health also deepened during the year. Air quality in cities like Delhi-NCR remained in the "severe" category for prolonged periods. These were not just alarming statistics—they represented a looming threat to the health of millions. Water pollution, plastic waste, and chemical effluents engulfed villages and small towns as well. The pressing question remains: are we willing to destroy our own sources of life in the name of economic growth? The new year urges us to recognize that health is not limited to hospitals and medicines—it is rooted in clean air, pure water, and a safe environment.

The education sector, too, exposed harsh realities in 2025. Studying abroad became increasingly expensive, while rising fees in private institutions within the country pushed education beyond the reach of the middle class. The growing commercialization of education is reinforcing the cycle of poverty—children of

the poor are denied education, and lack of education pushes them back into poverty. The sight of children working at bus terminals, railway stations, intersections, and factories raises serious questions about development claims. The new year forces us to ask: is education a fundamental right or a privileged commodity? If education is truly the foundation of nation-building, why has it been reduced to a market product?

Healthcare remained one of the gravest concerns for ordinary citizens in 2025. Despite government schemes and assurances, serious illness continues to result in financial ruin. Arbitrary practices by private hospitals, costly diagnostic tests, and rising medicine prices raise an unsettling question: has life itself become a tradable commodity? The new year demands that healthcare be redefined as a public service rather than a profit-driven enterprise. Experiences from pandemics and disasters clearly demonstrate that a robust public health system is a nation's real strength. Corruption and political mistrust also dominated public discourse throughout the year. Allegations, counter-allegations, scam revelations, and political hostility weakened public faith in democratic institutions. Democracy is not merely about winning elections—it is an ongoing test of trust, transparency, and accountability. When people feel that policies serve select interests rather than the public good, disillusionment and resentment grow. The new year raises a critical question: will politics become a vehicle for service, or will it remain merely a means to power?

The year 2025 taught us that challenges are not just obstacles—they shape the direction of the future. Environmental crises call us toward sustainable development; struggles in education and healthcare remind us of human values; poverty and corruption underline the urgency of social justice. The journey into the new year can only progress on the strength of these lessons. If development becomes sensitive to nature, if education and healthcare are treated as pillars of public welfare, if ethics guide politics and transparency strengthen governance, and if poverty eradication is reflected not just in statistics but in lived realities—only then will welcoming the new year be truly meaningful. A new year does not offer magical solutions; it merely presents an opportunity—to confront unanswered questions with honesty and courage. If the experiences of 2025 inspire us to ask the right questions in 2026, the answers will inevitably carve their own path. That may well be the truest aspiration, commitment, and greatest achievement of the new year.

## VB-G RAM G act has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers Parliamentary panel discusses MGNREGA shortcomings, ways to adopt VB-G RAM G Act smoothly

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** A parliamentary panel on Monday examined various aspects of the UPA-era rural job guarantee law MGNREGA, which has now been replaced by the Narendra Modi government's VB-G RAM G Act, and how to go about with it in the next six months for a smooth transition to the new legislation.

Sources said most members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj were concerned about how the transition would take place in the next six months when the government shifts work policies from MGNREGA to the VB-G RAM G Act, how the payments would be made to beneficiaries during this period and how additional budgetary support would be arranged.

No member opposed the VB-G RAM G Act during the meeting, and several of them expressed concern that the enrolment under the old law was only around 50 per cent in many states, sources said.

Members also said it would take at least six months to implement the VB-G RAM G Act, as it will be implemented only after the rules are framed.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed by the Congress-led UPA in 2005. The VB-G RAM G Bill was passed in Parliament during the recently concluded Winter Session amid vociferous protests by the opposition. The new act has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers.

The parliamentary panel meeting on Mon-



day also discussed what the new system and framework would look like.

According to sources, some opposition members admitted that there were certain shortcomings in the MGNREGA for which the committee had earlier made certain recommendations.

Some opposition members said they had earlier suggested extending the number of working days from 100 to 150.

They also demanded that whatever recommendations were made by the committee earlier should be considered while preparing the rules for the VB-G RAM G Act, according to sources.

BJP MPs said the new legislation was needed since the existing law could not address the current problems of villages and basic infrastructure development in rural areas.

Sources said that during the meeting, some MPs spoke about the reasons for bringing the VB-G RAM G Act and opined that MGNREGA was brought with the twin objectives of providing rural jobs and developing the rural infrastructure.

But those objectives were not achieved, and that is why the VB-G RAM G Act was brought by the government, sources said. BJP members also said there were exam-

ples from several states where even 50 per cent of the MGNREGA funds could not be utilised by the governments there.

Chairman of the committee and Congress leader Saptagiri Ulaka said the members discussed various aspects of MGNREGA threadbare and how to go about in the next six months, as the new law will be implemented only when the rules are framed.

He said that the members intend to discuss MGNREGA in the budget session too, and for all these, there was a briefing session from the Ministry of Rural Development.

"We had a good discussion. The new law has been passed, but new rules have to be issued. All states will also have to come on board. Today's meeting was on how to go about a smooth transition to the VB-G RAM G Act. Some members have given some suggestions too. We will give a report, then everything will be clear before you," he told reporters after the meeting.

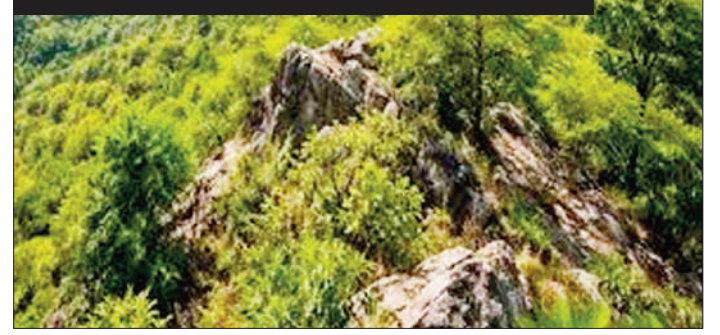
During the meeting, the secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development gave a presentation on the MGNREGA.

According to the presentation, sources said, except for Delhi and Chandigarh, MGNREGA is implemented in 741 districts, covering 2.69 lakh gram panchayats with 12.15 crore active workers.

Of these, women constitute 57 per cent, SC/ST workers 36 per cent, and 4.81 lakh persons with disabilities have also been provided employment. At present, more than 15 crore families with 26 crore beneficiaries are covered under the scheme, sources said. (PTI)

## SC keeps in abeyance its Nov 20 directions, says further probe needed to prevent regulatory gaps

### Aravalli definition row



**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Amid the

outcry over the new definition of Aravallis, the Supreme Court on Monday kept in abeyance its November 20 directions that accepted a uniform definition of these hills and ranges, saying there is a need to resolve "critical ambiguities" including whether the 100-metre elevation and the 500-metre gap between hills criteria will strip significant portion of the range of environment protection.

Proposing to constitute a high-powered expert panel, a vacation bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said it seemed prima facie that the earlier report of a committee and the verdict had "omitted to expressly clarify certain critical issues" and there is a "dire need to further probe" to prevent any regulatory gaps that might undermine the ecological integrity of the Aravalli region.

It also directed that as set out in the order dated May 9, 2024, until further orders, no permission shall be granted for mining in the 'Aravalli Hills and Ranges', as defined in the August 25, 2010, FSI report, without its prior permission.

"There has been a significant outcry among environmentalists, who have expressed profound concern about the potential for misinterpretation and improper implementation of the newly adopted definition and this court's directions," the bench, also comprising Justices J K Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih, said.

It said this public dissent and criticism appear to stem from perceived ambiguity and lack of clarity in certain terms and directives issued by the court.

"Consequently, there is a dire need to further probe and clarify to

prevent any regulatory gaps that might undermine the ecological integrity of the Aravalli region," the bench said in its order passed in a suo motu matter titled 'In Re: Definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges and Ancillary Issues'.

The top court had on November 20 accepted a uniform definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges and banned the grant of fresh mining leases inside its areas spanning Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat until experts' reports are out.

It had accepted the recommendations of a committee of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on the definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges to protect the world's oldest mountain system.

The committee had recommended that "Aravalli Hill" be defined as any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief, and an "Aravalli Range" will be a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other.

In its order passed on Monday, the bench noted the verdict has invited applications and pleas before it challenging the findings of the committee and the subsequent approval accorded by the court, while also seeking clarification on certain directions.

"While we have no scientific reasons justifying any ex-facie acceptance of the same, nor any cogent evidence or expert testimony to substantiate these individual contentions, nevertheless, it seems prima facie that both the committee's report and the judgment of this court have omitted to expressly clarify certain critical issues," it noted. (PTI)

## Killing of Tripura student in Dehradun a horrific 'hate crime': Rahul Gandhi

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Monday called the killing of a Tripura student in Uttarakhand's Dehradun a "horrific hate crime", as he accused the ruling BJP of "normalising" hate.

Twenty-four-year-old Angel Chakma from Nandannagar in the West Tripura district was attacked by a group of six people when he objected to an alleged racial slur on December 9 in Dehradun. He succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment on December 26.

In a post on X, Gandhi said hate does not appear overnight.

"What happened to Anjel Chakma and his brother Michael in Dehradun is a horrific hate crime," he said.

"Hate doesn't appear overnight. For years now, it is being fed daily -- especially to our youth -- through toxic content and irresponsible narratives. And it's being normalised by the hate-spewing leadership of the ruling BJP," he said.

The Leader of Opposition said India is built on respect and unity, not fear and abuse. "We are a country of love and diversity. We must not become a dead society that looks away while fellow Indians are targeted. We must reflect and confront what we are allowing our country to become," he said.

"My thoughts are with the Chakma family and the people of Tripura and Northeast. We are proud to call you our fellow Indian brothers and sisters," Gandhi added.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said his Uttarakhand counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhami has assured him that all persons responsible for the murder will be arrested. (PTI)

## Won't rest until he is hanged: Unnao rape survivor after SC's order on Sengar's life sentence

**UNNAO/NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** "I will not rest until he is hanged," said the Unnao rape survivor on Monday as she expressed satisfaction over the Supreme Court staying the Delhi High Court order suspending the convict Kuldeep Sengar's life sentence.

Hearing a plea filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which had challenged the high court's decision, the apex court also issued a notice to Sengar, directing him to file his response.

"I am very happy with this decision. I have got justice from the Supreme Court. I have been raising my voice for justice from the very beginning," the survivor told PTI over phone from Delhi.

"I do not make any allegations

against any court. I have faith in all courts, but the Supreme Court has given me justice and will continue to do so," she said.

She further said, "I will not rest until he is hanged. I will keep fighting. Only then will my family and I get justice. We receive threats even today."

Family members also expressed relief over the intervention by the Supreme Court, saying their faith in the justice system had been restored.

The survivor's sister said she had complete faith that the court would ensure the accused is not released.

"He is a monster. First, he raped my sister and later destroyed the entire family. I am satisfied today. His bail should remain rejected," she

said, adding that the family would continue to pursue the case.

The survivor's mother thanked the apex court for the relief and told reporters that those who killed her husband should receive the death sentence.

Reacting to the order the activist Yogita Bhayana said the order had wider implications. "This is not a fight of one victim alone, but of all girls. The Supreme Court itself noted that while stays are not usually granted, this case stands on a different footing," she said.

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the Delhi High Court order that had suspended Sengar's life sentence and granted him bail in the 2017 Unnao rape case.

A vacation bench comprising

Chief Justice Surya Kant, and Justices J K Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih observed that the matter required consideration. It said Sengar shall not be released from custody following the high court's December 23 order.

On December 23, the Delhi High Court suspended the jail term of Sengar, a former legislator from Unnao who was serving life imprisonment in the case, saying he had already served seven years and five months in prison.

His sentence was suspended by the high court till the pendency of his appeal challenging his conviction and sentence in the rape case. He has challenged a December 2019 trial court verdict in the case. (PTI)

## Defence ministry clears procurement of military hardware worth ₹ 79,000 cr

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The defence ministry on Monday approved procurement of long range rockets, missiles, radar systems and military platforms worth ₹ 79,000 crore to bolster the military's combat prowess.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, green-lighted the proposals.

The DAC approved procurement of loiter munition systems for the Army's artillery regiments.

It also cleared acquisition of low level lightweight radars, long-range guided rocket ammunition for Pinaka rocket system and integrated drone detection and interdiction system (Mk-II) for the Indian Army, the defence ministry said.

Loiter munition will be used for precision strike of tactical targets, whereas low level lightweight radars will detect and

track small size, low flying unmanned aerial systems, it said. It said long range guided rockets are being procured to enhance the range and accuracy of Pinaka rocket systems for effective engagement of high value targets.

Integrated drone detection and interdiction system (Mk-II) with enhanced range will protect the vital assets of the Indian Army in tactical battle area and hinterland.

For the Indian Navy, approval was accorded for procurement of high frequency software defined radios (HF SDR) Manpack and for leasing high altitude long range (HAL) remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS).

The unspecified number of RPAS is being taken on lease for continuous intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance over the Indian Ocean region, the ministry said. (PTI)



## INSV Kaundinya recreation of 5th century ship

### Design inspired by painting from Ajanta Caves

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Traditionally-built stitched ship INSV Kaundinya, which on Monday embarked on her maiden overseas voyage, from Gujarat to Oman, is a recreation of a fifth-century vessel, and inspired by a painting from the ancient Ajanta Caves.

Named after the legendary mariner Kaundinya, who is believed to have sailed from India to Southeast Asia in ancient times, the ship embodies India's historic role as a maritime nation.

Its design and construction had posed "unique technical challenges," according to officials.

The Indian Navy had formally inducted and named the vessel as Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Kaundinya at a ceremonial event held at the Karwar naval base on May 21, in the presence of Union Minister of Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.

On Monday, the ship set off on her maiden overseas voyage, from Gujarat's Porbandar to Oman.

"The voyage retraces ancient maritime routes that once connected the western coast of India with Oman, facilitating trade, cultural exchange, and sustained civilisational interactions across the Indian Ocean," a Navy spokesperson said.



The project of building a stitched ship with an ancient technique was initiated through a tripartite agreement signed in July 2023 between the Ministry of Culture, the Indian Navy, and Hodi Innovations, with funding from the Ministry of Culture.

"The stitched ship is a recreation of a 5th century CE ship, inspired by a painting from the Ajanta Caves," the Navy official said.

Following the keel laying in September 2023, the vessel's construction was undertaken using a traditional method of stitching by a team of skilled artisans from Kerala, led by master shipwright Babu Sankaran.

Over several months, the team painstakingly stitched wooden planks on the ship's hull using coir rope, coconut fibre and natural resin.

The ship was launched in February 2025 at Karwar in Karnataka.

After years of construction and other preparations, on December 29,

it was flagged off by Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, Vice Admiral, Krishna Swaminathan, in the presence of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to India, Issa Saleh Al Shibani.

"Wonderful to see that INSV Kaundinya is embarking on her maiden voyage from Porbandar to Muscat, Oman. Built using the ancient Indian stitched-ship technique, this ship highlights India's rich maritime traditions. I congratulate the designers, artisans, shipbuilders and the Indian Navy for their dedicated efforts in bringing this unique vessel to life. My best wishes to the crew for a safe and memorable journey, as they retrace our historic links with the Gulf region and beyond. @INSVKaundinya," Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X.

He also shared some photos of the ship and an image of an old mural depicting an ancient ship.

The ship serves as a tangible symbol of India's long-standing traditions of maritime exploration, trade, and cultural exchange, and its induction and naming marks a culmination of an "extraordinary project" that celebrates India's rich shipbuilding heritage, officials said.

The vessel incorporates several culturally significant features, and will be based at Karwar in Karnataka.

"Her sails display motifs of the Gandaberunda and the Sun, her bow

bears a sculpted Simha Yali, and a symbolic Harappan style stone anchor adorns her deck, each element evoking the rich maritime traditions of ancient India," a senior official earlier said.

Unlike any modern vessel, the stitched ship is equipped with square sails and steering oars, which are "entirely alien to modern-day ships". The hull geometry, rigging, and sails had to be reimagined and tested from first principles, according to the Navy.

The Navy has "overseen the entire spectrum" of implementation of this project, including concept development, design, technical validation and construction in collaboration with Hodi Innovations and traditional artisans.

"With no surviving blueprints or physical remnants, the design had to be extrapolated from a two-dimensional artistic iconography. The project demanded a unique interdisciplinary approach, combining archaeological interpretation, naval architecture, hydrodynamic testing and traditional craftsmanship," the official said.

The vessel not only reaffirms India's rich shipbuilding legacy, but also reflects the Navy's commitment to preserving and operationalising the living traditions of India's maritime heritage, the Navy said.

The project was approved by the National Implementation Committee, chaired by the Union home minister, as a commemoration project. (PTI)

No. B/KE/Confiscated Vehicle/NIT/ 7017

### NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Divisional Forest Officer, Kamrup East Division, Basistha, Guwahati invites bid for from eligible bidder for the following Confiscated Vehicle (2nd Sale). Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. www.assamforestonline.in w.e.f. 29/12/2025.

Sl. No.	Type of vehicle	Registration No.	Reserve Price (Rs.)
1	Tata ACE Van	AS-01-FC-2908	1,45,053.00

NOTE:

- The Contractors/Bidders must be registered with [www.assamforestonline.in](http://www.assamforestonline.in) for participating in the bidding process. The Bidding document may be downloaded through the portal [www.assamforestonline.in](http://www.assamforestonline.in) by using their own user ID.
- Online submission of Bid is mandatory. Manual submission of bid will not be considered. Bidders are to be submitting the required papers for e-auction by scanning and uploading the same.
- The bidder shall submit the cost of the tender processing fee and the earnest money deposit through online in the portal.

Sd/-

DIPR /C/HLT/262/30-Dec-25

Divisional Forest Officer  
Kamrup East Division, Basistha  
Guwahati-29

GOVT OF ASSAM  
DIRECTORATE-CUM-ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER  
PWD(R&B), HILLS, ASSAM,  
DIPHU.  
No. ACEH/CS/AAP/75/2025-26/6, Dated. 26/12/2025.  
PRESS NOTICE (RE-TENDER)  
Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Item Rates bids from registered contractors of Class-1 (A&B) category for the work "Construction of ICBP Road from Diphu Matipung via Mensing Ronghang to Hemari Bey under AAP (KAAC) for the year 2025-26" Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 30/12/2025 to 09/01/2026. The Bidders must be registered with the E-Tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.  
Sd/-  
Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer,  
P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.  
Memo No. ACEH/CS/AAP/75/2025-26/6-(A), Dated.26/12/2025.

GOVT OF ASSAM  
DIRECTORATE-CUM-ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER  
PWD(R&B), HILLS, ASSAM,  
DIPHU.  
No. ACEH/CS/AAP/75/2025-26/5, Date.26.12.2025.  
Cancellation Notice  
It is for information to all concerned that the Bid for "Construction of ICBP Road from Diphu Matipung via Mensing Ronghang to Hemari Bey under AAP (KAAC) for the year 2025-26" under Diphu Road Division, published vide Press Notice Inviting No.ACEH/CS/AAP/75/2025-26/3, Dated.27/11/2025 is hereby cancelled due to non received of required no of bid and Re-tender notice will be floated for the same shortly.  
Sd/-  
Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer,  
P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.  
Memo NOACEH/CS/AAP/75/2025-26/5-(A), Date 26/12/2025.

## Tripura student murder

## Pradyot announces ₹ 10 lakh reward for info on prime accused

AGARTALA, Dec 29: Tipra Motha supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Monday announced a ₹ 10 lakh cash reward on information that will lead to the arrest of the main accused in the Anjel Chakma murder case.

Twenty-four-year-old Anjel Chakma, an MBA student, from Nandannagar in West Tripura district was attacked by a group of six people when he objected to a racial slur at Dehradun on December 9, and he succumbed to his injuries on December 26.

Five out of six accused persons have already been arrested, while the mastermind is absconding, the police said.

Debbarma's announcement came days after the Uttarakhand Police declared a ₹ 25,000 cash reward on information that will facilitate the



arrest of the main accused in the murder case.

"I heard that the Uttarakhand government has declared ₹ 25,000 on information leading to the arrest of the mastermind in the Anjel Chakma murder case. Is this the price for arresting the mastermind in the killing of Anjel Chakma, a final

year student of MBA? I declare ₹ 10 lakh to one who provides clues leading to the arrest of the person who had murdered Anjel Chakma. The amount will be paid from my own pocket. Don't make fun of us", Debbarma said in a video post. Meanwhile, Tipra Motha Party (TMP)-run Tripura Tribal

Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) on Monday announced a compensation of ₹ 3 lakh to the family members of the deceased.

"As recommended by Bubagra (king) Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, chairman, ADC Administrative Reforms Committee (AARC), has decided to grant a financial compensation of ₹ 3 lakh to the family of late Anjel Chakma to support his final rites," TTAADC Chief Executive Member (CEM) Purma Chandra Jamatia wrote on Facebook.

This reflects "solidarity, compassion, and a sense of collective responsibility during this moment of profound grief", he said.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved family," he added. (PTI)

## AICSU seeks CBI probe, trial outside Uttarakhand in Anjel Chakma murder case

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 29: The All India Chakma Students' Union (AICSU) has demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe and transfer of trial outside Uttarakhand, preferably to Delhi, in connection with the murder of Anjel Chakma, an MBA student from Tripura, alleging serious lapses by the police and hospital authorities.

In a representation addressed to the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, AICSU stated that the family of the deceased has lost faith in the State police due to procedural failures, including a three-day delay in registration of the FIR despite the incident occurring on December 9. The organisation alleged that Selakui Police Station initially refused to register the complaint, and the FIR was lodged only on December 12 after sustained pressure from AICSU.

The students' body further claimed that appropriate sections of law were not invoked at the initial stage and alleged attempts by senior police officials to dilute the incident by projecting it as a "fight", while ignoring elements of racial abuse.

AICSU also raised concerns over alleged lapses by the hospital authorities, stating that Anjel Chakma was admitted in critical condition to Graphic Era Hospital as a medico-legal case, yet the police were not immediately informed, pointing to possible institutional negligence and lack of transparency during treatment.

Citing safety concerns, the organisation said family members and a key eyewitness do not feel secure in Uttarakhand, necessitating transfer of the trial to ensure a fair and impartial judicial process.

Among its demands, AICSU called for a CBI investigation into police conduct, FIR delay and possible medical negligence, immediate arrest of the absconding accused, invocation of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, action against police officials allegedly involved in dereliction of duty, compensation of ₹ 2 crore to the victim's family, and the creation of a dedicated police cell in Uttarakhand for the safety of people from the Northeast, on the lines of Delhi Police's SPUNER unit.

AICSU president Drishyamuni Chakma said the organisation would continue to pursue the matter through all legal and constitutional means to ensure justice for Anjel Chakma.

## NCORD meeting reviews anti-drug measures in Upper Siang district



HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, Dec 29: A district-level meeting of the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD), organised by the District Police, was held on Monday at the DC Office Conference Hall here to review actions taken by various stakeholders to combat drug-related activities in the district.

The meeting was chaired by SDO (HQ) Toni Mitkong, who stressed the need for continuous monitoring and strict surveillance to prevent the spread of drug abuse and trafficking. Expressing concern over network shadow areas between Padu and Silli villages, he directed the SDO (Telecom) to expedite the operationalisation of mobile network connectivity, stating that the lack of connectivity was hampering effective monitoring of drug-related cases and adversely affecting the general public.

During the deliberations, DAO Dana Moyong outlined steps taken by the Agriculture Department as part of anti-drug initiatives. A representative of the ABK also briefed the meeting on awareness programmes and action plans being implemented by the ABK Upper Siang unit to curb drug abuse. At the outset, DySP Gocham Sakter welcomed the participants and highlighted the objectives of the meeting. All district-level NCORD members, special invitees and officials of the District Police attended the meeting.

## BJP Arunachal marks Atal Smriti Varsh with assembly sammelan in Itanagar

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 29: The Arunachal Pradesh unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday concluded Atal Smriti Varsh with an Assembly Sammelan held at the DK Convention Hall here, commemorating the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

As part of Atal Smriti Varsh, the party organised a series of programmes across the State, including poetry recitations, painting and rangoli competitions, and other cultural activities highlighting the life, vision and legacy of the former Prime Minister.

The concluding Assembly Sammelan was attended by Nagaland Tourism, Higher and Technical Education Minister Temjen Inna Along as the chief guest.

Other dignitaries present included BJP Arunachal Pradesh vice-president and State convenor for Atal Smriti Varsh Dunggoli Libang, State general secretary Tadar Niglar, ministers Biyu-

ram Wahge, Ojing Tasing and Nyato Dukam, and BJP national executive member Arvind Damani.

Prof (Dr) Taro Sindik, assistant professor in the Department of Hindi at Dera Natung Government College, delivered a presentation on Vajpayee's life, leadership and contributions to nation-building, underscoring his lasting influence on India's democratic and developmental journey.

The programme saw participation from MLAs, corporators, senior party leaders, karyakartas and supporters.

A felicitation ceremony was also held to honour senior party workers who had closely worked with Vajpayee.

Those felicitated included Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju, along with senior leaders and karyakartas of the State.

In his keynote address, Along conveyed greetings to the people of Arunachal Pradesh on behalf of BJP Nagaland and the Naga community.

He highlighted Vajpayee's vision for Arunachal Pradesh, particularly his foresight on the State's hydroelectric potential, and said the former Prime Minister had laid a strong foundation for hydropower development in the region.

Along also recalled that major initiatives for the North East, including strengthening of the North Eastern Council and the creation of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), were undertaken during Vajpayee's tenure, enabling greater flow of development funds to the region.

He urged party workers to imbibe Vajpayee's inclusive and principled leadership style while working towards a Viksit Bharat, and emphasised the need to safeguard indigenous rights through appropriate legislation.

He congratulated the BJP Arunachal Pradesh unit on the successful observance of Atal Smriti Varsh and called for continued efforts to uphold the spirit of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat".

## SEC briefs Arunachal Governor on Panchayat, civic polls

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 29: The State Election Commissioner (SEC) of Arunachal Pradesh, Rinchin Tashi, called on the Governor, KT Parnaik, at Lok Bhavan here on Monday and briefed him on the conduct of the recently concluded Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Body elections in the State.

Congratulating the State Election Commission, the Governor lauded the SEC and his team for the smooth and successful conduct of the elections.

He also commended the district administrations and the State Police for their co-operation and commitment throughout the

electoral process.

The Governor said the peaceful and orderly conduct of the polls reflected meticulous planning, seamless coordination and efficient execution by all stakeholders.

He observed that beyond ensuring smooth polling, the election process had strengthened democracy at the grassroots by empowering citizens to actively participate in governance through transparency and inclusiveness.

He further stated that the free and fair conduct of the elections reaffirmed public trust in democratic institutions and underscored the State's commitment to uphold-

ing the will of the people without fear or favour.

The Governor also appreciated the robust and well-coordinated security arrangements, noting that constant vigilance and professionalism by the security forces ensured a safe and confidence-inspiring environment for voters.

According to official figures, the Panchayat elections recorded a voter turnout of 74.92 per cent across the State.

In the municipal polls, Itanagar registered a turnout of 51.39 per cent, while Pasighat recorded a higher participation rate of 60.95 per cent.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER::  
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT:: DIPHU  
(DEVELOPMENT BRANCH)

No.KA/DEV-808/FRA-Cell/2025/10

Dated, Diphu 24/12/2025.

## ADVERTISEMENT

In pursuance of Letter No. ECF: 280499/ Dated Dispur, the 4th October, 2025 received from the Secretary to the Department of Tribal Affairs (Plain), Government of Assam, Dispur, Ghy-06, Applications are hereby invited from eligible candidates who are citizens of India as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India and have a valid Employment Exchange Card registered in Assam in respect of the under mentioned posts on Contractual engagement in the District FRA Cell, Karbi Anglong.

1. Post Details and No. of Post(s):-

Sl. No.	Name of Post(s)	No. of Post(s)
1	Co-ordinator (FRA)	01 (Unreserved)
2	MIS/ Program (FRA)/ Associate FRA	01 (Unreserved)

2. Remuneration:-

Sl. No.	Designation	Average Unit Cost per Month	Indicative Minimum Qualifications/Stipulations etc.
1.	Co-Ordinator (FRA)	35000/-	a. Master's in Social Science/ Social Work. b. Knowledge of basic IT/ Computer Applications. c. Experience: Minimum 5 years domain experience in any area of Rural Development & Tribal Welfare will be preferred. d. Age: Not more than 35 years.
2.	MIS/ Program (FRA)/ Associate FRA	25000/-	a. B.Sc./BA in Statistics/ Mathematics/ Economics/Social Science from reputed institution. b. Minimum a Diploma in Information Technology (IT)/ Computer Applications. c. Experience: Minimum 2 years domain experience in the area of large-scale data processing and management. d. Age: Not more than 35 years.

3. Eligibility Criteria:-

The candidate must be an Indian Citizen as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India and have a valid Employment Exchange Card registered in Assam.

4. Education Qualifications:-

A. For Co-ordinator (FRA):

i. Masters in Social Science/ Social Work.

ii. Knowledge of basic IT/ Computer Applications.

iii. Experience: Minimum 5 years domain experience in any area of Rural Development & Tribal Welfare will be preferred.

B. For MIS/ Program (FRA)/ Associate FRA:

i. B.Sc./BA in Statistics/Mathematics/Economics/ Social Science from reputed institution.

ii. Minimum a Diploma in Information Technology (IT)/ Computer Applications.

iii. Experience: Minimum 2 years domain experience in the area of large-scale data processing and management.

5. Age Limit:-

The candidates should not be more than 35 (Thirty-Five) years of age on the day of Application.

6. Last Date and Mode of Application:-

Duly filled application forms in Standard Form (Assam Gazette-IX) along with copies of Employment Exchange Registration Certificate and all necessary testimonials related to Identity of the Candidate, Educational Qualification from HSLC to the highest qualification and experience etc. should reach the Office of the District Commissioner, Karbi Anglong, Diphu, 782460, Assam within 15 (Fifteen) days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- The engagement will be purely temporary in nature on contractual basis.
- Period of the programme is 2 (Two) years only. The Selected candidates will be engaged for a period of 11 (Eleven) months and after completion of 11 months, their engagement will be renewed to another 11 months subject to the satisfaction of the authority.
- The selection procedure will be notified later on followed by issuing corrigendum/ addendum, if required.
- The Committee will decide the provision for selection in respect of the post(s) considering the number of applications received for the advertised post(s).
- The candidates before applying for the post(s) should ensure that they fulfill all the eligibility conditions. Their admission at all stages of selection in which they are admitted by the Committee will be purely provisional. If on verification at any time before or after the Screening Test/ Interview, it is found that they do not fulfill any of the eligibility conditions; their candidature for the post(s) will be cancelled.
- No TA/DA will be admissible for appearing in the Screening Test/ Interview.
- The Committee reserves the right to reject any application without showing any reason.
- Canvassing in any form shall lead to disqualification.

Sd/-

District commissioner,  
Karbi Anglong, Diphu

Dated Diphu, 26/12/2025.

Memo. No. KA/DEV-808/FRA-Cell/2025/ 10

No. B/KWD/Notice/ 3052

## NOTICE

The following vehicles have been seized by respective Ranges under this Division for violation under Section 49 (1) of A.F.R. Act 1891 (Amendment Act 1995, Vol. VII) section 34, 40 and other relevant section of AFR Act 1891 as unclaimed. Therefore vide this notice all the owners of the following vehicles are hereby directed to claim the vehicles at the O/o the undersigned within 7 (seven) days from the publication of this notice without fail. Otherwise the vehicles will be confiscated by the Govt. of Assam as per Rule.

SL No.	Name of Range	Date of seizure	Vehicle Registration No.	Chassis No.	Engine No.	Type of vehicle
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Loharghat Range	20-05-2025	AS-01-DC-4636	-	-	TATA YODHA DI
2.	Loharghat Range	04-05-2025	AS-01-CC-3377	-	-	709 Truck
3.	Loharghat Range	11-06-2025	-	TATA25240113808	-	709 Truck
4.	Loharghat Range	07-06-2025	AS-01-U-7566	-	-	TATA DI
5.	Loharghat Range	12-09-2025	NL-02-Q-0240	-	-	SHAKTIMAN Truck
6.	Loharghat Range	07-11-2025	-	253401150324	-	709 Truck
7.	Loharghat Range	11-04-2025	AS-25-ER-5238	-	-	E-Rickshaw
8.	Loharghat Range	11-04-2025	AS-01-ER-1667	-	-	E-Rickshaw
9.	Loharghat Range	09-09-2025	AS-01-DD-1662	-	-	TATA DI
10.	Protection Squad Range	09-09-2025	-	-	-	TATA TURBO 709
11.	Bondapara Range	14-08-2025	-	*MAT478012BQF18108*	-	TATA DI

Sd/-  
Authorized Officer cum  
Divisional Forest Officer.  
Kamrup West Division,  
Bamunigaon.

DIPR /D/HLT/261/30-Dec-25

# The one time golf's greats can relate to him

**NEW YORK, Dec 29:** Talk to any golfer who played against Tiger Woods and there is sure to be at least one story about one shot so sublime they were certain it could not be hit by them or anyone else.

He was just different. Better. The 2-iron Woods hit into the par-5 10th hole at the TPC Sugarloaf led Stewart Cink to say, "This is a skill set I don't have." Padraig Harrington once saw Woods hit an 8-iron so majestic at Firestone that it got in his head and led to the Irishman making triple bogey.

Nick Price played the opening two rounds with Woods at St. Andrews in the 2000 British Open and felt the tournament already was over. Mark O'Meara played a practice round with him at Pebble Beach before the 2000 U.S. Open and told his wife before the championship started, "Tiger is going to win. And not only is he going to win, he's going to blow away the field." Woods won by 15.

For all those years, so many greats in the game could never relate to Woods. And now, finally, they can.

Not even Woods can beat time. He turns 50 on Tuesday.

It's a milestone for anyone, but it's different in

golf because the sport can be played well after the age when athletes have long retired in other sports. Phil Mickelson won a major at 50. Jack Nicklaus made an early Sunday charge at the Masters when he was 58.

With Woods, it's complicated. He now is eligible for the 50-and-older PGA Tour Champions. He also has had more surgeries than the 15 majors he won. This is the first year he didn't play a single tournament, the result of a ruptured Achilles tendon in March and a seventh back surgery in September.

"I'm probably going to play 25 events on both tours and I think that should cover most of the year, right?" Woods quipped in the Bahamas when asked about turning 50.

He won the U.S. Open just eight days before reconstructive surgery on his left knee. He won the Masters two years after surgery to fuse his lower back. But he hasn't been the same since that 2021 car crash in Los Angeles. Woods has played 11 times the last five seasons, finished only four of



**Woods turns 50**

those tournaments and hasn't been closer than 16 shots to the winner.

"Come back to what point?" Woods said. "I'd like to come back to just playing golf again."

And so this celebration is more about looking back than forward.

Ernie Els was most prescient in 2000 at Kapalua when he was on the losing end again — no one finished second to Woods more than the Big Easy. They matched eagles on the 18th in regulation, birdies on the 18th in a playoff and Woods got him with a 40-foot birdie putt on the second extra hole.

Vintage Tiger.

"I think he's a legend in the making," Els said that day. "He's 24. He's probably going to be bigger than Elvis when he gets into his 40s."

That's up for debate, of course. Undeniable is the impact Woods has left on golf.

Popularity soared and prize money skyrocketed. Woods made golf look different and he made it cool. And perhaps his greatest legacy is he unwittingly trained a generation of players who wanted to be like him. Scottie Scheffler said nothing inspired him more than watching the intensity of Woods when he was out of contention at the 2020 Masters. Woods made a 10 on the 12th hole and followed with five birdies over his last six holes. He tied for 38th. "Tiger was just different in the way he approached each shot. It was like the last shot he was ever going to hit," Scheffler said. It was the only time they played together. Scheffler now is coming up on three years at No. 1 in the world, the longest stretch since Woods.

But it started with that skill set unlike any other.

"He's the only guy I've ever known who continually exceeded expectations," Tom Lehman said. "No matter how much you heaped on him, he found

a way to exceed them."

Lehman recalls one moment at the Memorial on the 17th hole, a green so rock-hard it felt impossible to get it close. Lehman hit 5-iron as high and far as he could and was pleased to see it roll out 25 feet from the cup.

"He hits this shot way up in the air and it was coming down like a parachute," Lehman said. "Lands by the cup and bounces 2 feet and stops. I figure he must have hit a 7-iron. I said, Tiger, what club was that?" He said, That was a little, three-finger 5-iron. He just filleted it in there.

"When I think of him, that's what I think of. Only one guy could hit that shot. And he did it often."

Woods had the career Grand Slam at age 24, the youngest of anyone. He had 50 wins worldwide and 10 majors before he turned 30.

"If he never got injured, he'd have 25 majors and 125 wins," Fred Couples said.

Woods is keeping plenty busy outside the ropes. He was appointed to the PGA Tour policy board without a term limit in 2023 as the tour was in the midst of its battle with Saudi-funded LIV Golf. He now heads up the Future Competition Committee charged with reshaping the tour model. (AP)

## From 'lazy' to title challengers: Aston Villa is the big surprise in then EPL this season

**LONDON, Dec 29:** When Aston Villa was on a five-match winless run to start the Premier League season, the team looked more like a potential relegation candidate than a title contender.

Manager Unai Emery was describing his players as "lazy." Villa's big names — including England internationals Ollie Watkins and Morgan Rogers — were showing no form at all. There were major concerns about the club's lack of activity in the summer transfer window.

How, then, to explain the position Villa finds itself in heading into its final game of 2026?

On the back of 11 straight victories in all competitions, Villa is on its best winning streak in more than a century and is being viewed as a legitimate challenger for the Premier League title.

Indeed, beat first-place Arsenal on Tuesday and Villa will be tied on points with the Gunners at the top of the league halfway through its campaign. They and Manchester City have broken away from the rest and are separated by three points after 18 of 38 games, with Liverpool a further seven points back in fourth place.

And Villa will not be scared of Arsenal. After all, just three weeks ago, Villa scored a last-gasp goal to defeat the leaders 2-1 at home and keep its winning run going. That continued on Saturday with a come-from-behind 2-1 triumph at fifth-place Chelsea, secured thanks to two second-half goals by Watkins.

Much of the team's success is being put down to Emery, the Spanish coach whose savvy tactics, well-



timed substitutions and belief in his players leaves no task insurmountable.

Like when Villa trailed — and was being outclassed — at Stamford Bridge at the weekend, before Watkins' entrance off the bench. Or when Villa twice went behind at West Ham two weeks earlier before winning 3-2. Or when Villa went 2-0 down at Brighton on Dec. 3, only to fight back for a 4-3 victory. Two weeks before that, Villa conceded early at Leeds and rallied for a 2-1 win.

It means Villa goes to Emirates Stadium — where Arsenal hasn't lost in any competition this season and has taken 25 points from a possible 27 in the Premier League — seeking a sixth straight away win.

The match might be regarded as much a test of Arsenal's title creden-

tials as Villa's.

"Not really," Emery, a former Arsenal manager, replied on Saturday when asked if his team can stay in the title race.

No one will believe him three days later if Villa — most recently English champion in 1981 — racks up another win.

**Key matchups**  
City, which is two points behind Arsenal in second place, doesn't play until Thursday when Pep Guardiola's team travels to Sunderland protecting an eight-match winning run.

Liverpool has steadied without being entirely convincing and is looking for a fifth straight win in a home match against Leeds, also on Thursday.

On Tuesday, Chelsea — in fifth place — hosts Bournemouth and

sixth-place Manchester United is at home to last-place Wolverhampton, which is still without a win in what is now the worst ever start to a Premier League campaign after 18 games.

**Players to watch**  
Dominic Calvert-Lewin has netted in each of his last six matches for Leeds, making it the best scoring form of his career as he heads to Anfield to play Liverpool. The England hopeful still has a way to go to match Jamie Vardy's Premier League-record scoring streak of 11 games, from back in 2015 during Leicester's astonishing title-winning campaign.

**Out of action**  
Rayan Cherki has settled quickly in English soccer following his summer move to Manchester City from Lyon and is tied for the most assists in the Premier League with seven, having set up one goal before scoring the winner at Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

**Out of action**  
Arsenal has defensive problems for the match against Villa, with right backs Jurrien Timber and Ben White, left back Riccardo Calafiori and center back Cristian Mosquera all missing the team's 2-1 win over Brighton on Saturday. Midfielder Declan Rice was forced to play as an emergency right back for that game.

Mason Mount was hoping his injury issues were behind him after finally establishing himself in Man United's team. However, Mount came off with an unspecified injury in the 1-0 win over Newcastle on Friday and is being assessed ahead of Wolves' trip to Old Trafford. (AP)

## ICC rates pitch used in fourth Ashes Test unsatisfactory; hands one demerit point to MCG

**DUBAI, Dec 29:** The ICC on Monday rated the pitch used in Melbourne for the fourth Ashes Test between England and Australia as unsatisfactory and handed the venue one demerit point after it was deemed to be "too much in favour of the bowlers" in match referee Jeff Crowe's assessment report.

Twenty wickets fell on the opening day of the Test which England eventually won by four wickets inside two days.

"The pitch at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the venue for the fourth Ashes Test, has been deemed 'unsatisfactory' with the venue handed one demerit point under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process," read a statement from the ICC.

Accumulation of six demerit points leads to a 12-month ban on the venue.

Crowe delivered the verdict, explaining the decision behind the assessment of the pitch.

"The MCG pitch was too much in favour of the bowlers. With 20 wickets falling on the first day, 16 on the second day and no batter ever reaching a half-century, the pitch was 'unsatisfactory' as per the guidelines and the venue gets one demerit point," he stated.

However, all the Indian pitches that hosted international cricket this year were rated from 'very good' to 'satisfactory' in the international body's assessment report. The MCG pitch drew heavy criticism with England captain Ben Stokes saying it wasn't great for the game. Cricket Australia called it bad for business.

The spectators witnessed a total of 36 wickets fall across only 142 overs and no batter managing to reach the 50-run mark. Despite England securing their first Test victory on Australian soil since 2011, Australia have already retained the Ashes by winning the first three Tests to take an unassailable 3-0 lead. The final Test of the series will be played in Sydney, beginning on January 4. (PTI)

## India Open to be held at IG Indoor Stadium, tickets go on sale

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The BWF India Open Super 750 badminton tournament will be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium instead of the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall from January 13 to 18, marking a significant step up in scale and fan experience. With India set to host the prestigious World Championships in August next year, the USD 950,000 event will act as a test venue for the global tournament.

The new venue has a seating capacity of over 8,000, more than double that of the previous venue, and tickets for the India Open will be available exclusively online through the tournament's ticketing partner, Ticmint, priced from ₹400 onwards, with premium seating capped at ₹1,750.

Organised by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) under the aegis of the Badminton World Federation (BWF), the Super 750 event will once again bring the world's finest shuttlers to Indian soil.

Fans can look forward to watching global stars such as An Seoung, PV Sindhu, Kunlavut Vitidsarn, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, and Lakshya Sen alongside India's exciting next generation, including Unnati Hooda and Ayush Shetty, compete across six days of high-intensity action.

"Moving the India Open to the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium this year marks an important step in the tournament's evolution," BAI General Secretary Sanjay Mishra said in a release.

"The larger venue allows us to accommodate significantly more fans while delivering a better on-ground experience for players and spectators alike. (PTI)

## Indian cricket lifted by women's WC, men battle Test turbulence in 2025



**BENGALURU, Dec 29:** The women came of age with a long-awaited World Cup trophy but Indian men's cricket was in turmoil as its white-ball peaks ended up dwarfed by the abysmal low of a home Test series white-wash, making 2025 a year of 'glorious uncertainties' for the country's favourite sport.

The men's side triumphed in the Champions Trophy (ODI) and the Asia Cup (T20), while the women brought home a maiden 50-over World Cup.

But a 0-2 hammering at the hands of South Africa in Tests laid bare India's shortcomings in the red-ball format under feisty head coach Gautam Gambhir, who was his usual combative self in both triumph and debacle.

Why is it important to dwell on a lone glitch when the rest of the year largely produced glitter?

A glance back to the 2024-25 Border-Gavaskar Trophy is essential to find an answer.

The 1-3 series defeat saw the Test careers of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma coming to an end, and India had already lost R Ashwin

to retirement midway through the tour Down Under late last year.

Rohit and Kohli's ODI future remained a talking point through the year even though the two made it clear that they are here to stay by showing up in domestic matches as mandated by the BCCI. Another Test stalwart Cheteshwar Pujara too formally retired from international cricket, leaving a gaping hole in the middle order that is now struggling to find a sheet anchor.

India scaffolded their journey in the new World Test Championship (WTC) cycle (2025-27) on new captain Shubman Gill and a clutch of rising stars and the results so far have been mixed at best.

The beginning was bright.

A rather young India side drew the five-match away series against England 2-2 with Gill leading from front. He made 754 runs at an average of 75.40 with four hundreds, the second highest run-tally for a captain after Don Bradman's 810 in the 1936-37 Ashes.

Riding on the initial wave, India expectedly towelled the West Indies (2-0) at home

and it seemed they had embraced a new era without much fuss.

But then fortunes can swing wildly in the longest format.

**SA debacle**  
A wily South African off-spinner, Simon Harmer, mercilessly cut the chord of India's chandelier of optimism. Better prepared, and more settled Temba Bavuma's Proteas ended a 25-year wait to pull off a Test series against India.

And it did not feel like an isolated act either. Last year, the Indians had caved in similarly against New Zealand spinners at home. The twin failure exposed an obvious chink in the armour against spin.

It was a painful deviation from the past when some of the greatest spinners in the history of cricket had to return with bruised egos and stats from these shores.

But, now, even a set of above average spinners could outfox the Indian batters, as even a meagre target like 124 ended up being unachievable for Indians.

India are already down to sixth in the WTC points table and with tough tours to Sri Lanka and New Zealand lined up in 2026, a final spot in the cycle now appears a vastly distant stop.

If India do not do a big-picture thinking on players and combinations now, the next 12 months too could be heart-breaking in the traditional format.

**Kings of white ball formats**  
But the other side of the revolving door that opens to the glitzy world of white ball cricket remained quite glossy.

India went through the ICC Champions Trophy in Dubai and then later in the Asia Cup at the same venue undefeated, underlining their dominance in ODIs and T20Is at least in this part of the world. Those triumphs also gave Gambhir some bargaining space after a poor run in Test cricket.

If the performances of 2025 can be taken as a yardstick then fans will have a lot to look forward to in 2026 as well, as men's and women's teams are bracing for T20 World

Cups.

**Winds of change**

In one way, the year belonged to women cricketers. The Under-19 side defended its T20 crown in February to set the tone for the rest of the year.

Despite the obvious talent, the women's senior side has always struggled against Australia, New Zealand and England in global tournaments.

But in this edition of the 50-over World Cup, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led India took down Aussies and Kiwis and eventually overcame South Africa in the final to land their maiden ICC title.

The landmark victory has already brought in a fee hike in domestic matches by BCCI and fresh endorsements to players — clear portents to an even brighter future for women's cricket that once struggled for money and attention.

Off the field too, it was a year of change.

Former Delhi cricketer Mithun Manhas replaced Roger Binny as the BCCI president along with some new names.

Several other state associations too witnessed regime change as a few former cricketers like Sourav Ganguly and Venkatesh Prasad returned to administrative roles.

**No handshakes with Pak**  
The turbulent diplomatic ties with Pakistan simply nosedived after the Pahalgam terror attack and a brief military operation after that. The resonance of the upheaval was felt on the cricket field too.

Indian cricketers, on the directions of the BCCI, refused to shake hands with their cross-border opponents during the Asia Cup. They also did not accept the winners' trophy as it was to be presented by a Pakistani, Mohsin Naqvi.

As a result, Naqvi, who heads the Asian Cricket Council, and the Pakistan Cricket Board besides being the internal affairs minister of his country, has locked up the silverware at the ACC office in Dubai. He has also made it clear that he would only hand it to the Indians in a media-covered ceremony. (PTI)

## PM Modi congratulates Humpy, Erigaisi on World Rapid bronze medals



**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday commended Indian chess stalwart Koneru Humpy and young Arjun Erigaisi for winning the bronze medals in the Women's and Open categories of the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championships in Doha, lauding their dedication and hard work.

Humpy, who had entered the event as the defending champion, was done in by the international chess federation's (FIDE) tie-break rules on Sunday despite being the joint leader on 8.5 points with two other Grandmasters after the final round.

"Congratulations to Koneru Humpy, who finished strongly at the 2025 FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship in Doha, securing the Bronze medal in the women's section. Her dedication towards the game is commendable. Best wishes for the endeavours ahead. humpy\_koneru," wrote PM Modi on X.

The Prime Minister often makes it a point to acknowledge the achievements of India's athletes and para athletes, personally meeting many of them across sports disciplines.

PM Modi also appreciated the grit of Erigaisi, who finished behind

world No.1 Magnus Carlsen and Russian GM Vladislav Artemiev to earn a historic bronze.

"Proud of Arjun Erigaisi for winning the Bronze medal in the open section at the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship in Doha. His grit is noteworthy. Wishing him the very best for his future endeavours. @ArjunErigaisi."

The 22-year-old became only the second male player from the country after five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand to finish on the podium at the World Rapids.

Had Humpy won the title on Sunday, it would have made her only the first woman chess player to win three World Rapid crowns — her previous title-winning efforts came in 2019 and 2024.

She would have also become only the second woman player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch back-to-back titles. But it was heartbreak for the 38-year-old player, whose illustrious career has spanned over two decades.

FIDE's tie-breaker rule to rank players with the same score was applied and Humpy fell behind China's Zhu Jiner and Russian Grandmaster Aleksandra Goryachkina, who too were on 8.5 points after the 11th and final round. (PTI)