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CM thanks PM over Centre granting 'Navratna' status to Numaligarh Refinery



GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for reposing faith in the state's oil and gas sector, as the Centre granted 'Navratna' status to Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in Golaghat.

Prior to the upgrade, NRL, a Central Public Sector Enterprise under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, held 'Miniratna' status. NRL will be the 27th 'Navratna' amongst the CPSEs.

"I am grateful to Adaniya Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji for his faith in Assam's oil & gas sector and his guidance in taking it forward. This milestone achievement would not have been possible without the unstinted support of Hon'ble Union Minister Shri @HardeepSPuri ji," Sarma said in a post on X. It is a proud moment for Assam, he asserted.

"Not too long ago, it was on the verge of losing its PSU status, but with the Union Govt's support, we reposed our faith in the enterprise's ability & enhanced our stake in it and within 4 years it has become a Navratna," the CM said in another post.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has granted 'Navratna' status to NRL, the Department of Public Enterprises under the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday.

NRL's majority shareholder is Oil India Ltd with 69.63 per cent holding, while the Assam government has 26 per cent and Engineers India Ltd 4.37 per cent.

The 'Navratna' status will significantly enhance financial and operational autonomy of the company, officials said. (PTI)

Himanta presents appointment letters to 5,815 youths

Govt to create new 5,000 constable posts

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday distributed appointment letters to 5,818 youth selected for Assam Police and other directorates under the Home Department, further pushing the government's tally of transparent, merit-based appointments to 1,41,194.

The ceremony, held at the Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex, marked another major push in the chief minister's political narrative of clean recruitment and systemic reform in Assam Police.

Addressing the gathering, Sarma reiterated that the present government had dismantled the earlier culture of influence-based and cash-driven police recruitment.

He said that merit and hard work—not connections or bribes—now determine govern-



ment jobs, reversing a long-standing pattern that had driven many youths out of the state to work as security guards. He referred to the promise of one lakh government jobs made during the last Assembly election, emphasising that his administration introduced a transparent system that fills vacancies each year across the police, education and health departments.

Dr. Sarma said proposals for four new commando battalions and one forest battalion, along with clean recruitment processes, had sparked a renewed competitive

spirit among rural youth. More aspirants are qualifying for Assam Police, CAPF, BSF and the Army, he said, adding that the government will soon issue advertisements for 5,000 new constable posts. He urged the newly appointed youth—many from low-income backgrounds—to uphold integrity, reject corruption and remain grounded. He also appealed to families receiving Orunodoi benefits to give them up voluntarily if members now hold government jobs.

The Chief Minister highlighted a series of improvements in Assam's law and order scenario over the past five years, attributing the progress to steady recruitment and strengthened policing. Assam Police has been ranked first by the Union Home Ministry in implementing the new criminal laws. He said (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

BTC Winter session concludes

House clears ₹250-crore supplementary budget amid political undercurrents



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 3: The winter session of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Legislative Assembly concluded on Wednesday with the House approving a ₹250-crore supplementary demand, signalling the Hagrama Mohilary-led administration's bid to consolidate financial and administrative control ahead of key political developments.

The Chief Executive Member tabled the supplementary demand, along with ₹13.95 crore from the council's own resources, on the first day of the session.

The department-wise allocation was passed without debate, with Mohilary asserting that the council expected higher SOPD allocations than what the previous Pramod Boro-led government received.

He stated that while some projects initiated by the former council under SOPD would be executed, others may be scrapped based on viability.

Speaking to the media, Education EM Rabiram Narzary outlined a restructuring of BTC's school system based on teacher-student ratios in line with state norms.

He said schools with excess teachers would be rationalised and personnel shifted to understaffed institutions.

Narzary added that several schools and colleges in BTC remain outside the provincialised fold, prompting the council to draft a new act for provincialisa-

tion and consider a separate bill for BTC institutions.

He said discussions on mitigating financial burden would be held with the state government, ABSU, teachers' bodies and the BSS.

On school amalgamation, Narzary said the process was under way, with 984 LP and UP posts already cleared by the Assam government under SIO.

For 982 HS and 901 graduate teacher vacancies, he said appointments would be merit-based.

Political tensions around the proposed inclusion of six communities in the Scheduled Tribe list also surfaced.

UPPL MCLA Kampa Borgoyari noted widespread student agitations, warning that the move could undermine the rights of existing tribal groups.

He said political parties in BTC had not strongly opposed the state government's initiative but anxiety persisted among tribal students over potential dilution of reservations and protections.

Borgoyari said the "tribals have rejected the GoM report," stressing that Assam's tribal stakeholders must be consulted to ensure that existing quotas in education, employment, politics and socio-economic spheres remain intact.

He dismissed allegations of political instigation behind the protests, describing the Kokrajhar incident as an outburst of "emotion and sentiment" among students.

Himanta pins Gaurav Gogoi's poll gimmick slur

Panels to help tea garden workers in process of transferring land rights

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that four-member committees will be constituted in each tea estate by the respective district commissioner to help workers fill out application forms regarding the transfer of land rights to them.

Sarma, on the sidelines of a programme here, said he held a meeting with the district commissioners to discuss the procedure of giving land rights to the tea garden workers within a specified time frame.

After the governor gives his nod to the amendment Bill passed in the assembly, the process of transferring the lands from the tea garden owners to the government will be initiated, following which land rights will be given to the workers,

he said. The district commissioners have been directed to complete this work at the earliest and they are confident of doing it within the timeframe, Sarma said.

The work will be done in a phased manner as there are 800 tea gardens and it is not possible to conduct a survey of all of them in a day, he added.

Regarding state Congress President Gaurav Gogoi's allegation that giving land rights to tea garden workers was an election gimmick, Sarma said that the Opposition can keep claiming that this is a "drama" but the tea garden workers will get the land rights documents.

"They may say that it is a drama, but we will soon invite all to a pub-

lic meeting where the land rights certificates will be handed over to the workers," he said.

The chief minister said that the government was proceeding with a target in mind and, "we will invite him (Gogoi) also to Jorhat when the distribution takes place".

He can then say that this is "drama" before the tea garden workers, who will have their land documents in hand, he added.

"It is just a matter of time when the land rights will be handed over to the workers and one just needs to be patient," he added.

The Assam Assembly passed an amendment Bill in the recently concluded Winter Session which will enable the government to distribute land (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Cleric's call over mosque mic helps save 7 people

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: A mosque cleric's presence of mind helped save the lives of seven people who were trapped in a vehicle that plunged into a pond in Assam's Sribhumi district, an official said.

The driver lost control of the vehicle, which skid off the road and fell into the water body near Barobhari Jame Masjid in Nilambazar area of the district on Tuesday.

On hearing the sound of the vehicle falling into the pond, the cleric, identified as Maulana Abdul Basit, rushed out and on realising he would not be able to save the trapped people alone, made an announcement over the microphone of the mosque, seeking help from the villagers, the official said.

The villagers gathered at the pond and rescued the passengers and the driver from the half-submerged vehicle. (PTI)

CM speaks to Dharmendra Pradhan on TU impasse

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said he has spoken to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the shutdown of Tezpur University by students who are demanding the vice chancellor's removal.

"I spoke with Hon'ble Union Minister of Education Shri @dpradhanbjp today regarding the present situation at Tezpur University", the CM posted on X.

"I urged the Hon'ble Minister to appoint a Pro-Vice Chancellor immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present Vice Chancellor, so that academic stability is maintained", he added.

The CM expressed confidence that the issues would be resolved at the earliest with the

minister's support. Tezpur University has been shut down by students who are demanding the removal of Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh, alleging corruption and financial irregularities.

The students of this central university in Sonitpur district have been protesting since September and have shut down all academic activities on the campus from November 29 for an indefinite period. All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and other activities have also stopped.

The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their support to the agitation, being carried out under the aegis of Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF). (PTI)

Russian President Putin begins 2-day India visit today

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will host a private dinner for Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday, hours after he lands in New Delhi with a broader goal to shore up bilateral strategic and economic partnership, against the backdrop of a sharp downturn in India's relations with the US.

Boosting defence ties, insulating bilateral trade from external pressure and exploring cooperation in small modular reactors are set to be the focus of the summit talks between Modi and Putin on Friday that are expected to be closely watched by Western capitals.

The Russian president is likely to arrive in New Delhi at around 4:30 pm on Thursday, and hours later, Modi will host him for a private dinner in reciprocation of a similar gesture extended to the Indian prime minister by the Russian

leader during his visit to Moscow in July last year.

On Friday, Putin will be accorded a ceremonial welcome before the 23rd India-Russia summit. Modi will also host a working lunch for the Russian leader and his delegation at Hyderabad House, the venue for the summit. Putin will also visit Rajghat in the morning, according to people familiar with the matter.

After the summit, Putin is set to launch the new India channel of Russian state-run broadcaster, following which he will attend a state banquet to be hosted in his honour by President Droupadi Murmu.

The Russian leader is expected to leave India at around 9:30 pm on Friday, wrapping up his nearly 28-hour visit.

In the summit talks, New Delhi is expected to press for addressing the increasing trade deficit caused by India's procurement of large vol-

umes of Russian crude oil.

The Russian president's trip to India is taking place at a time when India-US relations are going through possibly the worst phase in the last two decades after Washington imposed a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for New Delhi's procurement of Russian crude oil.

The impact of American sanctions on India's procurement of Russian crude oil is likely to be discussed at the summit. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday said New Delhi's purchase of crude oil from Russia may decline for "a brief period" in view of Western sanctions, but, at the same time, he said Moscow is taking steps to enhance the supplies.

At the summit, Putin is expected to apprise Modi about the latest US efforts to bring an end to the Ukraine (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Want justice for Zubeen Garg: Gaurav Gogoi in LS

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday sought justice for Zubeen Garg, the popular singer-composer from Assam who died in Singapore in September, leaving his fans distraught.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, Gogoi paid rich tributes to Garg, hailing him as a humanitarian who gave the people of Assam hope in the 1980s and 1990s, when he northeastern state was in the grip of insurgency.

Gogoi, the president of the Congress's Assam unit, also demanded that the government confer the country's highest civilian honour, Bharat Ratna, on Garg.

"Zubeen Garg was a legendary musician. He passed away in Singapore in September when he was due to perform at a function organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, GoI, and the High Com-

mission of India to Singapore," he said.

Gogoi said Garg was an artist, humanitarian, environmentalist, wildlife enthusiast and a voracious reader.

"During the 80s and 90s, he gave the people of Assam hope. In recent years, he gave us moral courage and steel in our spine. He taught us how to overcome personal trauma and not be divided by religion and caste," the Congress leader said.

He said the Assam government has said Garg was killed.

"We want to know how, during a programme organised by the Government of India, a murder was committed on foreign soil," Gogoi said.

Garg died on September 19 when he was on a yacht trip with a group of people in Singapore, a day before he was to perform at a live (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Nagaland Hornbill Festival Day-3 Tourists take part in traditional bamboo stilt race

KOHIMA, Dec 3: Amid the vibrant cultural performances of Nagaland's 18 tribes, foreign and domestic tourists joined in the traditional Naga bamboo stilt race on the third day of the 10-day Hornbill Festival at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama.

Organised by the Department of Youth Resources and Sports, the race was open to visitors from outside the state.

While several attempted to master walking on the stilts, a total of 10 male and 5 female participants completed the race at the Amphitheatre of the picturesque festival venue.

In the female category, Kuenne Katrin from Germany emerged as the winner, followed by Sumi Deka from Assam in second place and Marina from Germany in third. Among the male participants,



Duncan from Australia clinched first place, with Neelav Pathak from Assam and Sharam from Jaipur finishing second and third, respectively.

The winners received cash awards for their efforts.

Guests included Ambassador of Bhutan, Consul General Jigme Thinley Namgyal, Air Marshal Surat Singh, Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Air Command, Indian Air Force, Lt. Gen. Mohit Wadhwa, GOC 101 Area, and Simon Lee Broughton, Founding Editor of Songlines.

Visitors were treated to around three hours of immersive cultural experiences, showcasing the rich traditions, storytelling heritage, and artistic vibrancy of the Naga tribes.

According to Toka E. Tuccumi, Joint Director, Nagaland Tourism, the first two days of the festival recorded a total of 40,518 visitors, including 704 foreign tourists, 10,207 domestic visitors, and 29,607 locals.

The footfall was 22,508 on the opening (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

The day's cultural extravaganza, held under the aegis of the Department of Art and Culture, was hosted by Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton and co-hosted by MLA and Advisor K. Tokugha Sukhalu.

CAG report flags shortfall in enrolment, low claims settlement in tea workers' PF org

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: From close to 40,000 tea estate workers not registered for provident fund facility to low rate of settlement of family pension claims, several issues plaguing the Assam Tea Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (ATEPFO) have been flagged by the CAG in a recent report.

The Comptroller and Auditor General report on the organisation from 2017-18 to 2021-22, which was recently laid in the state assembly, has highlighted areas where the ATEPFO, which was established to ensure social security benefits to workers employed in tea plantations and factories in Assam, is yet to fulfil its mandate.

A total of 1,197 tea estates are registered under the ATEPFO, out of which 624 have fully enrolled workers, it stated.

The report said the total number of eligible workers who can be registered is 12,37,351, of whom 11,98,231 are actually registered.

This implies that 39,120 eligible workers were "deprived of the benefits" of the schemes under ATEPFO as of March 2022, it said.

The CAG report also stated that there was shortfall in deposit of PF contribution of ₹ 315.45 crore at the end of March 2022, involving 334 tea estates. In 83 per cent of these estates, "this delay/non-deposit was to the extent of five years".

This figure excludes the tea estates owned by the Assam Tea Corporation Ltd (ATCL). There are 20,994 employees under 19 tea estates of ATCL registered under ATEPFO.

However, due to acute financial crisis, these tea estates had defaulted

in depositing employees and employers share of PF contribution since 2005, the report said.

The total default amount and statutory interest stood at ₹ 419.07 crore, of which "only ₹ 32.43 crore (8 per cent)" was deposited with ATEPFO till March 2022, and the outstanding PF contribution and interest stood at ₹ 386.64 crore, it said.

The ATEPFO had said in October 2023 that as of September that year, ATCL deposited the entire outstanding PF contribution, and 15 per cent statutory interest due on delayed deposit was to be deposited.

During 2017 to 2022, 87-96 per cent of PF claims and 99 per cent of pension claims were settled by the ATEPFO, CAG said in the report. Clearance of family pension (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Govt drops order for mandatory cybersecurity app on smartphones amid privacy concerns

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: The government on Wednesday withdrew its directive requiring smartphone makers to pre-install a state-run cybersecurity application on all new devices, as it moved to quell rising concerns that the measure could have compromised user privacy or enabled surveillance.

The Sanchar Saathi app, which the government says only helps track and block stolen phones and prevents them from being misused, will, however, continue to be available on app stores for voluntary downloads.

"The government has decided not to make the pre-installation mandatory for mobile manufacturers," the communications ministry said in a press statement.

The move follows protests from opposition parties and privacy advocates who felt the app could listen to calls as well as read messages. Some manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung were said to have voiced reservations over the November 28 order.

"The number of users has been increasing rapidly, and the mandate to install the app was meant to accelerate this process and make the app available to less aware citizens easily. Just in the last one day, 6 lakh citizens have registered for downloading the app, which is a 10x increase in its uptake," the ministry said in the statement.

Globally, hardly any country has mandated pre-loading of a cybersecurity app on all smartphones. The only reported exception is Russia which in August ordered that MAX - a state-backed messaging service viewed by critics as a potential surveillance tool - be installed by default on all phones and tablets.

Defending its own app, the government said it was "secure and purely meant to help citizens from bad actors in the cyber world."

The ministry added that the measure was no longer necessary as the app was gaining "wide user acceptance" on its own.



Earlier in the day, Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia indicated that the government was willing to make changes in the November 28 order but insisted that the snooping is neither possible nor will it happen with the app. Sanchar Saathi app "se na snooping sambhav hai, no snooping hoga", he said in response to Congress leader Deepender Singh Hooda's supplementary question in the Lok Sabha regarding snooping concerns related to the app.

Scindia had on Tuesday stated that users could delete the app, which becomes operational only when a user registers on it.

If a consumer has not been registered on the app, then the app will not be operational and one can also delete the app, he repeated in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. There have been around 1.5 crore app downloads already. With the portal and the app, 26 lakh stolen handsets have been traced, 7 lakh stolen handsets have been returned to consumers, 41 lakh mobile connections have been disconnected and 6 lakh frauds have been blocked, the minister said.

In the November 28 order, his ministry directed smartphone makers to pre-install the app on all new devices and push it through updates on older ones.

The order mentioned that the

pre-installed app should be "readily visible and accessible" and "functionalities are not disabled or restricted".

Following the uproar, the communications ministry had issued an explainer, clarifying that the phrase "readily visible and accessible" and "functionalities are not disabled or restricted" in order as a direction to manufacturers, not a restriction on users.

"It simply means manufacturers must not hide, cripple or pre-install a non-functional version of the app and later claim compliance. Nowhere it has been mentioned in the above clause that the Sanchar Saathi App cannot be uninstalled by the end user. It is up to the citizen if he wants to enable and register Sanchar Saathi Mobile App or uninstal," it had said.

The explainer was issued prior to the withdrawal of the order. Main opposition party Congress had charged the BJP-led government of "brazenly snooping" on citizens with the app.

"The communications minister confidently claimed that the Sanchar Saathi app can be deleted, a statement that collapses instantly under the weight of the government's own direction, where Section 7(b) categorically states that the pre-installed app cannot be removed, nor can any of its 'functionalities be disabled or

restricted'," Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara said.

The ministry's explainer said the Sanchar Saathi app has limited access to phone data and that too only to the extent citizens permit it in each "interaction of reporting fraud" through the permissions granted. Like some other mobile apps, Sanchar Saathi seeks permission to "make & manage phone calls" to check the active SIM in the phone before starting the registration process, send SMS to complete user registration.

"This is a one-time SMS, similar to OTP verification processes used by banking apps, UPI applications, and communication platforms. The app does not use this for anything else that may be enabled by this permission," the explainer had said.

The explainer said the app needs access to the camera to take pictures of the product, such as the IMEI number printed on the box, for checking genuineness of a handset, and to send captured screenshots of a fraud call or SMS as chosen by the user as evidence.

"The app is designed not to have any access to contacts, other apps, location, microphone, bluetooth, or any other private functionalities or data of the user that is specifically not permitted by the user in "every interaction of reporting fraud" of the user with the app.

"The app does not harvest any other data on its own based on permissions granted. Further, citizens have the choice to remove any permission any time or deregister any mobile number registered on the app and also to uninstall the app," the explainer said.

The explainer said the app never accesses microphone, location, bluetooth, or the operating system. "The Sanchar Saathi app has limited access to phone data and that too only to the extent citizens permit it in each 'interaction of reporting fraud'," the explainer said. (PTI)

Stock markets drop for 4th day amid relentless foreign fund outflows; Sensex dips 31 points

MUMBAI, Dec 3: Stock markets extended the losing run to the fourth consecutive day on Wednesday as persistent foreign fund outflows and the rupee breaching the psychological 90-to-dollar low hit investor sentiment, dragging the benchmark Sensex down by 31 points.

Falling for the fourth day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 31.46 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 85,106.81. The index opened lower and dropped further by 374.63 points or 0.44 per cent to hit a low of 84,763.64 due to profit-taking. Gains in IT and blue-chip ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank, however, helped the barometer pare some losses in the pre-close session.

The 50-share NSE Nifty skidded 46.20 points or 0.18 per cent to 25,986. After a flat start, the Nifty drifted gradually lower in early trade and then remained range-bound for most of the session.

Among Sensex firms, Bharat Electronics fell the most by 2.13 per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, NTPC, State Bank of India, Adani Ports, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles and Bajaj Finserv were also among the major laggards. IT shares rebounded as the rupee fell below 90 per dollar. TCS was the biggest Sensex gainer, rising by 1.41 per cent. Infosys rose 1.12 per cent while ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank also advanced.

"Equity markets ended lower as the continued slide in the Indian rupee — which hit a fresh record low against the US dollar — prompted foreign portfolio investors to lock in profits, with the currency weakness weighing on their dollar-adjusted returns," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The BSE midcap gauge dropped 0.95 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.43 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, capital goods tanked 1.31 per cent, followed by consumer durables (1.24 per cent), auto

(1.12 per cent), power (1.05 per cent), industrials (0.99 per cent), services (0.97 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.93 per cent) and utilities (0.85 per cent).

BSE Focused IT climbed 0.79 per cent, IT jumped 0.78 per cent, while teck (0.41 per cent), telecommunication (0.29 per cent) and bankex (0.19 per cent) advanced.

"Markets witnessed a volatile session and ended marginally lower, extending the ongoing consolidation phase. After a flat start, the Nifty drifted gradually lower in early trade and then remained range-bound for most of the session. A late rebound in the last half hour helped trim losses, and the index eventually settled at 25,986.

"Sentiment was dampened by a weakening rupee, which hit a record low against the dollar, heightening concerns around import costs and triggering FII outflows. In addition, caution ahead of the MPC meeting and mixed global cues added to the subdued mood," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,642.30 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 4,645.94 crore, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi and Japan's Nikkei 225 index settled in the positive territory, while Shanghai's SSE Composite Index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading mostly higher. US markets ended higher on Tuesday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 0.99 per cent at USD 63.07 per barrel.

Falling for the third straight session on Tuesday, the Sensex tumbled 503.63 points or 0.59 per cent to settle at 85,138.27. The Nifty declined 143.55 points or 0.55 per cent to 26,032.20. (PTI)

Workshop on GST annual filing for FY 2024-25 held at ICAI Guwahati

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 3: The Guwahati Branch (EIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India recently organised a workshop on GST Annual Filing and GSTR-2B Reconciliation at ICAI Bhawan, Guwahati.

The programme began with a welcome address and opening remarks by Branch Chairperson CA Raginee Goyal. A large number of members attended the session to gain clarity on the latest statutory requirements and reporting standards under GST for FY 2024-25.

The workshop focused on the evolving framework of annual GST

compliances, particularly the table-wise reporting approach in GSTR-9 and GSTR-9C, and the growing reliance on GSTR-2B-based reconciliation for accurate Input Tax Credit reporting.

Speakers noted that the annual return for FY 2024-25 has become more analytical and mismatch-sensitive, demanding greater diligence from taxpayers and professionals.

Branch Committee Member CA Kumar Victor Saha initiated the technical sessions, introducing CA Abhishek Pawan of Siliguri, who demonstrated GSTR-2B reconciliation using Power Query and Power

BI and explained how automation can reduce manual effort and enhance accuracy.

CA Vivek Jain detailed the complexities of table-wise reporting in GSTR-9, highlighting recurring issues in Tables 6, 7 and 8 arising from incorrect or delayed ITC claims, non-reporting of ineligible credits, supplier delays in filing returns, and inconsistencies between books and GSTR-2B.

Several case examples were presented to show how small monthly lapses can escalate into significant year-end gaps requiring extensive reconciliation.

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Govt to create new

registered cases fell from 1.21 lakh in 2020 to 50,000 in 2024, and crime per lakh population reduced from 379 in 2021 to 128 in March 2025. Pending cases dropped sharply from 1.33 lakh in 2021 to 14,000 in 2024. Charge sheet rates improved from 47.8 per cent in 2020 to 66.7 per cent in 2024, and conviction rates quadrupled to 22.9 per cent. Crimes against women also declined significantly, from 26,352 cases in 2020 to 5,555 in 2024.

Labour Welfare and Home (Prisons, Home Guards and Civil Defence) Minister Rupesh Gowala, MLAs Atul Bora, Siddhartha Bhattacharyya, Ramendra Narayan Kalita, Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, DGP Harmeet Singh and several other dignitaries attended the programme.

Himanta pins Gaurav

in tea estates' labour lines among the workers for house ownership. Gogoi had expressed doubt over the state government's decision and had questioned why this law was brought just four months before the elections. (PTI)

Russian President Putin

conflict. India has been consistently maintaining that dialogue and diplomacy is the only way forward to end the war.

Following the Modi-Putin talks, the two sides are expected to ink a plethora of agreements, including one on facilitating the movement of Indian workers to Russia, and another on logistical support under a broader framework of defence cooperation.

It is learnt that under the trade basket, Indian exports to Russia are expected to significantly increase in areas of pharma, agriculture, food products and consumer goods.

The move comes amid concerns in New Delhi over a ballooning trade deficit in favour of Russia. India's annual procurement of goods and services from Russia amounts to around USD 65 billion, while Russia's imports from India stand at around USD 5 billion. Officials said India is also looking at boosting cooperation in the fertiliser sector. Russia supplies three to four million tonnes of fertilisers to India annually.

The Indian and Russian sides are also likely to discuss New Delhi's proposed free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Ahead of the summit, the defence ministers of the two countries will hold wide-ranging talks on Thursday that are likely to focus on India's plan to procure additional batches of S-400 missile systems and other critical military hardware from Russia.

The S-400 missile systems proved to be very effective during Operation Sindoor. Top military officials said the overall focus will be to further expand the already close defence and security ties between the two countries, with a particular focus on ensuring expeditious supply of military hardware from Russia to India.

In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, notwithstanding a warning by the US that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions under the provisions of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

Peskov said there may be a discussion on the possibility of Russia supplying Su-57 fighter jets to India. India is in the process of procuring a batch of fifth-generation fighter jets. Dassault Aviation's Rafale, Lockheed Martin's F-21, Boeing's F/A-18 and the Eurofighter Typhoon are the main contenders.

Ways to bolster bilateral energy ties are also expected to figure prominently in the summit. It is learnt that Russia has offered India additional discounts for its procurement of crude oil.

The offer came after the volume of India's purchase of Russian crude oil registered a decline in the last few weeks following the latest wave of US sanctions on two Russian oil producers.

India and Russia have a mechanism under which India's prime minister and the Russian president hold a summit meeting annually to review the entire gamut of ties. So far, 22 annual summit meetings have taken place alternatively in India and Russia. The Russian president had last visited New Delhi in 2021.

In July last year, PM Modi travelled to Moscow for the annual summit. Russia has been a time-tested partner for India and a key pillar of New Delhi's foreign policy. (PTI)

Want justice for

concert. "Today, the people of Assam miss him. We want justice for him," Gogoi, the Lok Sabha member from Jorhat, said. (PTI)

CAG report flags

cases, however, was only 10-39 per cent during the period, it said. As many as 1,994 claims of PF, pension, family pension and deposit-linked insurance fund scheme involving ₹ 14.01 crore settled by ATEPFO were not credited to the bank accounts of the concerned beneficiaries, due to reasons for failed transaction as of March 2022, it stated.

Out of these, 52 per cent cases pertaining to 2017-18 and 2018-19 were pending for more than three years.

The report said due to investments made by the ATEPFO in certain corporate bonds "without keeping in view the criteria of safety", which started defaulting in payment of interest since 2019-20, resulted in loss of interest to the tune of ₹ 11.42 crore.

Moreover, there is probability of loss in six such bonds amounting to ₹ 69.61 crore on maturity in various periods till September 2027, it added. (PTI)

Tourists take part

day and 18,010 on Tuesday, reflecting the growing popularity of Nagaland's "festival of festivals." On Thursday, the 18th Hornbill International Naga Wrestling championship, an indigenous sport, will be held, around 3 km from Kisama.

Besides the Naga tribes competing in the male and female categories, Nagaland Wrestling Association has informed that a separate category for foreign tourists will also be conducted. (PTI)

PhonePe's Indus Appstore and Motorola India announce partnership

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Indus Appstore, India's homegrown Android app marketplace, on Wednesday announced a partnership with Motorola that will make the platform available on Motorola devices across India.

The collaboration enables wider distribution of Indus Appstore and offers Motorola users a personalised and culturally relevant app discovery experience.

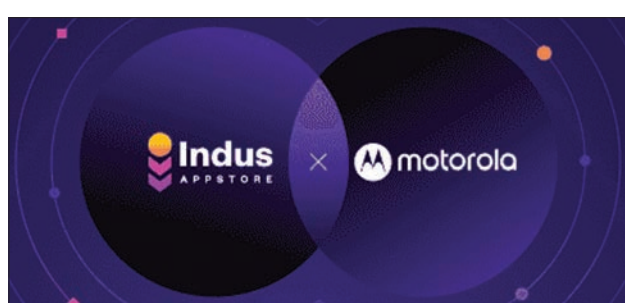
Indus Appstore provides Indian consumers with a meaningful alternative in the app ecosystem, built around local user preferences and the country's linguistic diversity.

The platform supports 12 Indian languages and English, and features AI-powered voice search that eliminates the need to type complex vernacular phrases.

A video preview option further allows users to visually experience an app's functionality before downloading.

With its fair app store policies, Indus Appstore aims to create a favourable environment for Indian developers.

By reducing reliance on a



single source of distribution, it has emerged as a competitive alternative that empowers local developers and strengthens India's broader app development ecosystem.

Priya M Narasimhan, chief business officer of Indus Appstore, expressed enthusiasm over the partnership, saying, "We are delighted to partner with Motorola to offer an extended set of Indians seamless access to the Indus Appstore experience, reinforcing our commitment to serving the entire breadth of the Indian market. The app store, which truly embodies the Made-for-India spirit, is at an inflection point to revolutionise the Indian app economy. The partnership solidifies our effort to offer Indi-

ans a meaningful, viable alternative to not just download but discover regionally relevant apps."

Sharing similar views, T M Narasimhan, managing director, Motorola Mobility India, said, "At Motorola, we have always prioritised delivering a premium and locally relevant experience to our users in India, and Indus Appstore perfectly fits this vision. By integrating this homegrown platform, we are providing an innovative app discovery medium that enriches our users' experience and is culturally relevant. This partnership also supports Indian developers by connecting them with the right users through Indus Appstore's unique distribution model."

Kotak MF outlook 2026 sees structural trends driving growth

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd (KMAMC), popularly known as Kotak Mutual Fund, on Wednesday released its Market Outlook 2026, presenting a detailed assessment of India's macroeconomic landscape and the investment themes expected to guide financial markets in the coming year.

The report identifies opportunities across equities, fixed income, and key thematic sectors, while outlining global and domestic trends that investors should monitor closely.

Nilesh Shah, managing director of Kotak Mahindra AMC, said, "Equity returns in FY2026 are likely to be anchored in earnings growth, with India Inc expected to deliver double-digit growth in FY27. This strength is likely to attract foreign portfolio investors, supporting market liquidity. Midcaps are poised to outperform large and small caps, though the margin of outperformance may remain

narrow. Gold and silver should continue to see upside, aided by sustained central bank buying. Investors are advised to moderate return expectations and adopt a balanced, diversified approach across asset classes to navigate evolving market dynamics."

The report states that consumption is set for a strong rebound, supported by rising incomes, GST reforms and festive demand.

Rural income per capita has now crossed the USD 2,000 mark, an inflection point that typically drives higher discretionary spending and benefits sectors such as automobiles.

With India remaining among the least penetrated markets globally for two-wheelers and passenger vehicles, rising aspirations, GST relief, benign inflation and rural recovery are expected to boost demand.

A pickup in credit growth, reflected in the rising credit-to-deposit ratio, further signals improving lending momentum. India's e-commerce sector is

also poised for significant expansion, driven by low penetration and increasing digital adoption.

Overall penetration is projected to rise to 12-13% by FY30, led by categories such as electronics and beauty & personal care.

Meanwhile, healthcare spending continues to climb due to aging demographics and a rise in chronic illnesses, with India's elderly population among the largest globally and expected to double over the next 25 years.

In fixed income, evolving market conditions are expected to strengthen the asset class's role in providing portfolio stability and risk mitigation.

India's prospects of inclusion in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index have improved, with a formal decision anticipated in January 2026 and potential inflows estimated at around USD 25 billion. Supportive macroeconomic fundamentals and balanced demand-supply dynamics provide a constructive outlook for the bond market.

RENOVATION OF CENTRAL CONTROL ROOM IN HQ CAMPUS

Tender Notice No.: Dy. CEE/PS/MLG/HQ/60/25-26, **Dated:** 01-12-2025. E - Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work. **Tender No.:** DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-60-25-26. **Name of Work:** Renovation of central control room in HQ campus including the provision of Conference Hall in central control room and other ancillary works in central control building. **Advertised Value:** ₹ 21,42,226/- **Earnest Money:** ₹ 42,900/- **Date and time of closing of tender at 15:00 on 22-12-2025** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

LOST

I lost my Higher Secondary admit card of Assam State Open School (ASOS) Assam Higher Secondary Education Council bearing Roll No 20252018A079 for the year of 2019 of Higher Secondary level examination A block 2019, between Bakalia bridge to Bakalia Xerox shop. Any person (s) finding the same is requested to inform the person with address and mobile No. mentioned below. Name: Mamita Kumari Singh, D/O Ramashish Singh Address: Pub Silputa P.O. Pub Silputa and P.S., Bakalia. District: Karbi Anglong, Assam. Mobile No 9365238517.

Grand Barakhana brings together serving soldiers and ex-servicemen in celebration of camaraderie

Assam regiment's 'Atoot Bandhan' strengthens ties with veterans

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: In a stirring tribute to service, sacrifice and the enduring spirit of brotherhood, the 119 Territorial Army (TA) Battalion of the Assam Regiment hosted a special outreach programme under its flagship initiative, 'Atoot Bandhan', reaffirming the regiment's commitment to its veterans in Silchar.

Living up to its name, meaning "Unbreakable Bond," the initiative is designed to deepen the connection between serving personnel and the revered community of ex-servicemen who have shaped the regiment's proud legacy.

At the heart of the programme was a grand Barakhana, a traditional regimental feast organised by the 119 TA unit. The event witnessed an impressive turnout with nearly 60 veterans from across the



district joining the celebrations.

The gathering became a vibrant blend of nostalgia, pride and heartfelt interactions. Serving officers and troops spent quality time with the veterans, listening to their ex-

periences, sharing memories and acknowledging their immense contributions to the nation's security and the regiment's heritage.

The atmosphere remained one of warmth, mutual respect and

rekindled camaraderie throughout the event. Many veterans expressed deep appreciation for the Assam Regiment's gesture, noting that such initiatives reinforce their lifelong bond with the uniform and the unit they once served with honour.

A serving officer summed up the essence of the programme, saying, "The 'Atoot Bandhan' initiative is a cornerstone of our regimental ethos. It is both our duty and privilege to ensure that the bond with our veterans remains strong. Their service paved the way for us and their welfare will always remain our priority."

The successful Barakhana in Silchar stands as yet another milestone in the Assam Regiment's ongoing efforts to honour, support and stay connected with its retired personnel across the region.

UPPL rejects Mohiliary's charge on Nov 29 incident at BTC Assembly

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 3: The Opposition UPPL has come down heavily and rejected the charge of BTC Chief Hagrama Mohiliary dragging the UPPL having involved in the November 29 last at BTC Assembly where agitated University and Colleges students went vandalism.

Addressing the media persons at UPPL's central office on Wednesday, Afjal Hoque Sarkar, vice president of the UPPL and former MCLA said that the Chief of BTC Hagrama Mohiliary blamed the UPPL and the ABSU on the rampage of BTC Assembly by agitated students on November 29 last, was a baseless allegation. He said the ABSU, being the largest democratic student organisation of the Bodos had been playing a key role to protect the community from all critical situations and problems as they have unit committees in all universities and colleges.

He has rejected the charge of Mohiliary who said both the ABSU and the UPPL were just two sides of a same coin and said many EMS and MCLAs of BPF led council



government came from the ABSU platform. The students of Bodoland University and various colleges joined the rally of the tribal students on November 29 last to oppose the move to granting ST status to six communities and there was no instigation of the ABSU and the UPPL as alleged by Mohiliary as the agitation of students was taking place spontaneously in every college by their own initiative with the emotion and sentiment.

Sarkar said after the BPF led BTC government came to power,

the unending Melas with gambling had been being organised everywhere which was totally stopped in the last five years led by Pramod Boro. He said Pramod Boro led council government established a congenial atmosphere to the people of the region to live in peace with dignity and honour, violence was stopped totally to ensure security to every citizen. He also called upon the BPF led BTC government to ensure peace and stability in the society instead of aggravating the situation by blaming others.

Dr Bishnu Ram Nunisa receives Bharatiya Gaurab Award - 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: Dr Bishnu Ram Nunisa, Sports Organiser was awarded the Bharatiya Gaurab Award - 2025 by the Mahatma Gandhi Global Peace India Foundation, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India. The recognition marks a proud and humbling moment for him, acknowledging his dedicated work and commitment in the field of sports and community service.

Attending the ceremony at Silpgram, Guwahati, Dr Nunisa expressed gratitude and motivation. The event also featured a Zubeen Garg song singing competition and a separate, beautiful chorus rendition of his iconic song "Mayabini," which added cultural depth and celebration to the evening.

Dr Nunisa emphasised that the award is not just a personal achievement but a recognition of everyone who has supported and encouraged him throughout his journey. He accepted the honour with humility and renewed determination to continue contributing meaningfully in the future.

SMC warns banquet halls, hotels against improper waste disposal

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 3: The Silchar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has issued a strict advisory to Banquet Halls, Hotels, Restaurants, Godowns and all Bulk Waste Generators (BWGs) to ensure proper waste management during the ongoing festive and wedding season. The advisory comes amid rising concern over garbage being dumped on roadsides, drains and public spaces, which threaten cleanliness, sanitation and public health in the city.

The Corporation warned that any establishment found violating municipal waste management regulations will face stringent penalties under the Assam Municipal Corporation Act, 2022, including fines of up to ₹ 1,00,000 and potential legal action. SMC emphasised that irresponsible disposal disrupts civic order and hampers ongoing efforts to maintain a clean and hygienic urban environment.

All establishments have been instructed to coordinate with the Silchar Municipal Corporation for timely collection and scientific disposal of waste. The Corporation will provide the necessary services in accordance with established norms, with applicable user fees. SMC's Enforcement Team is authorised to inspect establishments at any time and any lapse in compliance will attract immediate punitive action.

In the notice, SMC appealed for collective responsibility among event organisers, commercial establishments and bulk waste generators to ensure public safety and environmental health. For waste collection coordination and compliance assistance, establishments can contact Panna Lal Deb, Municipal Inspector (9101293214), or Rajiv Chanda, City Project Officer, SBM (U) (6002568070).

Reiterating its commitment to a Swachh Sundor Silchar, the Corporation called for full cooperation from all stakeholders to uphold cleanliness and civic discipline during the festive period.

DMC demolishes illegal four-storey building in Dibrugarh after fatal mishap

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 3: The Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation (DMC) on Wednesday demolished an unauthorised four-storied commercial building in the Loharpatty area after it was found to be structurally unsafe and constructed in complete violation of the Assam Unified Building Construction (Regulation) Bye-Laws, 2022.

The action followed a tragic incident on November 19, when 52-year-old Salma Begum died after construction materials fell from the upper floors of the structure while she was washing utensils in the courtyard of her home below. The multi-storied RCC building (G+4), built by Mohd Yunus Khan on a plot measuring just 7.75 Ls, had been sealed immediately after the accident.

According to officials, the DMC had issued multiple notices to Khan, beginning with a stop-construction order on November 20, which also demanded all relevant documentation. However, the response submitted by the builder was deemed "not satisfactory."



prompting further scrutiny.

A structural inspection conducted by the corporation confirmed that the building had been erected without any official permission and posed a severe safety risk. In his final demolition order, DMC Commissioner Jay Vikas wrote: "It is also observed that the said building is structurally unsafe and may collapse at any time and its continued existence endangers the safety of the public. In view of the extreme risk posed, it is imperative to demolish the said structure immediately."

The demolition was also influenced by rising public pressure fol-

lowing the fatality. After the structure was brought down on Wednesday, local resident Naseer Hussain welcomed the move but voiced concern that it took a loss of life for authorities to act. "This action was necessary, but it shouldn't have taken a tragedy for the authorities to act. We are relieved that this dangerous structure is finally down and we hope the DMC continues to monitor illegal construction across the city to prevent another loss of life," he said.

The corporation has indicated that further action may be taken against the builder for violating safety and planning norms.

AJP president inaugurates Morigaon office ahead of 2026 Assembly polls

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 3: As the 2026 Assembly election draws closer, the Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) has intensified its preparations to contest seats across Assam. In a bid to strengthen its organisational base, AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi on Tuesday inaugurated the party's new office at Morigaon town.

With less than four months remaining before the state goes to the polls, AJP along with other political parties has begun ramping up its groundwork and strategy. Addressing party members and supporters, Gogoi stressed the need for collective support from all sections of society to ensure the party secures a meaningful presence in the upcoming election.

The inaugural event saw the presence of several key leaders, including former minister Rajen Gohain, AJP secretary Jagadish Bhuyan, Central Committee joint secretary Bani Das, Morigaon district acting president Simal Deuri and many others.

Rabies awareness programme conducted at DAV School



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 3: In a move to promote community health and animal welfare, a Rabies Awareness Programme was held at DAV School, Diphu, on Wednesday morning. The event, organised jointly by the

Diphu Municipal Board and the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, began at 9:30 AM and witnessed participation from around 400 students.

Key officials overseeing the programme included Dr David Bor-

doloi Nodal Officer of the Rabies Control Programme, Dr Monica Tissoo Veterinary Officer, Diphu, Prodeep Rongpi Executive Engineer, Diphu Municipal Board and Menaka Terangpi Junior Engineer, Diphu Municipal Board.

The programme was conducted under the theme, "Protect Your Pets, Protect Your Community," emphasising responsible pet ownership, timely anti-rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats and proper action in case of an animal bite. The initiative also aligns with nationwide efforts following the Supreme Court's Suo Moto Writ Petition (Civil) No 05/2025 addressing rabies prevention and stray animal management.

Officials highlighted the importance of educating the younger generation to spread awareness throughout the wider community. The camp at DAV School is part of an ongoing effort by the Diphu Municipal Board and the Veterinary Department to ensure a safer and healthier environment for both humans and animals in the region.

KA observes International Day of Persons with Disabilities

KAAC distributes financial aid, mobility aids and promotes disability-inclusive development

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 3: The District Social Welfare (DSW) Department under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) organised a special program on Wednesday to observe the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at the Home for Destitute and Vagrant Children, Birla. The event aimed to highlight the abilities, rights and well-being of people with disabilities, while promoting an inclusive society.

Physically challenged persons from both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts participated in the celebration, receiving recognition from the government. As part of the event, one-time financial assistance was provided along with support materials such as wheelchairs, elbow crutches and hearing aids.

District Social Welfare Officer Dr Sayed Nasir Rahman highlighted the theme for 2025, "Fostering disability-inclusive societies for advancing social progress," emphasising the need for communities where



individuals with disabilities are fully included in education, employment, healthcare and social activities. He said the goal is to ensure equal opportunities, respect and active participation, which ultimately drives broader social progress.

Executive Member in charge of DSW,

Rina Terangpi, stressed that persons with disabilities are capable of achieving great things, citing examples from sports, academics and government services. She also spoke about the launch of various government schemes for their upliftment. Sharing her personal experience with her physically

challenged son, Terangpi encouraged parents to embrace challenges with positivity.

Chief Executive Member of KAAC, Dr Tuliram Ronghang, as the chief guest, reiterated the importance of respecting and supporting physically challenged persons, emphasising their determination and willpower. He assured continued support from KAAC and distributed one-time financial grants of ₹ 2,000 each to 150 PWDs from Karbi Anglong and 100 from West Karbi Anglong. Wheelchairs, elbow crutches and hearing aids were also provided to those in need. Additionally, selected Self Help Groups (SHGs) from 26 MAC constituencies received ₹ 10,000 each.

The program was attended by KAAC Chairman Raju Tissoo, EMS, MAC members, MLAs Darsing Ronghang, Bidyasing Englung, Rupsing Teron and District Commissioner Nirola Phangchopi, marking a collective effort to promote inclusion, respect and empowerment for persons with disabilities in the region.

Mulbha Harijon passes away

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 3: Mulbha Harijon, a retired teacher and resident of Khatowal Gaon, Sootea, passed away in the early hours on Wednesday due to age-related ailments. He was 76.

Harijon retired as the headmaster of Dakhin Veer Gaon MV School, Biswanath, in 2012 after a long career in the field of education. Beyond his professional life, he remained actively associated with several socio-cultural organisations in the greater Sootea area, contributing significantly to community initiatives and welfare activities.

He is survived by his wife, a son, a daughter and a large circle of relatives. His demise has cast a pall of gloom over the entire locality, with residents mourning the loss of an educator and community figure who had earned widespread respect.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Whenever you do a thing, act as if all the world were watching. -Thomas Jefferson

India's GDP on right track

India's second-quarter GDP print has triggered the kind of chest-thumping usually reserved for election night or a cricket victory. Real GDP surged 8.2% in July-September, the strongest among major economies and, predictably, a cause for unrestrained celebration across ministries and television studios. Manufacturing accelerated, construction stayed firm, services punched above their weight, and even agriculture—a sector often forgotten until monsoon forecasts go wrong—posted another quarter of solid expansion. And yet, this exuberant narrative has a gaping hole at its centre. The very same economy that is supposedly sprinting forward is simultaneously failing to generate enough nominal income to meet its own fiscal targets. Tax revenues are sputtering, the Budget's assumptions look increasingly fantastical, and the government is leaning heavily on accounting manoeuvres and the central bank's largesse to mask a widening structural imbalance. The contradiction is stark: a booming economy with a revenue engine coughing and wheezing. And unless policymakers are willing to confront the mismatch between real output and nominal income, India risks drifting into dangerous territory where headline numbers flatter reality while the fiscal foundations quietly erode underneath.

The trouble begins with a deceptively simple statistical quirk: real GDP growth is racing ahead, while nominal GDP—the actual monetary value generated by the economy—is barely keeping pace. In Q2, nominal GDP grew just 8.7%, only a shade above real growth. This implies an extraordinarily weak GDP deflator, India's broadest measure of inflation. A low deflator flatters real growth, making the volume of output look stronger than the income it actually generates, while simultaneously undermining the fiscal framework that depends on nominal growth for tax buoyancy. The Union Budget, in its infinite optimism, assumed 10.1% nominal growth for FY26. The first half has delivered 8.8%. That single gap—between what was assumed and what is unfolding—is now haunting the fiscal numbers.

Gross tax revenues grew just 4% between April and October. To meet the ₹42.7 trillion target, they now need to grow 22% in the remaining five months—a number so unrealistic it borders on fiction. Income-tax collections rose only 6.9%, corporate taxes 5.2%, indirect taxes 2.6%, and customs duties actually contracted by 2.5%. To meet the Budget goal, Central GST collections would need to suddenly accelerate at nearly 18% for the rest of the year. No serious observer believes that is remotely possible. A tax shortfall of ₹1.2-1.5 trillion looks inevitable, and that gap will be plugged through a familiar cocktail of delayed spending, administrative savings, and silent undershooting of ministerial allocations—the kind of backdoor adjustments that make fiscal numbers look neat without creating any real fiscal space.

Education in rural Assam: Ground realities

Education in rural Assam is a topic that requires much more than casual consideration. It is a complex issue shaped by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural challenges. Assam, a state rich in culture and diversity, faces a unique set of circumstances when it comes to providing quality education in its rural areas. While Assam has made significant strides in improving access to education over the past decades, the rural education system continues to be hindered by a number of persistent problems.

In Assam, rural education is not just about classrooms and textbooks; it is about addressing the broader challenges that these areas face. One of the primary issues is the lack of proper infrastructure in schools. Many rural schools in Assam are ill-equipped to meet the needs of their students. A large number of schools lack basic facilities like proper classrooms, furniture, toilets, and safe drinking water. The situation becomes even more problematic during the monsoon season, when many areas are cut off from the rest of the state due to floods. During such times, the already fragile educational system is further strained, making it nearly impossible for students to attend school regularly.

The issue of teacher shortages is another major concern. In rural Assam, there is a dearth of qualified teachers, particularly in remote areas. Often, schools are run by untrained teachers or are short-staffed altogether. This not only affects the quality of education but also leads to a high dropout rate. The situation is compounded by the fact that many teachers are unwilling to work in remote, underdeveloped areas due to the lack of amenities, difficult living conditions, and the lower salaries offered in comparison to urban areas. As a result, many students in rural Assam are deprived of a proper education, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Apart from the physical infrastructure and teacher shortages, cultural and social factors also play a significant role in hindering educational progress in rural

Assam. In many rural areas, education, especially for girls, is not always seen as a priority. Families often prefer to send their children to work rather than to school, especially in areas where agriculture is the primary livelihood. In tea gardens, for instance, children are frequently employed in the fields, which keeps them out of school. Similarly, in communities living along the riverbanks and in other rural pockets, children are often seen as contributing members of the household, and education is seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. The government has initiated several programs aimed at improving education in rural areas. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme, for example, is one such initiative designed to encourage students to attend school by providing them with free meals. This program has seen some success in increasing enrollment rates, but it has not been enough to tackle the deeper issues. Furthermore, schemes like free textbooks and uniforms, while beneficial, fail to address the root causes of educational inequality in rural Assam.

One of the most significant challenges that rural students face is the poor quality of education. Even when they do attend school, many students receive a standard education that does not equip them with the skills they need to succeed in life. The outdated curriculum, lack of practical knowledge, and reliance on rote learning further diminish the quality of ed-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

education. In remote areas, where access to technology and modern teaching aids is limited, students often graduate without gaining any meaningful skills or knowledge. This leads to a cycle of underemployment, as many rural graduates are unable to secure jobs in the formal economy.

The dropout rate in rural Assam remains a major concern. Many students, particularly those in rural areas, leave school early due to the lack of interest, economic pressures, and poor academic performance. The high dropout rate is particularly alarming at the sec-



ondary level, where students face increasing difficulty as the education system becomes more complex and competitive. For many students in rural Assam, the decision to drop out of school is often driven by the pressing need to contribute to the family's income. Girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out, as they are often expected to help with household chores or get married at a young age.

The role of the community in shaping the educational landscape in rural Assam cannot be overstated. In many rural communities, the importance of education is not always understood. There is often a lack of awareness about the long-term benefits of education, and this is especially true in remote tribal areas. Educating communities about the value of schooling, and creating awareness about the opportunities it brings, is critical to improving education in these regions. Efforts have been made by both the state and central governments to improve the situation. The Right to Education Act, which mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14, has been a step in the right direction. However, the implementation of this Act has been uneven, especially in rural Assam, where schools often lack the resources and support needed to provide quality education.

The Assam government has also launched several schemes aimed at improving the education system in rural areas. These in-

clude the establishment of new schools, the construction of more classrooms, and the provision of additional resources to existing schools. The state has also made efforts to increase the number of teachers through recruitment drives, though these have not always been sufficient to meet the demand. Despite these efforts, the overall impact on rural education has been limited, and much more needs to be done.

One of the ways to improve education in rural Assam is to provide better training and support for teachers. Teachers in rural areas often feel isolated and unsupported, and this can lead to burnout and low morale. Providing regular professional development opportunities, as well as creating a support system for rural teachers, would go a long way in improving the quality of education. In addition, the curriculum needs to be made more relevant to the needs of rural students. This includes introducing practical subjects such as agriculture, rural development, and vocational training, which would provide students with skills that are directly applicable to their lives.

The integration of technology into rural education also holds great potential. While internet access remains a challenge in many rural areas, initiatives like e-learning platforms, digital classrooms, and mobile learning can help bridge the gap. By providing students with access to online re-

sources, rural schools can expose them to a broader range of learning materials, making education more engaging and relevant.

Another critical aspect is the role of local communities in supporting education. Community involvement in school management, decision-making, and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in improving the educational outcomes for rural students. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community, it is possible to create a more supportive environment for education. Local organizations, NGOs, and other community-based groups can also contribute by providing supplementary education and vocational training programs.

In conclusion, the education system in rural Assam faces numerous challenges, from infrastructure issues and teacher shortages to socio-cultural barriers and economic pressures. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. With concerted efforts from the government, communities, and educational institutions, it is possible to improve education in rural Assam. The key lies in a holistic approach that not only addresses infrastructural and logistical issues but also promotes awareness, skill development, and community involvement. Education has the power to transform lives, and if Assam's rural students are given the right opportunities, they too can aspire to a brighter future.

The Taiwan crisis, Japan's security policy, and the changing Indo-Pacific equation for India

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The Taiwan issue is at the center of growing tensions between Japan and China, which has reshaped the balance of power in the entire Indo-Pacific region. Due to geographical proximity, maritime interests, and historical sensitivities, Japan views Taiwan's stability as an extension of its own national security interests. China's intensification of military activities around Taiwan in recent years—whether through airspace violations, missile tests, or large-scale naval exercises—has profoundly altered Japan's threat perception. The 2022 landing of Chinese missiles in Japan's exclusive economic zone was a clear indication that the Taiwan crisis directly impacts Japan's geopolitical environment.

This is why Japan has made unprecedented changes to its security strategy. Despite decades of a pacifist approach, it has decided to double defense spending to 2% of GDP. Long-dormant military infrastructure is being revitalized, new missile deployments are being established on the southwestern islands, and joint operational capabilities with the United States have been significantly enhanced. Japan understands that if a conflict erupts in Taiwan, Chinese aggression could escalate toward the Senkaku Islands and Japanese waters. Therefore, its entire security vision is now deeply intertwined with the stability of the Taiwan Strait.

This shift is also evident in Japan's foreign policy. While Japan previously refrained from speaking openly on the Taiwan issue, it now repeatedly emphasizes the importance of "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" on international platforms. Its diplomatic stance toward China has become much tougher. Japan's summoning of the Chinese ambassador following China's threats over the Japanese Prime Minister's remarks on Taiwan is emblematic of this shift. Furthermore, Japan is developing new security structures with the Quad, ASEAN countries, and European partners to counter China's growing military capabilities.

This entire scenario is extremely important for India. Both India and Japan are concerned about China's aggressive tendencies, so security cooperation between the two countries is naturally deepening. The Quad has grown in strategic importance, and maritime surveillance, naval exercises, and technical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific have accelerated. Japan's military modernization opens new opportunities for India in the areas of defense industry, technology transfer, and maritime security.

But the challenges are also not without. India desires to maintain stable relations with China, as peace in the border region and economic cooperation are its direct requirements. However, the escalation of China-Japan tensions further complicates the India-China balance. If India shows greater closeness with Japan and the United States, China could increase pressure on the border. Another major concern relates to any military crisis in the Taiwan Strait. This sea route is vital for India; any instability there would severely impact energy imports, trade, electronic chip supplies, and overall maritime transport. This could jeopardize both India's economic growth and security.

The third challenge is America's "strategic ambiguity." The US has never clearly stated whether it would intervene militarily in the event of an attack on Taiwan. This uncertainty puts the entire region in a state of dilemma. Japan and Taiwan are not only concerned, but this question is also important for India, because the Quad's true utility depends on the extent to which the US plays a decisive role. If the US remains uncertain, China may be encouraged to take more aggressive steps in the region, which will also impact India's security balance.

Amidst these complexities, the opportunities for India are equally significant. Japan's renewed engagement could provide new direction to defense industry cooperation, maritime technology, submarine capabilities, and joint military exercises. Together, India and Japan can take concrete steps toward a stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Diversification of trade routes will also be essential for India to reduce its excessive dependence on the Taiwan Strait.

Finally, the Taiwan crisis has made it clear that the future of the Indo-Pacific can no longer be determined by old equations. Japan is redefining its security strategy, China continues to expand its power, and the United States is partially rebalancing its role. In this scenario, India must adopt a highly balanced, astute, and multi-layered diplomacy—one that neither creates unnecessary conflict with China nor slows down growing cooperation with Japan, the United States, and other partners.

The changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific pose both a challenge and an opportunity for India. This is a time for India's strategic maturity, economic expansion, and decisive foreign policy. If India balances all these aspects, it will not only influence the regional balance of power but will also become a key determinant of the Indo-Pacific's future in the years to come.

Global instability: The new normal

By: Satyabrata Borah

Geopolitical conflict and global political instability have defined the early decades of the twenty-first century with an intensity not seen since the Cold War. The world is no longer shaped by a single bipolar rivalry or a unipolar moment of American dominance. Instead, it is caught in a web of overlapping crises, competing power centers, and accelerating technological change that together erode the foundations of the post-1945 international order. Great powers, middle powers, non-state actors, and transnational forces all pull in different directions, producing a landscape marked by proxy wars, economic coercion, frozen conflicts, and sudden eruptions of violence. Stability, once taken for granted in many regions, has become an exception rather than the rule.

The return of great-power competition lies at the heart of contemporary instability. The United States, though still the world's leading military and economic power, faces a China that has grown confident, wealthy, and assertive. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, its militarization of the South China Sea, and its relentless pressure on Taiwan signal a clear challenge to the American-led order in Asia. Washington has responded with trade restrictions, technology sanctions, and a network of new security arrangements such as AUKUS and the Quad. The rivalry is no longer confined to economics or diplomacy; it increasingly carries the risk of direct military confrontation over Taiwan or disputed islands. Every large joint exercise, every new chip factory in Arizona or TSMC facility in Japan, every freedom-of-navigation operation becomes a move on a chessboard where miscalculation could trigger catastrophe.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked the most dramatic rupture in European security since 1945. Moscow's attempt to annex its neighbor and overturn the post-Cold War settlement revealed both the fragility of deterrence and the limits of Western unity. The war has killed hundreds of thousands, displaced millions, and turned Ukraine into a laboratory for drone warfare, electronic jamming, and long-range strikes. Europe, long accustomed to American protection, has been forced to confront its own military weakness and energy dependence. NATO has enlarged and rearmed, yet the continent remains vulnerable to hybrid attacks, sabotage of undersea cables, and nuclear saber-rattling from the Kremlin. The conflict has also globalized: North Korean troops reportedly fight alongside Russians, Iranian drones darken Ukrainian skies, and Western missiles now strike inside Russia. What began as a regional war has become a worldwide confrontation by proxy.

In the Middle East, old certainties have collapsed. The Abraham Accords briefly promised a new era of Arab-Israeli cooperation against Iran, but the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza shattered that illusion. The conflict spread to Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and the Red Sea, drawing in Iran-backed militias, American and British airstrikes, and Houthi missiles aimed at global shipping. Israel's campaign against Hezbollah and its strikes deep inside Iran have brought the region closer to all-out war than at any point since 1973. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime clings to power only with Russian and Iranian help, while Turkey, Israel, and various jihadist factions carve out zones of influence. Oil routes remain vulnerable, and the risk of a direct Iran-Israel confrontation looms larger with each passing month.

Further south, the Sahel has become one of the world's most unstable regions. A string of military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad has overturned fragile democracies and invited Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group and its successors. France, the former colonial power, has been expelled from much of its traditional sphere of influence. Jihadist insurgencies spread unchecked across vast territories, displacing millions and threatening coastal states like Benin and Togo. The withdrawal of Western counterterrorism forces has left a vacuum that neither local armies nor Russian contractors have been able to fill. Food insecurity, climate stress, and youth unemployment feed a cycle of violence that spills across borders and fuels migration toward Europe.

Asia beyond China also simmers. The Korean Peninsula remains a flashpoint, with Pyongyang testing ever more sophisticated missiles and issuing nuclear threats almost monthly. Myanmar's civil war following the 2021 military coup has killed thousands and created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Ethnic conflict in India's Manipur state, tensions between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, and naval standoffs in the South China Sea all remind observers that Asia is far from the peaceful rising continent once imagined. Even Japan and South Korea, long pillars of regional stability, have begun unprecedented military buildups in response to threats from China, Russia, and North Korea.

Economic weapons have become central to geopolitical conflict. Sanctions, export controls, and financial exclusion are now routine tools of statecraft. The freezing of Russian central bank assets after the Ukraine invasion demonstrated the extraordinary power of dollar dominance, yet it also accelerated efforts by China, Russia, India, and others to create alternative payment systems and reduce reliance on Western finance. Technology itself is a battlefield. The race for supremacy in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology carries national security implications as profound as the nuclear balance once did. Supply chains for critical minerals in Africa and Latin America have turned geologists and mining executives into strategic assets courted by Beijing and Washington alike.

Energy transitions add another layer of instability. The push toward renewables and the retreat from Russian gas have upended decades-old energy relationships in Europe. OPEC Plus, dominated by Saudi Arabia and Russia, wields renewed influence over global prices. Meanwhile, new producers in Guyana, Namibia, and the Eastern Mediterranean scramble to monetize discoveries at a time when long-term demand remains uncertain. Climate change itself acts as a threat multiplier, intensifying resource conflicts over water in Central Asia, arable land in Africa, and fish stocks in the warming Arctic.

Non-state actors exploit the chaos. Transnational criminal organizations traffic drugs, people, and weapons across weakened borders. Cyber criminals and state-sponsored hackers paralyze infrastructure and steal billions. Terrorist groups like Islamic State and al-Qaeda regroup in ungoverned spaces from Afghanistan to the Sahel. Private military companies operate with impunity in multiple continents. Information warfare has reached industrial scale, with disinformation campaigns, deepfakes, and bot armies capable of swaying elections and inciting violence far from their point of origin.

The institutional framework meant to manage global order is creaking. The United Nations Security Council is paralyzed by vetoes. The World Trade Or-

ganization struggles to resolve disputes in an era of open economic warfare. Nuclear non-proliferation regimes face existential challenges as Iran inches toward a bomb and North Korea expands its arsenal. Even regional organizations like ASEAN or the African Union often prove incapable of decisive action when great powers pressure their members in opposing directions.

Yet amid the turmoil, new patterns of alignment are emerging. A growing number of middle powers refuse to choose sides in the U.S.-China rivalry. India purchases Russian oil and weapons while deepening security ties with the United States. Turkey balances NATO membership with purchases of Russian air defenses and mediation between Moscow and Kyiv. Brazil and South Africa host BRICS summits that challenge Western financial dominance while maintaining close economic ties with Europe and North America. The Global South increasingly asserts its agency, demanding reforms to institutions created when most of its members were colonies.

The return of history has been swift and unforgiving. Borders once thought settled are contested again. Spheres of influence, long dismissed as relics, are openly discussed in Beijing, Moscow, and even Washington. Military spending worldwide has surged to levels not seen since the Cold War. Conscription debates return to countries that abandoned it decades ago. Nuclear powers modernize arsenals and lower thresholds for use. The taboo against territorial conquest, perhaps the greatest achievement of the post-1945 order, has been broken in Europe and challenged in Asia.

The cumulative effect is a world that feels simultaneously interconnected and fragmented. A crisis in one region rapidly produces effects far away: a blockade in the Red Sea raises insurance rates in Rotterdam; a chip shortage triggered by tensions over Taiwan stalls car production in Germany; a coup in Niger disrupts uranium supplies to French nuclear plants. Global problems from pandemics to climate change demand cooperation, yet the political space for such cooperation shrinks with each passing year.

There are no easy paths back to stability. Deterrence requires military strength and political will that many democracies struggle to sustain. Diplomacy demands concessions that domestic audiences often reject. Economic interdependence, once hailed as a guarantee of peace, now appears as a source of vulnerability. Technological revolutions arrive faster than societies or governments can adapt. And beneath it all runs a demographic shift as aging powers in Europe and East Asia confront youthful, restless populations in Africa and South Asia.

The current era of geopolitical conflict and global political instability is not necessarily prelude to a third world war, but neither is it a temporary aberration. It reflects deeper forces: the rise of new powers unwilling to accept old rules, the diffusion of destructive technologies, the erosion of trust between nations, and the inability of existing institutions to accommodate change peacefully. The world has entered a period of prolonged rivalry and uncertainty where crises overlap and reinforce one another. Managing this era without catastrophe will require statecraft of exceptional clarity, restraint, and imagination, qualities in short supply at a time when domestic polarization and short-term thinking dominate politics almost everywhere. The margin for error has grown perilously thin, and history suggests that periods of flux rarely end without significant upheaval. The task for leaders and citizens alike is to prove that this time can be different.

COP30: Southern Leadership

By: Satybrat Borah

The Amazon rainforest stretches endlessly under a canopy of emeralds, its rivers weaving through the earth like veins carrying life to the planet. In November 2025, the world's gaze will turn to Belém, a vibrant city at the mouth of the Amazon in Brazil, where leaders, activists, scientists, and citizens will gather for COP30. This is not just another climate conference. It is a pivotal moment, a new horizon where the narrative of global climate action must shift. For too long, the burden of responsibility has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of industrialized nations, while the voices and leadership of developing countries have been sidelined. It is time for that to change. Developing countries must take the lead in addressing the climate crisis, not because they are the primary culprits, but because they are the most affected, the most innovative under pressure, and the most capable of charting a sustainable path forward for humanity.

The climate crisis is not a distant threat; it is a present reality, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Global South. Small island nations like Kiribati and the Maldives face existential threats from rising sea levels, with entire communities preparing for relocation as their homelands disappear. In sub-Saharan Africa, prolonged droughts devastate crops, pushing millions into food insecurity. Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries on earth, battles annual floods that displace hundreds of thousands. These nations did not create the problem. Historical emissions data tell a stark story: the United States and Europe, through centuries of industrialization, account for the lion's share of cumulative greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Yet, the consequences are borne by those who contributed the least. This injustice demands a reevaluation of who should lead the response.

Developing countries are uniquely positioned to spearhead climate solutions because they live the impacts daily. Their leaders and communities have no choice but to adapt, and in that adaptation lies profound innovation. Take India's approach to renewable energy. Despite being a developing economy, India has become a global leader in solar power. The International Solar Alliance, initiated by India and France, now includes over 100 countries working to mobilize a trillion dollars for solar projects. In rural India, solar microgrids power villages that were once in darkness, providing electricity without the need for extensive fossil fuel infrastruc-

ture. This is not theoretical; it is practical, scalable, and born from necessity. Similarly, in Kenya, the mobile payment system M-Pesa has revolutionized access to clean energy. Farmers use mobile phones to pay for solar home systems in small installments, bypassing traditional banking barriers. These examples illustrate a key point: developing nations are not waiting for permission or handouts; they are building solutions tailored to their contexts.

At COP30 in Brazil, this leadership must be formalized and amplified. Brazil itself embodies the potential and the challenges. As host, it brings the Amazon to the forefront, a critical carbon sink that absorbs billions of tons of CO2 annually. Under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil has recommitted to ending deforestation by 2030, a bold target that requires international support but national resolve. Indigenous communities, who have protected the rainforest for generations, must be central to these efforts. Their knowledge of sustainable land management is invaluable. In the lead-up to COP30, Brazil has already hosted preparatory meetings emphasizing South-South cooperation. Countries like Indonesia, with its vast peatlands, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, guardian of the Congo Basin rainforest, are sharing strategies for forest conservation. This peer-to-peer learning is more effective than top-down directives from wealthier nations, as it respects local realities and builds genuine partnerships.

Finance is often cited as the stumbling block, but here too, developing countries can lead by reimagining the system. The current global financial architecture, dominated by institutions like the World Bank and IMF, has failed to deliver adequate climate finance. Promises of 100 billion dollars annually from developed to developing nations remain unfulfilled, with much of the money coming as loans rather than grants, exacerbating debt burdens. At COP30, leaders from the Global South should push for reform. Proposals like debt-for-nature swaps, where debt is forgiven in exchange for conservation commitments, have succeeded in places like Seychelles. Brazil could champion a broader initiative, perhaps a Global South Climate Fund managed by developing nations themselves. This would ensure funds are used efficiently, without the bureaucratic hurdles that plague Western-led aid. Moreover, innovative financing mechanisms, such as green bonds issued by countries like Nigeria for renewable projects, demonstrate that capital can be mobilized domestically and regionally.



Technology transfer is another area ripe for Southern leadership. Developed countries have long promised to share clean technologies, but patents and costs create barriers. Developing nations can bypass this by fostering open-source innovation and regional hubs. China's Belt and Road Initiative, despite criticisms, has installed gigawatts of solar and wind capacity across Africa and Asia. While China is an emerging power, its model of South-South technology sharing can inspire others. At COP30, a coalition of developing countries could establish a technology commons, pooling patents and expertise for mutual benefit. Imagine engineers from Vietnam, experts in flood-resistant architecture, collaborating with counterparts in Pakistan to design resilient cities. This collaborative approach accelerates progress far beyond what isolated efforts achieve.

Education and awareness are foundational, and here, developing countries excel in grassroots mobilization. In the Philippines, community-led mangrove restoration projects not only sequester carbon but also protect coastlines from storms. Schoolchildren plant trees, learning ecology firsthand. In Brazil, the favela communities of Rio de Janeiro organize urban farming initiatives, turning rooftops into gardens that cool cities and provide food. These

local actions, multiplied across millions of communities, create a bottom-up movement that national policies can support. COP30 should highlight these stories, shifting the narrative from victimhood to agency. Media coverage often portrays developing nations as passive recipients of aid, but the reality is a tapestry of resilience and creativity.

Of course, challenges abound. Political instability, corruption, and economic pressures can derail progress. Many developing countries rely on fossil fuels for revenue; transitioning requires just alternatives. Coal-dependent South Africa, for instance, needs support to retrain workers for green jobs. But leadership means confronting these internal issues head-on. At COP30, transparency mechanisms, perhaps blockchain-based tracking of climate funds, could build trust. Developing nations must also hold each other accountable, through regional bodies like the African Union or ASEAN.

The role of developed countries should not be to dictate but to enable. They must fulfill finance pledges, remove trade barriers on green technologies, and reduce their own emissions drastically. The IPCC reports are clear: to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, global emissions must peak by 2025 and halve by 2030. Wealthy nations, with their capacity, bear the

greater moral and practical responsibility here. By stepping back from leadership and instead providing unwavering support, they allow developing countries to innovate without interference.

As the sun sets over the Amazon, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, COP30 represents hope. It is a chance to redefine global cooperation. Developing countries, with their intimate understanding of the crisis, their proven ingenuity, and their moral authority, are ready to lead. They must set ambitious nationally determined contributions, not as concessions, but as declarations of self-determination. They must demand a seat at every table, from finance negotiations to technology forums. And they must inspire the world with visions of a just, sustainable future.

Addressing the climate crisis is not about blame; it is about survival and thriving. The new horizons opened at COP30 in Brazil will show that when developing countries lead, the path forward is not only necessary but transformative. From the solar panels glinting in Indian deserts to the reforested hills of Costa Rica, the evidence is clear. The Global South holds the keys to a cooler, greener planet. It is time to turn those keys and unlock a shared destiny. The world is watching Belém, but more importantly, the world should follow its lead.

COP30 ends in disappointment with weak commitments



By: B K Singh

A week before COP30 began in Belém, Cyclone Moneta formed in the Bay of Bengal and struck the Indian states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, damaging infrastructure and disrupting lives and livelihoods. Around the same time, Hurricane Melissa originated in the Atlantic Ocean and caused widespread destruction in Jamaica and Cuba. Melissa was one of the strongest Category 5 storms ever recorded, with wind speeds approaching 300 km per hour, knocking out power to nearly three-quarters of the island nation. The hurricane then moved towards Cuba, causing extensive damage, and later to Haiti, where 20 people died, before passing across the Bahamas and near Bermuda. In addition, Typhoon Kalamegi made landfall in Vietnam after killing 200 people in the Philippines and Vietnam. By the time COP30 reached its concluding stage, flooding in Vietnam had taken 41 more lives.

Amid so many climate disruptions occurring across the world, COP30 ended with significant disappointment. Brazil's proposal — backed by nearly 90 countries — to lay down a roadmap for transitioning away from fossil fuels, along with the host nation's proposal to end deforestation, failed to reach consensus.

The conference was overshadowed by the absence of leaders from the three top greenhouse-gas-emitting countries. Climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions has warmed oceans and intensified storms. The most damaging of these gases is CO₂, a non-reactive compound that remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years. The poorest countries — especially those located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn — are suffering the most.

They have been pleading for assistance for years, but wealthy nations have failed to meet their pledges to fund mitigation and adaptation efforts. Donald Trump, in both his first and second terms as US President, withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord and did not provide funds to help poorer nations decarbonise their economies or repair climate-related damage. How can he aspire to a Nobel Peace Prize when his actions have left two-

thirds of the global population exposed to increasingly destructive climate catastrophes?

More than Trump's claims, the Nobel Committee should consider the state of the global environment. Scientific communities and the United Nations have repeatedly warned that if global warming exceeds 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, life on the planet will face unprecedented disruptions. These warnings have been ignored by Trump, who calls climate change a hoax, dismantles green-energy transition projects and expands fossil fuel production. He praises "clean, beautiful coal" and increases fossil-fuel output to keep inflation in check. How can the Nobel Committee overlook actions that directly contradict scientific advice?

The conference was held at the mouth of the Amazon in Belém, a region of immense environmental significance. The Amazon rainforest is considered the lungs of the world, and its preservation is essential for the survival of humankind. Assured access to concessional finance for adaptation and affordable green technology for mitigation are major concerns for the Global South. The scale of the Amazon can be understood from the fact that India's forests store 7.2 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent, while the Amazon stores 56.8 gigatonnes. Forests cover 31 per cent of the world's land, amounting to 4.14 billion hectares. Brazil holds 12 per cent of global forests, while Russia, China, Canada and the Democratic Republic of Congo hold 20 per cent, 12 per cent, 9 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. If forests were protected and allowed to regenerate without human pressure, they could absorb nearly 14 gigatonnes of CO₂ annually — equal to one-third of yearly global greenhouse-gas emissions.

Recognising this potential, the host country proposed an initiative to end deforestation. Although only a beginning, the proposal aimed to stop the destruction of tropical forests. The Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) was launched to mobilise \$125 billion through public and private funding to reward countries that conserve forests and regenerate barren areas to expand tropical forest cover. It would be managed by the World Bank as a multilateral trust fund. The

challenge arises when fossil fuels lie buried beneath these forests, creating incentives for their destruction through extraction.

Of the 74 countries with TFFF-qualifying forests, 68 have fossil fuel deposits beneath them. There are 317 billion tonnes of potential CO₂ from recoverable reserves and more than 4.6 trillion tonnes if all deposits were exploited. Most of these are concentrated in India, China and Indonesia. TFFF cannot succeed unless there is a clear commitment not to extract fossil fuels beneath forests. A similar mechanism must also apply to non-TFFF countries. Boreal forests also cover major fossil fuel reserves, particularly in Russia and Canada. Therefore, an agreement is needed to prioritise forests located above fossil fuel deposits and ensure they remain off-limits for exploitation. Indigenous people from the Andes in Ecuador, the Amazon in Peru, and activists from Brazilian forests and savannas — young and old, women and men — participated in the conference in large numbers. They raised their voices against the destruction of their territories through oil drilling and gold mining and demanded the protection of the world's most biodiverse forests. Indigenous communities in the Amazon are known to clear trees and expand agriculture for crops such as soybeans and maize. They will protect the forests if compensated adequately.

Another proposal by the host country that failed to appear in the final agreement was the roadmap for phasing out fossil fuels. Around 90 countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific, along with EU member states and the UK, supported the phase-out plan. Although the EU called the roadmap a red line, leading economies such as India, China, South Africa and Russia informed the presidency that they would not accept it.

Cambodia also joined this coalition. The initiative sought a binding global agreement to halt new fossil fuel expansion, ensure an equitable phase-out and scale up financial mechanisms to support vulnerable nations. Developing countries require technology transfer, climate finance and capacity-building support for a fair energy transition. There was strong support from both the Global South and Global North for a fossil-fuel phase-out, but the final agreement omitted it. This became the biggest fault line at COP30.

COP30 increased the annual climate-finance target from \$100 billion to \$300 billion by 2035. Developed countries will raise their grant contributions from \$40 billion to \$120 billion, while the remaining \$180 billion — mobilised by developed countries — will come as loans to developing nations for mitigation and adaptation. This could push vulnerable countries into unsustainable debt and harm their economies.

Other issues that reached consensus and were included in the agreement are the health action plan, the Santa Marta Conference (co-hosted with the Netherlands on April 28-29 2026) to discuss global fossil-fuel phase-out, the Open Planetary Intelligence Network, the global ethical stocktake, and the declaration on hunger, poverty and people-centred climate action and adaptation. These have limited significance at the international level. The concern remains that transporting 50,000 delegates from all parts of the world and meeting their logistical needs in Belém may have generated more carbon emissions than the reductions achieved at COP30. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Climate risks expose fragile financial backbone behind global trade: UNCTAD warns

By: Puja Das

Global trade is holding steady despite tariffs, geopolitical tensions and supply-chain realignments. Goods trade grew an estimated 4 per cent in early 2025, defying predictions of slowdown. Containers are moving, shipping routes are adjusting, and firms have learned to navigate fractured geopolitics.

But the latest Trade and Development Report 2025 on the brink warns that this resilience masks a deeper vulnerability. The world's trading system, it argued, increasingly relies not on logistics but on a highly concentrated financial architecture that is now being destabilised by climate shocks, currency volatility and tightening global liquidity.

"Trade is not just the concatenation of suppliers," said Rebecca Grynspan, secretary-general of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD). "It is also the concatenation of credit lines, payment systems, currency markets and capital flows." And climate change, UNCTAD cautioned, is pressuring all of them at once.

Hidden fault line: Financial system behind trade

More than 90 per cent of global trade now depends on trade finance — letters of credit, supply-chain financing, guarantees, digital clearing platforms and derivatives that allow exporters and importers to transact across borders. That means the real engine of world trade is balance sheets, not factories.

Behind every shipment sits a credit assessment. Behind every container, an exchange rate. Behind every supply chain, a network of correspondent banks.

Yet this backbone is becoming more volatile, disproportionately harming developing economies. Dollar funding shortages, currency depreciation, sanctions compliance, and risk-weighted capital norms have already narrowed the number of banks willing to support trade in Africa, South Asia and parts of Latin America.

Now, climate change is accelerating the squeeze.

Climate shocks reshaping financial risk, trade flows

As climate impacts intensify through storms, heatwaves, droughts and commodity disruptions, they are increasingly priced into financial markets. Banks tighten risk models. In-



urance costs spike. Export guarantees shrink. Countries facing repeated climate shocks lose creditworthiness, limiting their access to trade finance precisely when they need it most.

According to UNCTAD, severe weather events are heightening the risk of defaults in agriculture and commodity industries. In nations vulnerable to climate impacts, currency volatility is increasing hedging expenses. Financial institutions are re-evaluating the feasibility of providing loans to exporters in regions with elevated risk.

This creates a dangerous feedback loop: Climate shocks weaken financial stability → tighter trade finance → constrained export capacity → slower growth → even higher vulnerability to climate impacts. For many developing countries, this is already visible in rising costs of letters of credit, reduced access to dollar clearing, and a shrinking pool of banks willing to process their trade transactions.

Divided trading system emerges

Global trade may seem strong, but UNCTAD cautions about a divided world: Nations with solid financial systems, reserve currencies and developed capital markets maintain steady trade, while those grappling with climate instability and financial marginalisation face higher costs, reduced trade, and greater economic shocks.

The green transition risks widening this divide. Exporters without access to affordable trade finance cannot upgrade production, meet green standards, buy cleaner equipment, or integrate into low-carbon global value chains. A climate-aligned future, UNCTAD ar-

gues, will be determined not just by energy choices but by who controls the financial plumbing of trade.

Climate-stressed future demands financial reform

UNCTAD's report makes a blunt point: the climate crisis is now a financial risk, not just an environmental one, and it is reshaping world trade from below.

To stabilise the system, it called for:

Expanded public trade-finance guarantees for climate-vulnerable economies

Multilateral development banks to provide counter-cyclical liquidity for trade

Reforms to derisk currency volatility for developing countries

Greater regional trade-finance platforms beyond dollar-based systems

Global rules to ensure green standards do not become new barriers to trade

Without such reforms, global trade will become increasingly fragmented, not because supply chains fail, but because finance fails first.

Illusion of resilience

The world sees ships moving and containers flowing. Trade looks healthy. Markets appear stabilised.

But UNCTAD warned that beneath this surface lies an increasingly fragile financial scaffolding strained by climate shocks, currency swings and liquidity pressures. If the financial system behind trade buckles, the entire structure could tilt, it indicated.

The next global trade disruption, UNCTAD suggested, may not come from geopolitics or logistics, but from the world's uneven ability to withstand climate-driven financial stress. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Europeans accuse Putin of feigning interest in peace after talks with US envoys

KYIV, Dec 3: Ukrainian and European officials accused Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday of feigning interest in peace efforts after five hours of talks with US envoys at the Kremlin produced no breakthrough.

The Russian leader "should end the bluster and the bloodshed and be ready to come to the table and to support a just and lasting peace," said UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybaha urged Putin to "stop wasting the world's time."

The remarks reflect the high tensions and gaping gulf that remain between Russia on one side and Ukraine and its European allies on the other over how to end a war that Moscow started when it invaded its neighbour nearly four years ago.

A day earlier, Putin accused the Europeans of sabotaging the US-led peace efforts — and warned that, if provoked, Russia would be ready for war with Europe.

Since Moscow invaded Ukraine in 2022, European governments, along with the US, have spent billions of dollars to support Kyiv financially and militarily. Under President Donald Trump, however, the US has tempered its support — and instead made a push to end the



war. On Wednesday, the Kremlin spokesman said he wouldn't discuss the substance of the talks but pushed back on any suggestion that Putin had rejected the US peace plan. Where the peace talks go from here depends largely on whether the Trump administration decides to increase the pressure on Russia or on Ukraine to make concessions.

Unclear where peace talks go now
A US peace proposal that became public last month was criticised for being tilted heavily toward Moscow because it granted some of the Kremlin's core demands that Kyiv has rejected as nonstarters.

Many European leaders worry that if Russia gets what it wants in Ukraine, it will have free rein to threaten their countries, which already have faced incursions from Russian drones and fighter jets, and an alleged widespread sabotage campaign.

Putin met on Tuesday in Moscow with Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner. The Russian and American sides agreed not to disclose the substance of the talks, but at least one major hurdle to a settlement — the fate of four Ukrainian regions Russia partially seized and occupies and claims as its own — remains. After the talks, Yuri

Ushakov, a senior adviser to Putin, told reporters that "so far, a compromise hasn't been found" on the issue of territory, without which, he said, the Kremlin sees "no resolution to the crisis."

Ukraine has ruled out giving up territory that Russia has captured. Asked whether peace was closer or further away after these talks, Ushakov said: "Not further, that's for sure." "But there's still a lot of work to be done, both in Washington and in Moscow," he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that it was "not correct" to say that Putin had rejected the US peace plan. He declined to comment further on the talks.

"We're deliberately not going to add anything," he said. "It's understood that the quieter these negotiations are conducted, the more productive they will be."

Europeans step up assistance for Ukraine

Foreign ministers from European NATO countries, meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, showed little patience with Moscow.

"What we see is that Putin has not changed any course. He's pushing more aggressively on the battlefield," Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said. (AP)

Munir deliberately 'igniting tensions' with Afghanistan: Imran Khan

LAHORE, Dec 3: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Wednesday claimed that army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir's policies are "disastrous" for the country and accused him of deliberately "igniting tensions" with Afghanistan.

The 73-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician made the remarks in a social media post a day after his sister, Dr Uzma Khan, met him at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail after more than a month following Shehbaz Sharif's government's "special permission".

"Asim Munir's policies are disastrous for Pakistan. Because of his policies, terrorism has spiralled out of control that grieves me deeply," Khan said in an X post in Urdu.

"Asim Munir has no concern for Pakistan's national interests. He is doing all this merely to please Western powers. He deliberately ignited tensions with Afghanistan so that he could be seen internationally as a so-called 'mujahid' (Islamic fighter)," Khan said.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder said he opposed "drone attacks and military operations against own people in the country which he said would only fuel more terrorism".

"Munir first threatened Afghans, then expelled

refugees from Pakistan and carried out drone strikes whose consequences we now face in the form of rising terrorism," Khan claimed. Calling Munir a "mentally unstable man", Khan alleged his "moral bankruptcy has led to the complete collapse of the Constitution and rule of law in Pakistan".

Khan claimed that on Munir's orders, he and his wife have been "imprisoned in fabricated cases and subjected to the worst form of psychological torture".

"I have been kept in complete solitary confinement, locked inside a cell with no contact with a single human being for four weeks. I was kept entirely cut off from the outside world, and even the basic necessities guaranteed under the jail manual have been taken away from us," he said.

Khan said despite clear directions of the high court, his meetings with political colleagues were first banned, and now even access to his lawyers and family has been stopped.

"Pick up any human rights charter, psychological torture is considered 'torture' and is deemed even more severe than physical torture. My sister Noreen Niazi was dragged on the road simply for demanding her legitimate right to meet me," he said. (PTI)

India sends mobile field hospital, over 70 medical personnel to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 3: India has sent a mobile field hospital and over 70 medical personnel to Sri Lanka as part of its continuing humanitarian assistance following the devastating floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah, the Indian mission here said on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka has been grappling with widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse, leaving several districts isolated and severely straining the country's disaster-response capacity.

As of Tuesday, 465 people have been killed, with 366 missing, in catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.

The Indian High Commission in a social media post said India has sent a "rapidly deployable field hospital" along with over 70 medical personnel to provide urgently required healthcare support in disaster-affected areas.



Citing a social media post by PRO Defence Jammu, it said an Indian Air Force C-17 Globemaster aircraft airlifted the para field hospital, along with equipment and 73 medical personnel from Agra, and landed in Colombo on Tuesday evening to augment ongoing relief efforts.

IAF Mi-17 helicopters have also been operating continuously, airlifting more than eight tonnes of relief material and evacuating 65 survivors, including foreign nationals, critically ill patients and a pregnant woman.

Indian rescue teams are also conducting operations across multiple sites, the mission said.

In Badulla on Tuesday, a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team recovered another body in an "exceptionally difficult" operation, with remains located beneath layers of compacted debris.

Search efforts at the site are continuing with "determination and compassion," it said.

NDRF teams deployed in the Sedawatta and Nadeegama areas near Colombo have rescued more than 43 people so far, and continue to save those trapped in floodwaters ranging between 8 and 10 feet, the High Commission said in a social media post on Tuesday.

Under "Operation Sagar Bandhu", Indian teams are prioritising the evacuation of the most vulnerable to ensure every life is brought to safety, it said. (PTI)

UK medical team joins effort to treat Bangladesh's critically ill ex-PM Khaleda Zia

DHAKA, Dec 3: A four-member specialist medical team from the UK arrived in Bangladesh on Wednesday to assist in the treatment of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who remains in a critical condition in a private hospital here.

The delegation, led by Dr Richard Buell, visited Evercare Hospital soon after arrival and reviewed the condition of the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, news portal tbsnews.net reported.

The UK doctors also held an initial round of discussions with the local medical team treating her, it said, quoting hospital sources.

Buell arrived in Dhaka in the morning, BNP media cell member Shayrul Kabir Khan was quoted as saying by the state-run BSS news agency.

Khan hoped the arrival of foreign specialists will mark significant progress in Zia's ongoing medical care.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's interim government directed Army and Air Force helicopters to conduct test landings near the hospital where Zia is undergoing treatment.

A message from Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' Office said the "experimental landings and takeoffs would be carried out between 1200 and 1600 hours" on Thursday at two open fields near Evercare Hospital under the Special Security Force (SSF) protocol, news portal bdnews24.com reported. The interim government on Monday declared Zia a "very, very important person", enabling the deployment of SSF for her protection. The Chief Adviser's Office urged the public "to refrain from any kind of propaganda or confusion" regarding the drills.

The directive coincided with the arrival of a four-member UK specialist team led by Dr Richard Buell, which reviewed the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson's condition and consulted the local medical team treating her.

They also held an initial round of discussions with the local medical team treating her, it said, quoting hospital sources.

According to vernacular daily Pratidin, Buell is a professor of intensive care medicine at King's College London and a consultant in intensive care medicine at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

The UK-based experts are in Dhaka to help formulate an advanced treatment plan and provide recommendations in coordination with the medical board.

Another team of Chinese specialists is scheduled to arrive later in the day. A Chinese medical team had already reached Dhaka on Monday and joined the medical board supervising Zia's treatment. The board is led by Prof Shahabuddin Talukder.

Zia's personal physician and BNP standing committee member Dr AZM Zahid told reporters on Tuesday that she is "maintaining the treatment" being administered despite her critical state.

He, however, reiterated that there was no scope to take the former premier abroad at this stage.

Hossain said India, China, the US, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan have also extended their medical assistance.

Meanwhile, in a rare joint public visit, the chiefs of three armed services met the ailing former prime minister at the hospital on Tuesday.

Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Navy Chief Admiral Mohammad Nazmul Hassan, and Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan vis-



ited Zia at Evercare Hospital, the military's media wing said in a brief statement.

According to news portal bdnews24.com, their vehicles were seen entering the hospital's main gate around 9 pm. The three service chiefs stayed inside briefly and left shortly after 9:20 pm.

Quoting Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) media cell member Shairul Kabir Khan, the state-run BSS news agency said the chiefs spoke with Zia's family members and her medical team, and offered prayers for her recovery. Later in the night, Jamaat-e-Islami chief Shafiqur Rahman also visited the 80-year-old ailing BNP chairperson.

The three-time prime minister was admitted to the private hospital on November 23 after being diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs.

She was moved to the coronary care unit four days later as her complications worsened.

Her condition deteriorated further, and she was placed on ventilation on Sunday night, BNP Vice-Chairman Advocate Ahmed Aazam Khan had said.

Security was tightened around Zia on early Tuesday. She is currently staying in a cabin on the fourth floor, where surrounding cabins have been vacated as part of heightened security protocols.

Special prayers for Zia's recovery are being held across Bangladesh, including in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chattogram, Barishal, Sylhet and Mymensingh, by BNP units and supporters.

Many supporters also took to social media to post prayers and messages wishing her a swift recovery.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters late Monday that Zia's son and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, who has been living in self-exile in London for over a decade, "will return to Bangladesh soon".

His remarks followed a meeting of the BNP's top decision-making body, which also discussed the current political situation and strategies for the upcoming election campaign. BNP has re-emerged as the frontrunner in Bangladesh's changed political landscape after a student-led violent street protest toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5, 2024.

According to BNP leaders, Rahman, who has been in London since 2008, is awaiting the issuance of a new Bangladeshi passport, as he is unwilling to use a one-time travel pass offered by the interim government. At a press conference on Monday, Election Commission Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said Rahman is not registered as a voter in Bangladesh but may do so if permitted by the EC. (PTI)

1-year-old was among 159 killed in Hong Kong apartment fires

HONG KONG, Dec 3: The death toll of Hong Kong's high-rise apartment blaze rose to 159 on Wednesday, as authorities arrested six people on suspicion of deactivating some fire alarms during maintenance work at the housing complex.

The youngest person who died in the fire was a 1-year-old infant, police said. The oldest was 97.

Police said they have completed a search for bodies inside all seven of the eight high-rise residential towers ravaged in the fire that first broke out last Wednesday and took until Friday to be extinguished. About 30 people were still reported missing. "We have not finished our work yet," Commissioner of Police Joe Chow told reporters, adding that officials will continue to search through piles of fallen bamboo scaffolding to check if any remains or bodies were buried there.

The deadly blaze broke out at Wang Fuk Court, in the northern suburban district of Tai Po, which was undergoing a monthslong

renovation project with buildings covered by bamboo scaffolding and green netting.

Police and the city's anti-corruption body said Tuesday that they had arrested 15 people as authorities probe corruption and negligence in relation to the renovation work. Substandard netting covering scaffolding erected outside the towers and foam boards installed on windows were found to have aided the fire's rapid spread, authorities said earlier this week.

Police said Wednesday that six people who allegedly deactivated some fire alarms at the housing complex during the renovation works were arrested on suspicion of making false representations to the fire services department. Residents and officials have said that some fire alarms in the buildings failed to sound when the fire broke out, though it was not clear how widespread that problem was within the complex.

The initial cause of the fire was still under investigation. (AP)

Pete Hegseth faces deepening scrutiny from Congress over boat strikes

WASHINGTON, Dec 3: Pete Hegseth barely squeaked through a grueling Senate confirmation process to become Secretary of Defence earlier this year, facing lawmakers wary of the Fox News Channel host and sceptical of his capacity, temperament and fitness for the job.

Just three months later, he quickly became embroiled in Signalgate as he and other top US officials used the popular Signal messaging application to discuss pending military strikes in Yemen.

And now, in what may be his most career-defining moment yet, Hegseth is confronting questions about the use of military force after a special operations team reportedly attacked survivors of a strike on an alleged drug boat off the coast of Venezuela. Some lawmakers and legal experts say the second strike would have violated the laws of armed conflict.

"These are serious charges, and that's the reason we're going to have special oversight," said Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The scrutiny surrounding Hegseth's brass leadership style is surfacing what has long been brewing: discontent in Congress

over President Donald Trump's choice to helm the US military. And it's posing a potentially existential moment for Hegseth as the congressional committees overseeing the military launch an investigation amid mounting calls from Democratic senators for his resignation.

Hegseth vowed a warrior culture, but lawmakers take issue

Since working to become the defence secretary, Hegseth has vowed to bring a "warrior culture" to the US government's most powerful and expensive department, from rebranding it as the Department of War to essentially discarding the rules that govern how soldiers conduct themselves when lives are on the line.

Hegseth on Tuesday cited the "fog of war" in defending the follow-up strike, saying that there were explosions and fire and that he did not see survivors in the water when the second strike was ordered and launched. He chided those second-guessing his actions as being part of the problem.

Yet the approach to the operation was in line with the direction of the military under Hegseth, a former infantry officer with the Army National Guard, part of a post-Sept. 11 generation, who was

deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and earned Bronze Stars.

During a speech in September, he told an unusual gathering of top military brass whom he had summoned from all corners of the globe to the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia that they should not "fight with stupid rules of engagement."

"We untie the hands of our warfighters to intimidate, demoralise, hunt and kill the enemies of our country," he said. "No more politically correct and overbearing rules of engagement, just common sense, maximum lethality and authority for warfighters."

But now lawmakers and military and legal experts say the Sept. 2 attack borders on illegal military action.

"Somebody made a horrible decision. Somebody needs to be held accountable," said Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican who in January held out support for Hegseth until only moments before casting a crucial vote for his confirmation.

"Secretary Talk Show Host may have been experiencing the fog of war, but that doesn't change the fact that this was an extrajudicial killing amounting to murder or a war crime," said Sen. Chris Van



Hollen, D-Md. "He must resign."

Rep. Don Bacon, a Republican who served 30 years of active duty in the Air Force, finishing his career at the rank of brigadier general, said he hasn't been a fan of Hegseth's leadership. "I don't think he was up to the task," Bacon said.

Will Hegseth keep Trump's support?

Trump, a Republican, has largely stood by his defence secretary, among the most important Cabinet-level positions. But the decisions by Wicker, alongside House Armed Services Chair Mike

said at the start of the week. "Others can make those evaluations."

But Hegseth also has strong allies on Capitol Hill, and it remains unclear how much Republicans would actually be willing to push back on the president, especially when they have spent the first year of his administration yielding to his various demands.

Vice President JD Vance, who cast a rare tiebreaking vote to confirm Hegseth, has vigorously defended him in the attack. And Sen. Eric Schmitt, another close ally to Trump, dismissed criticism of Hegseth as "nonsense" and part of an effort to undermine Trump's focus on Central and South America.

"He's not part of the Washington elite," said Schmitt, R-Mo. "He's not a think tanker that people thought Trump was going to pick. ... And so, for that reason and others, they just, they don't like him."

Tension between some Republican lawmakers and the Pentagon has been rising for months. Capitol Hill has been angered by recent moves to restrict how defence officials communicate with lawmakers and the slow pace of information on Trump's campaign to destroy boats carrying drugs off the coast of Venezuela.

As he defends his job, Hegseth has spoken to both Wicker and Rogers, the top lawmakers overseeing the military. Rogers said he was "satisfied" with Hegseth after that conversation, while Wicker said that he told Hegseth that he would like him to testify to Congress.

Hegseth at first tried to brush aside the initial report about the strike by posting a photo of the cartoon character Franklin the Turtle firing on a boat from a helicopter, but that only inflamed criticism of him and angered lawmakers who felt he was not taking the allegations seriously.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York called Hegseth a "national embarrassment," adding the defence secretary's social media post of the cartoon turtle is "something no serious leader would ever think of doing."

What information will Congress get?

Later this week, the chairs of the armed services committees, along with the top Democrats on the committees, will hear private testimony from Navy Vice Adm. Frank "Mitch" Bradley, who the White House has said ordered the second strike on the survivors. (AP)

International conference on the cultural and historical legacy of Dalai Lama

Tawang becomes centre of global dialogue, says CM Khandu



ITANAGAR, Dec 3: Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said Tawang has become the "centre of a global academic dialogue" as the first-ever international conference on the cultural and historical legacy of the sixth Dalai Lama commenced in his birthplace.

Opening the event with prayers at the historic Tawang Monastery, Khandu said the conference was a "blessed beginning to honour his timeless spiritual and cultural legacy".

"Tawang, the birthplace of His Holiness the Sixth Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso, today becomes the centre of a global academic dialogue on his cultural, historical and spiritual legacy," the chief minister said in a post on X.

Born in 1683, the Dalai Lama continues to inspire humanity through his timeless teachings, poetry and compassion, the chief minister added.

The first-of-its-kind four-day conference brings together leading researchers in Tibetan literature, Buddhist studies, arts, history and an-

thropology from premier institutions across India and abroad, officials said.

Hosted by the state Karmik and Adhyatmik Affairs department, the Thubten Shedrubling Foundation, and the Centre for Cultural Research and Documentation (CCRD), the conference aims to critically examine the multifaceted legacy of the sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706/46), a figure whose life and writings have profoundly shaped Tibetan intellectual and spiritual history.

Despite the complexities surrounding his brief and extraordinary life, Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso left behind a remarkable body of poetic works composed primarily in vernacular Tibetan. His verses, often meditations on impermanence, exile and spiritual longing, continue to resonate globally.

"Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso's life was a bridge between the spiritual and the secular and his poetry is a testament to the enduring power of human expression amidst historical turmoil," a representative of the Thubten Shedrubling Foundation said. (PTI)

DIPR officers condole demise of Late Kipa Chuchu

HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Dec 3: Officers and staff of the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Naharlagun, gathered at the office on Wednesday at 1:00 PM to mourn the passing of Late Kipa Chuchu, a peon in the department, who passed away on December 2, 2025. The assembly observed two minutes of silence and offered prayers for the departed soul, seeking strength for the bereaved family to cope with the loss. Late Kipa Chuchu, son of Late Kipa Ridak, hailed from Chebang village under PO/PS Nyapin in Kurung Kumey district. Born on April 22, 1983, he joined DIPR as a peon on December 3, 2002 and served the department faithfully until his untimely demise. He is survived by his wife, one son and two daughters.

During the meeting, it was resolved to send a formal condolence message to the bereaved family, expressing deep grief at the loss and a copy of the message will also be forwarded to Kipa Yadap, wife of Late Kipa Chuchu.

Rajya Sabha MP Nabam Rebia urges relaxation of PMGSY-IV road project criteria

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 3: Rajya Sabha MP Nabam Rebia has urged the Government of India to relax the criteria for availing road projects under PMGSY-IV in Arunachal Pradesh. Raising the matter in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, Rebia warned that if the guidelines are not relaxed, a significant number of villages in the state will remain unconnected.

"As per the present guideline, a village with a population of above 250 is eligible to get road connectivity in the NE states. Only 84 villages are eligible as per this and around 500 villages will be left out," Rebia said. He appealed to the government to lower the criteria in line with the norms followed in left-wing extremism-affected regions.

"Population criteria should be lowered to 100 people and above in line with left-wing extremism-affected areas. This will help many villages to get road connections in future," Rebia added.

Dy CM Chowna Mein participates in 20th International Tipitaka Chanting Ceremony

Global spiritual congregation emphasises peace, compassion and India's Buddhist heritage

HT Correspondent

BODHGAYA, Dec 3: Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Chowna Mein, attended the inaugural session of the 20th International Tipitaka Chanting Ceremony at Bodhgaya, the sacred site of the Buddha's enlightenment. The ceremony took place beneath the revered Bodhi Tree and was attended by Union Minister for Culture & Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, venerable Sanghas, monks, nuns and delegates from over 22 countries.

Mein described the collective recitation of the Tipitaka as a "profound spiritual blessing," emphasising that it reinforces the Buddha's universal message of compassion, peace and harmony. He noted that the event embodies the principle of Vasudeva Kutumbakam "one earth, one family, one future" as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fostering global unity through the teachings of love and compassion.

Quoting PM Modi, Mein highlighted that "Buddhism is India's gift to the world," and said that the event rekindles India's commitment to preserving and promoting its Buddhist heritage globally. He also expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for recognising Pali as a Classical Language and for the repatriation of sacred Buddha relics from Thailand, Mongolia and Bhutan, which he said strengthens spiritual bonds and India's cultural diplomacy.

Highlighting Arunachal Pradesh's rich Buddhist heritage, Mein referred



to the state as the Himalayan cusp of Dhamma, where both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism flourish. He cited iconic sites such as the ancient monasteries of Tawang, the Golden Pagoda in Namsai and the 180-foot Buddha statue at Dhamma Hill, underscoring the state's ongoing commitment to preserving and promoting the Buddha's teachings.

Mein also thanked the International Tipitaka Chanting Council of India (ITCC), International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), Life of Buddhaharma Foundation International (LBDFI), the Mahabodhi Society and other partner organisations for successfully organising the global spiritual congregation. He appreciated the Arunachal Pradesh delegation, particularly the Tai Khamti community for presenting the Maha Sangha Dana to monastic delegates with traditional delicacies.

Concluding his address, Mein said the enduring chants of the Tipitaka will continue to guide humanity towards peace and the compassion of the Buddha will inspire unity across borders.

H-Spring Foundation celebrates children with special needs

Inclusive activities showcase talents and creativity in Pasighat



HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Dec 3: The Pasighat-based NGO H-Spring Foundation marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities with a vibrant celebration at its Diking centre, highlighting the creativity, talents and unique potential of Children with Special Needs (CwSNs). The event was held under the motto: "Inclusion is not a privilege, it is a right — Every Child Deserves a Spring Time."

Students, parents and teachers from SFS School, Siang Royal Academy and D Ering Memorial Govt HSS School, Pasighat, participated in the programme, which featured a wide range of artistic and creative activities. The celebrations included performances, art, craft, literary competitions and a Fancy Dress Competition themed around the children's dreams and aspirations, drawing enthusiastic applause from attendees.

Dr Yagling Perme, District Medical Officer (DMO), East Siang, who attended as the Chief Guest, emphasised the importance of awareness, empowerment and inclusion for CwSNs. He praised the children's performances and artistic displays, noting that their talents flourish when given the right support and environment. Dr Perme, along with other dignitaries, distributed prizes to winners of sports, art, craft, essay and painting competitions held for school students in Pasighat.

Chairperson of H-Spring Foundation, Dr Oimang Megu, spoke about the vision behind the centre, established on August 19, 2023, to promote inclusion, dignity, empowerment and holistic development for children with special needs and their families. She outlined the centre's focus on Early Intervention and Rehabilitation, as well as the H-Spring Integrated School. The foundation supports children with conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Speech and Language Disorders, Cerebral Palsy, Global Developmental Delay, Down Syndrome, Intellectual and Learning Disabilities and other neurological conditions.

Dr Megu also highlighted the centre's strong emphasis on academics and student engagement. Psychology students and BED Special Education trainees gain hands-on exposure through internships in early intervention, therapy observation and community engagement. The foundation collaborates with Arunachal Pradesh University, Pasighat to strengthen practical learning opportunities.

Recently, H-Spring Foundation was awarded 'Best Stall' during the 39th Statehood Day celebrations for showcasing the theme of inclusivity and empowerment of children with special needs, further reflecting its commitment to creating an enabling environment that celebrates the talents and individuality of every child.

Memo No. SMED/DMCH/VRDL/Staff/151/2023-1632

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW FOR THE FOLLOWING POST IN MEDICAL COLLEGE LEVEL VIRUS RESEARCH & DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY (VRDL) UNDER DHR AT DEPARTMENT OF MICROBIOLOGY, DIPHU MEDICAL COLLEGE & HOSPITAL, DIPHU, KARBI-ANGLONG, ASSAM

Walk-in- Interview for interested candidates are invited on purely temporary and contractual engagement at Medical College Level Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (DHR sponsored) at Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu, Karbi-Anglong, Assam for the following position :-

SL No.	Name of the Post	No. of Post	Monthly Remuneration (fixed)	Minimum Qualification	Age limit
1.	Laboratory Technician	1	20,000+ HRA	<p>Essential: B.Sc (MLT) from govt. recognized university OR 12th pass in Science and Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technician from govt. recognized university. OR High school with 5 years Lab. Experience</p> <p>Desirable : ■ Two years experience in Govt. Institutions ICMR/DHR/IDSP/CSIR/DBT/in any other project / Medical College ■ Knowledge of computer application/ data management</p> <p>Note: Preference will be given to candidates having B.Sc (MLT) over DMLT and high school with 5 years lab experience.</p>	21-30* Years Age relaxable in accordance of GOI instruction.

- Up to 05 years (five years) age relaxation for candidates with at least 02 years previous experience of working as a project staff in a VRDL or extramural research project on Virology or Microbiology in a Medical college.
- The pay band for the above mentioned post is subject to increment, as per latest DHR guidelines and receipt of funds.

Terms & Conditions:

- The post is purely temporary and is based on the tenure of the project. However, the appointment can be terminated at any time even before the end of the contract period due to any reason. In case of such premature termination, one month's notice or one month's salary in lieu of the same will be provided. The same will not hold true in case of premature termination due to performance related issues. Candidate can leave the job prematurely giving one month's notice period or one month's salary in lieu of the same. Duration of employment will be one year (12 months) extendable depending on the candidate's performance and budget grant from the funding agency. Performance will be assessed on a regular basis.
- Application and selection procedure: Interested Candidates can come for walk-in-Interview to the Administrative Block of Diphu medical College & Hospital with all the relevant documents (In original) and signed copy of curriculum vitae on 12-12-2025 at 8:30 am.
- Two recent self signed passport sized colored photographs are to be attached on signed copy of curriculum vitae.
- Qualifications and degree should be from Government recognized institution/University.
- One set of Photostat copies of ID proof and Address proof and certificates self attested must be attached with curriculum vitae.
- ***All the relevant educational qualifications and experience certificates (as per advertisement for specific post only)
- Other Instructions:
 - This is purely contractual post and as such it will not have any claim whatsoever for regulation neither in DMCH, Diphu nor at DHR/ICMR. The mere fulfillment of requisite essential qualification/ experience does not guarantee selection.
 - During the period of the project as well as on its termination, the DMCH, Diphu as well as DHR will have no legal liabilities relating to staff.
 - No TA/DA will be paid, neither for appearing in the interview nor for joining the assignment.

DIPR /D/HLT/240/4-Dec-25

Sd/-
Principal-Cum-Chief Superintendent
Diphu Medical & Hospitals, Diphu

Countries creating roadblocks in flow of talents across borders will be 'net losers': Jaishankar



NEW DELHI, Dec 3: Countries creating too many roadblocks in flow of professionals across borders will be "net losers" and India needs to convince other nations that the use of talent is for mutual benefit, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday.

His comments at an interactive session at a conclave on mobility came against the backdrop of concerns over the US's decision to impose new fees on H-1B visas in line with the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration.

"That they would be net losers if they erect too many roadblocks to the flow of talent. Particularly if you move into an era of advanced manufacturing, you will need more talent," Jaishankar said.

He was responding to a question on the larger issues linked to immigration including concerns over the H-1B visa programme.

Without naming any country, Jaishankar said India needs to convince other nations that the use of "talent across boundaries is to our mutual benefit."

"Often the people in the forefront of entrepreneurship and technology would actually make the case for mobility. It is the people who have a certain political base or a constituency to address, who may oppose it, and they will probably reach some modus vivendi eventually," he said.

Jaishankar also linked the resistance to mobility of talents in some countries to efforts to get certain companies shift their manufacturing hubs from China.

Under the H-1B visa programme, companies recruit foreign workers with specialised skills to work in the US, initially for three years that can be renewed for three more years.

Indians made up an estimated 71 per cent of all approved H-1B applications in recent years, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

"If there is pressure on jobs in many developed countries, the pressure is less because people come in, in those sectors. It is more because they allowed manufacturing to go out and you know where," Jaishankar said.

"If it becomes harder for people to travel, the work is not going to stop. If people don't travel, the work will travel," he added.

Jaishankar also spoke extensively on the importance of legal

mobility.

"In a globalised world, I think we often, when we talk of our external engagement, especially our economic engagement, we tend to really focus on trade. Now, there is nothing wrong with that," he said.

"But we often neglect work and the mobility associated with work. Just to give you a sense of what it is to which we don't pay enough attention. Last year, remittances to India were USD 135 billion. That's about roughly twice our exports to the United States," he said.

"Now, it's just the remittances. Because think of the people abroad, their own livelihood, the assets they have created there," he said.

At the same time, Jaishankar also cautioned against illegal mobility and listed possible fall out of it.

"If you look at trafficking per se, all the associated crimes, and often it leads people with agendas of various kinds, political agendas, separatist agendas, they all join up to the illegal mobility side of it," he said.

Jaishankar also highlighted how the government has been trying to address the problems of Indians living abroad.

"In the last three years, only in the Gulf, we actually have addressed 138,000 grievances using the Madad portal," he said.

The external affairs minister said India has also been extending help to Indians and Indian diaspora under the framework of Indian Community Welfare Fund.

"In the last three years, 238,000 people have benefited from the use of this Community Welfare Fund. These are people for whom we may have bought tickets back home, who had legal cases abroad. In some cases, they may have passed away, so their last rights were done," he said.

Jaishankar also highlighted the importance of mobility agreements India linked with many countries.

"Clearly today, intergovernmental agreements dealing with mobility are a very important part of our diplomacy. We have 21 such agreements in addition to which we have mobility provisions in some of the free trade agreements that we have done," he said.

"And we certainly, in many relationships, see that as actually adding a new dimension to the relationship," he added. (PTI)

MCD bypolls: BJP wins 7 wards, AAP 3, Congress opens account

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: In the first electoral contest in Delhi since February's Assembly election, the BJP fell short of expectations, winning seven of the 12 seats in the MCD bypolls, even as its main rival, the AAP, managed to secure three wards.

Congress snatched the Sangam Vihar A ward from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party held none of the 12 wards earlier, where bypolls were held on November 30. The All India Forward Bloc, backed by local heavyweight Shoaib Iqbal, opened its account with a victory in Chandni Mahal, defeating the AAP candidate.

The civic body bypolls were a litmus test for the BJP, as these were its first big electoral battle after coming to power in the capital in February.

The BJP, which previously held nine of the 12 wards, lost three of those -- Mundka, Naraina and Dakshinipuri -- to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). It, however, managed to wrest the prestigious Chandni Chowk ward back from the AAP.

Interestingly, of the seven BJP winners, six were women.

According to the State Election

Commission, the BJP secured a vote share of 45.09 per cent, while the AAP and the Congress managed to get a vote share of 34.97 per cent and 13.44 per cent respectively.

The results proved a mixed bag for the AAP, which previously held three of the 12 wards. It lost the minority-dominated Chandni Mahal and Chandni Chowk wards, while defeating the BJP in Munka, Dakshinipuri and Naraina.

AAP leaders said the results were an indicator that the BJP's fortunes are declining in Delhi, where it came to power after 27 years after winning the Assembly polls in February.

"This was a prestige test for the BJP and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. She campaigned in every ward and even distributed free domestic gas cylinders. Despite all that, the party lost two wards held by it earlier. It has failed the litmus test," AAP's Delhi unit chief Saurabh Bharadwaj told a press conference.

Former chief minister and AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal said the results of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) bypolls have



shown that public trust is returning towards his party in just 10 months, while BJP leaders, including Delhi minister Kapil Mishra, said the opposition party has lost face in Chandni Mahal and Chandni Chowk due to its "corruption" record.

During campaigning for the MCD bypolls, several BJP leaders had asserted that the party would improve its tally by winning at least 10 of the 12 wards.

The saffron party had appointed Delhi ministers as in-charges of

two wards each. The BJP lost the Mundka ward where Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa was the in-charge, while it also failed to retain the Dakshinipuri and Sangam Vihar A wards that were under the charge of Parvesh Kumar Verma. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the margin of defeat for the party was small in two wards and the results will be reviewed to find out the reasons for the loss.

The BJP won seven wards and the AAP three, while the Congress

and the Forward Bloc emerged victorious in one ward each.

BJP's Suman Kumar Gupta defeated AAP's Harsh Sharma by a margin of 1,182 votes in Chandni Chowk.

The saffron party also comfortably won the Shalimar Bagh B ward, with Anita Jain defeating AAP's Babita Rana by a margin of more than 10,000 votes.

The Shalimar Bagh B ward was vacated after BJP councillor Gupta won the Assembly polls and went on to become the chief minister.

The AAP won the Mundka and Dakshinipuri wards, while the Congress's Suresh Choudhary won the Sangam Vihar A ward by defeating the BJP's Subhajeet Gautam.

Choudhary polled 12,766 votes, while his opponent managed to get 9,138 votes.

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav thanked the party workers for the victory and extended heartfelt greetings to the people of Sangam Vihar.

BJP's Veena Asija was locked in a close fight with AAP's Seema Goyal but surged ahead to win the Ashok Vihar ward by a margin of 405 votes. (PTI)

Sonia, Oppn leaders protest against new labour codes

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: Several Opposition MPs, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, protested in Parliament House complex on Wednesday against the new labour codes and demanded their scrapping.

MPs of the Congress, DMK, TMC, Left parties, among others, participated in the protest in front of the Makar Dwar of Parliament.

Slamming the Centre, Kharge accused the Modi government of being "anti-labour, anti-worker and pro-cronies".

In a post on X after the protest by the opposition, Kharge said the Opposition parties protested against the Modi government in Parliament premises, expressing strong objection about the newly implemented labour codes.

"Some of the serious concerns in the New Codes are -- threat to job security. Layoff threshold raised from 100 to 300 workers i.e. more than 80% of factories in India can now lay off or retrench workers without government approval, reducing job security. Expansion of Fixed Term Employment (FTE) will end many permanent jobs. Companies can now hire workers on short-term contracts, avoiding long-term benefits," the Congress chief said. He further said that although the code keeps an 8-hour day on paper, states can allow 12-hour shifts through flexible scheduling. "Coupled with state-determined overtime limits, this effectively permits much longer workdays, increasing fatigue and safety risks even when labelled 'consensual'," he said.

"Workers must wait 60 days before striking, plus a 14-day cooling-off period. This prevents quick action against unsafe or unfair conditions. Requiring one union with 51% membership to be the sole negotiator sidelines smaller unions and reduces representation for diverse worker groups," Kharge said.

He pointed out that standing orders will not apply to units with fewer than 300 workers. "Basic rules on working hours, leave, and termination will not be mandatory." (PTI)

Happy with HC verdict on primary teacher appointments: Mamata

MALDA/KOLKATA, Dec 3: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday welcomed the Calcutta High Court's order setting aside a previous ruling that had annulled the appointments of 32,000 primary school teachers for alleged irregularities, calling the verdict a "humanitarian" relief for thousands of families.

The BJP, however, said the judgment has triggered "fresh questions" among unemployed youth and vowed to continue the legal battle.

A division bench, comprising justices Tapabrata Chakraborty and Reetabrata Kumar Mitra, said it is not inclined to uphold the single bench order as irregularities have not been proven in all the recruitments. These teachers were recruited in 2016.

The court maintained that the termination

of employment after nine years would have a huge impact on the primary teachers and their families.

Speaking to reporters in Malda, Banerjee said the division bench's decision brought immense relief to thousands of young teachers recruited through the 2014 Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET).

"We are happy with the court's order. It is a great relief that the jobs of these teachers are saved. We want to generate jobs and not take them away," she said.

The chief minister added, "The judges have viewed the matter from a humanitarian angle. The families of these teachers have been protected. I am happy. It is not right to run to court every time to take away someone's job."

The Supreme Court had in April can-

celled the appointment of nearly 26,000 teaching and non-teaching staff in state-run and -aided institutions after finding that the selection process was tainted.

"These (primary school) teachers were recruited through the TET of 2014," the bench noted, while making it clear that investigations into alleged irregularities may continue and that cases pertaining to reservation and other issues pending before the single bench would proceed independently.

The now-overturned order was originally passed by a single bench led by then-Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who later resigned from the judiciary and joined politics. He is currently the BJP MP from Tamluk constituency in West Bengal.

Asked about him, Banerjee declined to comment. (PTI)

Navy to showcase maritime capabilities with operational demonstration off Kerala coast

NEW DELHI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 3: The Indian naval force is set to showcase its maritime prowess and combat capabilities with a mega operational demonstration off the coast of Kerala on Wednesday, which is being held as part of the Navy Day celebrations.

President Droupadi Murmu is scheduled to attend the event at Shangumugham Beach in Thiruvananthapuram as the chief guest.

Nineteen major war vessels, including India's indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, one submarine, four fast intervention boats, and 32 aircraft — fighter jets, surveillance planes and helicopters — will be part of the show, a top naval officer said in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday.

This mega event will provide a unique opportunity to the citizens to witness various facets of Indian Navy's multi-domain operations, enhance maritime awareness among them and honour India's rich seafaring heritage, officials said.

It will bring alive the Navy's formidable combat capabilities, technological excellence, and operational readiness, while reflecting the nation's growing maritime strength and self-reliance, they added. The operational demonstration will feature coordinated manoeuvres by frontline platforms symbolising the Navy's ability to "deliver power and precision across the maritime spectrum."

The event will highlight seamless coordination of surface, sub-surface and aerial assets, reflecting the Navy's preparedness to secure India's maritime frontiers, the officials said.

The showpiece demonstration will take place as part of the celebrations to mark the Navy Day, which falls on December 4.



Addressing a press conference in Delhi ahead of it, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on Tuesday said this year's Navy Day theme is "Combat-ready, Cohesive, Atmanirbhar Navy: Safeguarding National Maritime Interests Anytime Anywhere Anyhow".

"I want to tell the many youths out there who might wonder why Navy Day is marked on December 4. It is to commemorate Indian Navy's audacious and decisive strike on Karachi on December 4, 1971, that changed the course of war," he said.

The Navy chief also said the operational demonstration at Shangumugham Beach, as part of the Navy Day celebrations, was being held there for the first time.

Last year, the operational demonstration was held at Odisha's Puri Beach, a Blue Flag Beach, and President Murmu attended it. A year prior to that, Maharashtra's Sindhudurg hosted the event.

This is in continuation of Indian Navy's effort to organise the event at a location other than major naval stations, officials said.

On Operational Demonstration 2025, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Southern Naval Command, Vice Admiral Sameer Saxena, told reporters a day ago that it will reflect the Navy's preparedness and

"ability to deliver power and precision across the maritime spectrum."

He further said Navy Day is also an "acknowledgement of the Indian Navy's role in Operation Trident in the 1971 war, and more importantly, it is a tribute to the bravery, courage and valour of our men who made the supreme sacrifice."

The 1971 India-Pakistan War started on December 3 and ended 13 days later on December 16 after the fall of Dhaka, which led to Pakistan's surrender and the creation of the country of Bangladesh from the region that was earlier known as East Pakistan.

Navy Day serves as a reminder of the naval force's "vital role" during the 1971 War. The missile boats of the Indian Navy had launched a daring attack on Karachi harbour as part of Operation Trident.

"This decisive action not only demonstrated India's maritime strength but also precision, courage and strategic brilliance," officials said.

The operational demonstration will showcase Indian Navy's state-of-the-art operational platforms and its resolve as the "preferred security partner" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) guided by the broader vision of MAHASAGAR -- Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions, they said. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, S.E.. WORKS,

**KAAC SECRETARIAT
DIPHU-782460**

No. KAAC/S.E.-W- 143 (Pt)/2025-26/241-A

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TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees fen) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. on 06/12/2025. and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or then authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any assigning reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate.

Sl. No.	Name of Works	Tender Amount (Rs)	A/A Amount (Rs)	Earnest money	Time allowed for completion
1.	Repairing/Renovation of Guwahati Karbi Bhawan, Penson Para Road, Silpukhuri, Ghty.	Rs. 62,000,00.00	Rs. 62,000,00.00	ST/SC/OBC-1% General 2%	90 days

Terms & Condition

- The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above/below as per schedule rate for building/unitary works for all division under CPWD-2020-21.
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank drill & should be attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The Contractor shall repair/re-Construction if the works executed failed doc inferior quality of works. The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair/re construction the woks
- The work must be carried on as directed by the EE (W), KAAC Diphu, Authority.
- The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender.
 - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
 - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST.
 - Council Registration.
 - Call Deposit
 - Council recipe
 - Caste Certificate
 - Pan Card/Adhaar Card
 - Account number
 - Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
 - The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer (SE), Works.
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
DIPHU

Naga groups assert need to balance history with present realities

DIMAPUR, Dec 3: The Working Committee of the Naga National Political Groups (WC-NNPGs) said the "historical realities must meet contemporary realities", cautioning apex Naga tribal bodies against what it termed "selective amnesia" at a critical juncture of Naga history.

In a detailed statement, the WC-NNPGs, composed of seven Naga groups, said most tribal hohos had actively participated in extensive consultations between 2016 and 2019, issuing joint statements as key stakeholders in the Naga political talks.

They maintained that the Agreed Position signed between NNPGs and the Centre on November 17, 2017, was the outcome of years of consultations with tribal bodies, churches, prayer groups and village custodians, calling it a "refined political thought process".

The group recalled that the Centre invited the NNPGs for formal negotiations in October 2017, during which the Naga delegation adopted a "calm, practical" approach.

All agreed points, it said, were formally recorded and shared between the two sides to ensure clarity and avoid historical distortions.

The WC-NNPGs also criticised what it described as the breakdown of communication after the signing of the Framework Agreement between the Centre and NSCN-IM on August 3, 2015.

It claimed that NSCN (IM) "cut off all communication lines" with the Forum for Naga Reconciliation, tribal bodies and civil society, leaving Nagas "in the dark about their political future".

Warning against "emotional rhetoric" at a time when thousands of educated Naga youth are entering a highly competitive world, the WC-NNPGs said it is "not a time to lecture Nagas on Naga history", acknowledging that total Naga integration is "not possible at this time". Reiterating the core principle of the 2017 agreement, the group said the right of Nagas to determine their future must be balanced "with due regard to contemporary political realities".

Following the ceasefire agreement in 1997 and over 80 rounds of talks, the Centre inked the Framework Agreement with the NSCN-IM in 2015.

Parallel talks with the WC-NNPGs led to the signing of the Agreed Position on November 17, 2017.

The Centre had declared that the Naga talks with both groups had concluded in October 2019. While the NNPGs have expressed willingness to accept a "workable" solution and continue negotiations, the NSCN-IM has remained firm on its demands for a separate flag, constitution, and the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas, which have been rejected by the Centre. This has delayed a final solution to the decades-old Naga Political Issue. (PTI)



Centre pushing tech democratisation, says Union Min Ashwini Vaishnaw

SHILLONG, Dec 3: Union Electronics & Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Wednesday said the Centre is pushing to democratise technology and will ensure equitable access to emerging digital tools.

Addressing the Regional AI Impact Conference in Shillong virtually, he said the central government has allocated Rs 10,300 crore over five years to build an inclusive artificial intelligence ecosystem.

He said a Common Compute Facility with more than 38,000 graphics processing units (GPUs) -- electronic circuits that can perform mathematical calculations at high speed -- has been created to offer affordable access to high-end AI resources, along with 3,800 datasets and over 250 open-source models to support innovators.

Vaishnaw said India aims to train one million people in AI skills, which will be critical for future employability.

As part of this push, 570 Data & AI Labs are being set up nation-



wide, including one at NIELIT Shillong, and upcoming labs at ITI Shillong, Shillong Polytechnic and ITI Tura in the state.

Speaking at the conference, Meghalaya Principal Secretary Sampath Kumar said the event provides opportunities for collaboration in AI and aligns with the state's goal of rising to the top 10

in national development rankings.

He highlighted Meghalaya's 75 per cent forest cover and the use of predictive modelling, in partnership with Yale University, to identify deforestation risks.

This led to the Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme, which provides annual income support to forest owners to encour-

age conservation.

Kumar said Meghalaya's demographic strength - 51 per cent of its population is below 20 - positions the state to build an AI-driven economy and potentially emerge as an "AI Factory" in sync with the region's semiconductor ecosystem.

Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Electronics & IT, Sudeep Shrivastava, said the IndiaAI Mission, launched in 2024 with an outlay of Rs 10,371 crore, focuses on building a robust and inclusive AI framework under seven pillars, including compute infrastructure, foundation models, datasets, start-ups, FutureSkills and safe AI.

He said Meghalaya was selected for the first Regional Summit due to its leadership in digital governance, citing initiatives such as paperless Assembly proceedings and the e-District service delivery model.

With over half its population below 21 and strong hydropower and climate advantages, the state is well placed to attract knowledge-based investments, he added. (PTI)

AI will play defining role in governance, citizen empowerment in coming years: Meghalaya CM

SHILLONG, Dec 3: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday emphasised that artificial intelligence (AI) will play a defining role in governance, development and citizen empowerment in the coming years.

Addressing the Regional AI Impact Conference here, Sangma said it was an honour for the state to host the meet, adding that Meghalaya is steadily emerging as a leader in the IT sector in the Northeast and advancing its capabilities in AI.

"AI is the future. It is a technology that will reshape governance, accelerate development and empower citizens like never before," he said. The chief minister highlighted the state's success in leveraging technology for governance, pointing out that data-driven interventions have helped reduce the Maternal Mortality Rate by nearly 50 per cent.

Technology has also enabled the mapping of rivers, springs, watersheds, forests and other key natural resources, he added.

Sangma said firms operating out of the Shillong IT Park are already using AI to develop predictive models in agriculture and to support Fortune 500 companies in their tech transitions - a reflection



of the growing confidence global industries have in Meghalaya's talent pool.

He said technology has empowered the government to make timely, informed decisions and targeted interventions, and expressed pride in Meghalaya leading the Regional AI Impact Conference for the Northeast.

Stressing the need for a robust ecosystem built through collaboration between the government, industry, academia and domain experts, Sangma said Meghalaya recently established its first State Government Engineering College.

Calling for investment in advanced skills such as AI, quantum computing and frontier technologies, he said the state's young population and strong institutional support place it in a favourable position to lead the region's AI transformation. (PTI)

Meghalaya youth organisation seeks justice for teachers hit by 2008-09 recruitment row

SHILLONG, Dec 3: An influential youth organisation in Meghalaya has sought a fresh review of teachers declared "tainted" in the 2008-09 lower primary recruitment case after the Meghalaya High Court quashed proceedings against the key accused, including a former minister in the MDA government, in the alleged 'white ink scam'.

The LP teacher recruitment exercise had triggered statewide controversy after allegations surfaced that score sheets were tampered with using white ink to alter marks and favour certain candidates.

A CBI inquiry, followed by state-level investigations, identified a group of candidates as "tainted", leading to cancellations of appointments, terminations and stalled careers for many.

The scandal also led to FIRs and court cases naming senior education department officials and a former education minister, Ampareen Lyngdoh, as accused.

Over the years, multiple reviews were conducted, and a segment of candidates classified as "untainted" were reinstated.

In 2021, the government reinstated around 187 candidates after a verification exercise.

However, those labelled



"tainted" continued to face disqualification and stigma, even as the legal process dragged on for more than a decade.

The case took a decisive turn on September 4, 2025, when the Meghalaya High Court quashed all criminal proceedings.

The court held that the prosecution had failed to produce reliable evidence of manipulation, and found no proof of white-ink usage or tampering in the scoresheets.

It observed that signatures and tabulation records were consistent,

of the allegations has collapsed, why must the affected teachers continue to suffer?" he said.

Synrem said the government's "continued silence" on whether the "tainted" tag still holds had left many candidates in uncertainty.

"Hundreds lost their livelihood and dignity because of this tag. The state cannot remain silent when the court itself has found no prima facie case," he added.

He noted that while some were reinstated earlier, "many more continue to live in uncertainty, unemployment and social stigma", and that the absence of a clear government position has pushed deserving individuals into "legal and administrative limbo".

The council urged the government to "take cognisance of the HC judgment and initiate a complete re-examination" of all cases linked to the 2008-09 recruitment.

It also called for a time-bound 'review and reinstatement committee' under the Directorate of School Education and Literacy to process cases transparently.

"The court's findings warrant a full reassessment of the so-called 'tainted' classification and the restoration of dignity and employment to those wrongfully punished," Synrem said. (PTI)

Three militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 3: Security forces arrested three militants belonging to various proscribed outfits from two districts of Manipur, police said on Wednesday.

During an operation, a 25-year-old active cadre of the banned United National Liberation Front (Koireng) was apprehended from Sagolband area in Imphal West district on Tuesday, they said.

The security personnel arrested a member of the outlawed Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) from Langthabal Kunja Makha in the district on Monday, a police officer said.

Besides, an active cadre of the Peoples' Liberation Army was nabbed from Waikhong Kangsam Leikai area in Kakching district on Monday, the officer said. Further investigation is underway. (PTI)

50-hectare urban forest opened in Mokokchung for urban connection to nature

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 3: A 50-hectare Nagar Van Merakum Tzuin (urban forest) was officially inaugurated in Mokokchung village under Mokokchung district on Wednesday, marking a significant step in urban biodiversity conservation and environmental education in the region.

Nagaland principal chief conservator of forests Vedpal Singh, in his inaugural address, elaborated on the core objectives of the central Nagar Van scheme.

He emphasised that the initiative aims to boost education, raise awareness, and reconnect urban populations with forest ecosystems, addressing the increasing

disconnect between humans and nature. "The success of this project lies in the collaborative effort of the village and the department," Singh stated, highlighting the model's potential for replication across Nagaland and beyond.

He also suggested establishing a monitoring board to track the site's biodiversity status and commended Mokokchung village for donating the land and the Mokokchung forest division for the timely execution of the project.

In her keynote address, Dr Sentitula, DFO, Mokokchung forest division, detailed the various features of the site, including eco-trails, a QR-coded "living lab" for plant information, a Bible theatre,

and a bio-amphitheatre.

Mokokchung DC Ajit Kumar Verma lauded the project as futuristic and stressed the importance of urban forests amidst current environmental challenges.

He urged the village council and the forest department to develop a sustainable, revenue-generating model for the project's long-term maintenance, given with limited government resources.

Rongsenlema, conservator of forest (northern territorial circle), explained the objectives behind urban forest development.

Mapuyanger, chairman, Mokokchung Village Council, reiterated the village's commitment to supporting the project.

Irish art installation 'Danu' showcased at Hornbill Festival

HT Correspondent

KOHIMA, Dec 3: A striking Irish public art installation titled 'Danu' is on display at the ongoing Hornbill Festival in Naga heritage village, Kisama, bringing a unique blend of mythology, craftsmanship and cultural symbolism to festival visitors.

Created by Irish artists Lisa Sweeney, Richard Babington and Johnny O'Reilly, along with Indian artist Sanjiv Saha, the installation draws inspiration from the Celtic figure Danu, representing themes of motherhood, resilience and strength. The design also incorporates motifs linked to Ireland's ancient seasonal festivals and traditions associated with Brigid, one of Ireland's female patron saints.

First exhibited in Kolkata, the artwork was crafted using iron, wood, bamboo and fabric, with a small pool of water at its base to evoke Danu's deep connection to rivers and the life-giving force of water. The piece also features St. Brigid's Cross, symbolising protection and blessing.

Supported by the Embassy of Ireland in New Delhi, the installation marks a notable cultural collaboration. 'Danu' is being showcased at Hornbill Festival 2025 in partnership with the



Nagaland government and the state Task Force for Music & Arts.

Meanwhile, the third day of the 26th edition of the Hornbill Festival on Wednesday witnessed a vibrant array of cultural presentations.

Hosted by deputy chief minister Y Patton, the cultural show was attended by Ambassador of Bhutan Jigme Thinlye Namgyal, Air Marshal Surat Singh, Lt. Gen Mohit Wadhwa, GOC, 101 Area, Simon Lee Broughton, founding editor of

Songlines, and other dignitaries.

The day featured a rich showcase of Naga cultural dances and folk traditions of various tribes, each reflecting the unique identity and heritage of the tribes.

Day 3 of the Hornbill Festival offered a captivating journey through the cultural richness, traditions and storytelling heritage of the Naga tribes, leaving visitors with an immersive and memorable experience.

Tripura CM for air connectivity to 3 Shakti Pithas in Northeast

AGARTALA, Dec 3: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has emphasised the need to introduce a Northeast tourism train and an app to make travel across the region more convenient for visitors, an official release said.

Speaking at the final meeting of the high-level task force on tourism promotion formed by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) here on Tuesday, Saha said major festivals such as the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland and the Unity Promo Fest in Tripura have been playing a key role in boosting tourism across the region, the Information and Cultural Affairs (ICA) department said in a statement on Tuesday. "These events are playing an important role in the development of tourism in the Northeast as a whole", he said. It said, "Saha proposed to bring all religious tourism sites, especially three Shakti Pithas in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, under air connectivity." (PTI)

E-Sports championship gets flagship event status at Nagaland's Hornbill Festival

KOHIMA, Dec 3: The Department of Youth Resources and Sports (YRS) in the Nagaland government on Wednesday announced that the Hornbill E-Sports Championship Season 2 will be held as a flagship event of the ongoing Hornbill Festival.

Addressing a press conference here, YRS director Kethosituo Sekhose said the event scheduled for December 8 and 9 at Indira Gandhi Stadium Kohima, will feature expanded game titles, increased prize money and the highest-ever e-sports participation recorded in the state.

He said it is being organised in collaboration with the E-Sports Association of Nagaland (ESAN). He said Season 2 would be bigger than last year, noting that the number of registered participants has reached 512 athletes and teams, with an additional 240 individual competitors.

According to Sekhose, the prize money has been raised from ₹ 6 lakh to ₹ 10 lakh. The first edition last year drew more than 1.5 lakh online viewers and over 500 on-ground spectators, he said.

The championship will feature the following titles: BGMI (Battlegrounds Mobile India) - 16 has qualifying teams including one from Nagaland, three from Manipur, seven from Assam, one from Bihar, one from Mizoram and two from West Bengal will compete for the prize pool of ₹ 4,50,000.

Moba Legends 5v5, a new addition has eight teams with two from Nagaland, one each from Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Manipur & Kerala and two from Assam. Its prize pool is ₹ 3,00,000 and Diamonds worth ₹ 1,00,000.

E-Cheer with 11 athletes has a prize pool of ₹ 75,000, E-Football with 14 athletes has a prize pool of ₹ 1,00,000 and FC 25 with 60 registered players has a prize pool of ₹ 75,000.

Sekhose noted that esports featured for the first time at the Khelo India Youth Games, where a Nagaland

athlete won gold in E-Football.

ESAN president Thejavituo Sekhose said the qualifiers were conducted online in October and November, with matches broadcast on YouTube. Finalists have been selected for the LAN finals, he said.

YRS director Sekhose said the selection process was fair and transparent, adding that no state quota was applied to encourage participation from outside Nagaland. He said such participation would promote sports tourism in the state.

Following the closing ceremony, the department will host the Esports Music Festival, featuring: Polar Lights & Abdon Mech of Nagaland, Guru Gee from Mizoram and Zephyrtone from Pune.

Sekhose said e-sports continues to grow rapidly worldwide, especially after being recognised by the International Olympic Committee as an Olympic discipline.

He described e-sports as a "billion-dollar industry" and said Nagaland and Mizoram were identified as India's fastest-growing e-sports states at the All India Game Developers Conference held in Hyderabad.

He said several youths in the state are engaged in game development, design, and esports-related services.

The department, he said, is exploring the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Esports, envisioned as a hub for game developers, athletes, designers, marketers, and digital advertisers.

Sekhose said such a facility would help local youth gain industry exposure without leaving the state.

Responding to questions on whether e-sports could negatively impact physical sports, the Director said esports athletes require physical fitness, adding that advanced e-sports facilities, particularly in East Asia, include gyms and detox support for players.

The proposed Centre of Excellence, he said, would incorporate similar support systems. (PTI)

Affordable housing project at Tripura's Akhaura to be completed by May 2026: official



AGARTALA, Dec 3: The affordable housing project at Akhaura near Agartala will be completed by May 2026, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The foundation stone for Light House Projects in six states, including the one at Akhaura, was laid in 2021 by PM Narendra Modi. Barring Akhaura, the projects in the five other states have been completed.

As part of the projects, houses are being built with shortlisted alternative technologies suitable to the geo-climatic and hazard conditions of the region for economically weaker sections.

"The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is the nodal agency of the Light House Project. It has engaged a construction firm to complete the work, but it got delayed because of various reasons," state Urban Development Secretary Abhishek Singh said.

"The project fell short of funds because additional piling was required to be carried out, which was not included in the original DPR. Besides, there were issues regarding labour and materials. Because of the lack of funds, the construction agency had slowed the work. Now, the issue has been resolved as the Centre sanctioned an additional fund of Rs 40 crore following persuasion of Chief Minister Manik Saha," he said.

Singh said the top officials of the construction company recently visited the state and assured that the project will be completed by May.

He said of the 500 beneficiaries, around 450 have paid the full amount for the flats. (PTI)

As an actor and producer, my hats are different: Priyanka Chopra Jonas on backing 'Born Hungry'

The actor in Priyanka Chopra Jonas wants to see if she can navigate different genres, action, comedy and drama, and the producer avatar sees her wanting to back stories that touch a personal chord and give newcomers a chance.

And that's what, she says, propelled her to back the documentary "Born Hungry" on celebrity chef Sash Simpson.

Currently streaming on JioHotstar in India, the documentary traces the life of Sash Simpson -- from being abandoned as a young boy in India to his adoption in Canada and his eventual success as a renowned chef.

It is produced by Priyanka's banner Purple Pebble Pictures along with Barry Avrich's Melbar Entertainment Group.

"As an actor and as a producer, my hats are kind of different. And my brain splits into two. I think as an actor, I'm constantly trying to challenge myself. I want to be able to see if I can navigate different genres and if I can do action, comedy, drama... I love challenging myself and that is why my acting career has had variety.

"As a producer, I'm empathetic and our ethos is a lot

around wanting to give opportunities to newer filmmakers or filmmakers that want to achieve something that they haven't been able to or are kind of hitting a wall somewhere. My production side kind of comes from what personally moves me," Priyanka told PTI in an interview from Los Angeles.

The story of "Born Hungry", the actor said, came to her in 2023 via Barry who wanted her company to amplify Sash Simpson's story.

"I just remember watching it myself and us, as a company, and just being so moved by not just his story, but the narrative that the director had created. We really wanted to get behind it to maximise the reach of this film. So, hopefully, with JioHotstar's reach Sash will get some answers about his birth family or where he comes from, which is what he's really seeking," she said.

"This movie has an incredible story. And right at the center of it is a protagonist who has lived an incredibly inspiring life," she added.

Priyanka said when she set up her production house, she started with strong stories like "Ventilator" and "Paani" in regional cinema.

The idea to back stories that resonated with her also came from her own experience of navigating the film industry as an outsider after she won the Miss World title in 2000 and made her Hindi cinema debut with 2003 film "The Hero: Love Story of a Spy".

"I didn't know why I was gravitating towards filmmakers and stories that were maybe marginalised or told that they're not what is expected... As I'm talking about it, I think it does come from the fact that when I joined the industry, I didn't have it.

"I was trying to navigate this crazy movie industry by myself with my parents who were doctors and who also had no idea about the business. And I kind of felt really lost," said the actor, whose parents, Ashok and Madhu Chopra, were both physicians in the Indian Army. Priyanka said she hopes her company becomes a home for people who have a point of view and are bold.

"I'm not someone who tells myself that this is a specific kind of thing I'm going after. I've always been very emotional about my films and my work. As a producer, I just want to be able to tell stories that I think

will resonate with people," she said.

The actor was recently in India for the launch of her film with SS Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu. The movie, titled "Varanasi", had a grand launch in Hyderabad last month.

When it comes to her career in Hollywood, where she has starred in blockbusters such as "Baywatch", "The Matrix Resurrections" and most recently "Heads of State", Priyanka said she still has a lot more to do.

"If you look at my Hindi filmography or Indian film filmography, there's a lot more variety than I have been able to achieve in my international work. I'm hoping to be able to create diversity and to be able to do really interesting work in my English language work as well, like I did in my Bollywood films. So there's a lot more growth that I'm hoping for to achieve there. I'm still quite early in my growth in Hollywood.

"But I'm in a really interesting place where I have amazing opportunity to work with different kinds of filmmakers from all around the world. And I'm grabbing that with both hands," she said. (PTI)



Vir Das turns director with Aamir Khan-backed spy comedy 'Happy Patel'

Superstar Aamir Khan on Wednesday announced "Happy Patel: Khatarnak Jasoos", a quirky spy comedy which marks the directorial debut of actor-comedian Vir Das.

The film, starring Das alongside Mona Singh, will be released in theatres on January 16, 2026.

The project was unveiled through a humorous announcement video featuring Khan himself. It was posted by the actor's banner Aamir Khan Productions.

In the clip, Khan is seen questioning Das about his unconventional approach to action, romance and even an item number in the film, while contrasting visuals show audience members praising the project.

"From 'Kya BANAYA' to 'KYA BANAYA'. Get ready for a wild ride of comedy, action, romance, and some spy stuff as well. 'Happy Patel: Khatarnak Jasoos', in theatres only from January 16, 2026," the studio posted.

Das, who has performed globally as a stand-up comic and starred in films such as "Go Goa Gone", "Badmaash Company" and "Delhi Belly", is collaborating with Aamir Khan Productions for the second time after the 2011 cult hit "Delhi Belly". (PTI)

'THE FAMILY MAN 3' BECOMES PRIME VIDEO'S MOST-WATCHED SERIES OF 2025 IN LAUNCH WEEK



The third season of "The Family Man" has become Prime Video's most-watched series of 2025 in its launch week, the streamer said on Wednesday. Released on November 21, the latest chapter in the spy-action saga created by Raj & DK trended in the Top 5 in more than 35 countries, including the UK, Canada, Australia, the UAE, Singapore and Malaysia, Prime Video said in a statement.

The show, headlined by Manoj Bajpayee, also reached 96 per cent of pincodes in India during its first week, surpassing the performance of its previous seasons as well as every other title released on the service this year, it added.

"The immense love and adulation that audiences have for The

Family Man is evident in the spectacular reception of the latest season," said Nikhil Madhok, Director and Head of Originals at Prime Video India.

"The gripping story, exceptional performances and Raj & DK's signature quirk... are what have made the series so widely loved and a true audience favourite," he added.

Raj & DK has created, wrote and directed the series along with Suman Kumar with Tusshar Sehgal joining the directing team for season three.

The filmmaker duo said they were "deeply grateful" for the response after a four-year wait between seasons.

"The overwhelming response to the latest season, even after a four-year wait, reaffirms that they

value our efforts to make the series bigger, better, and more engaging and entertaining for them. And we are committed to pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling to bring them fresh, relatable, and truly unmissable content," they added.

The new season marks the return of Manoj Bajpayee as Srikant Tiwari, a regular family man but unknown to his wife and children, he works as government agent trying to unmask terror plots. The third season, which released on Prime Video on November 21, saw the intelligence agent turn fugitive as he goes on the run with his family, hunted by both formidable new enemies and his own agency, while racing against time to avert a looming national crisis. (PTI)

Ralph Fiennes-starrer '28 Years Later: The Bone Temple' to release in India in January

Sony Pictures on Wednesday announced that "28 Years Later: The Bone Temple", the latest chapter in the post-apocalyptic franchise originally created by filmmaker Danny Boyle, is set to release in Indian theatres on January 16, 2026.

The Hollywood studio has also released the official trailer of the movie, which picks up after the events of this year's "28 Years Later", starring Ralph Fiennes, Alfie Williams and Aaron Taylor Johnson.

The new instalment is directed by Nia DaCosta and written by Alex Garland, who penned the earlier films in the acclaimed series.

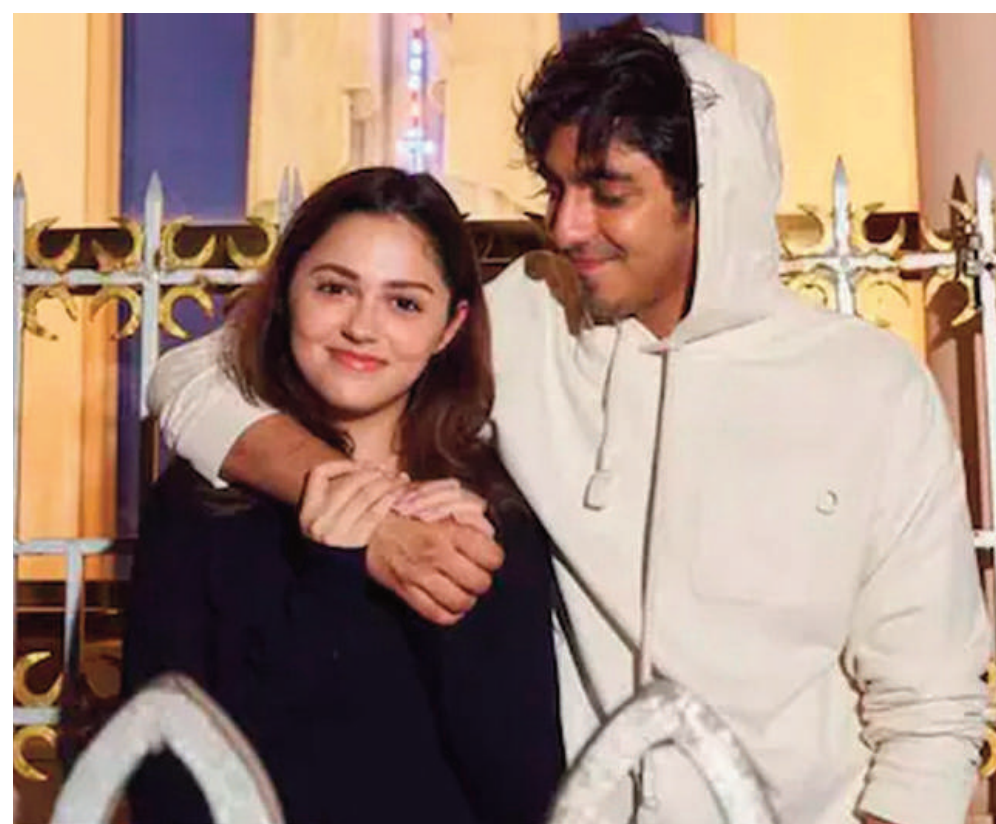
In the new film, Dr. Kelson, played by Fiennes, becomes entangled in a shocking new relationship that carries world-altering consequences, while Spike (Williams) finds himself trapped in a terrifying encounter with Jimmy Crystal, portrayed by Jack O'Connell.

The storyline suggests a deeper psychological and moral descent for the characters as the world around them continues to collapse.

Produced by Andrew Macdonald, Peter Rice, Bernard Bellew, Danny Boyle and Garland, the film also stars Erin Kellyman and Chi Lewis-Parry.

Oscar winner Cillian Murphy, who headlined Boyle's 2002 original movie "28 Days Later", returns as executive producer.

"28 Years Later: The Bone Temple" will be released across India in English and Hindi. (PTI)



'Saiyaara' actors Ahaan Panday, Aneet Padda top IMDb's most popular Indian stars of 2025

truly, if anything, this recognition makes me a little more aware of the responsibility I have towards my craft, and at the same time, it excites me for what's to come," the actor said in a statement.

He credited Suri for his guidance and thanked producers Aditya Chopra and Akshaye Widhani, as well as casting director Shanoo Sharma, for their support.

"I look forward to returning soon with my second film, and this honour is motivation enough to try and deliver a performance that will resonate deeply. I thank every single person from across the world who has supported me and rooted for me in 'Saiyaara'. I thank everyone for helping the stars align and giving me something I could cherish for a lifetime, but mainly, I thank everyone for allowing the grandson of a heart surgeon to be a vessel for love. There's nothing more poetic. All love here, always," he added.

Padda, who is set to headline Maddock Films' upcoming title "Shakti Shalini", said the success of "Saiyaara" had been "life-changing" and expressed gratitude to viewers

across languages.

"Saiyaara" changed my life in ways I am only beginning to understand, and to know that people across countries and languages connected with my work means more to me than I can explain.

"This honour from IMDb feels like a gentle push toward everything I want to grow into: more clarity, more curiosity, and more craft. I am soaking all of this in as I step into my next film. Thank you for the love. It is the biggest fuel I have," she said.

Among actors, Aamir Khan, who returned to the big screen with "Sitaare Zameen Par", secured the third spot on the list, followed by "Homebound" star Ishaan Khatter at No. 4.

Rising star Lakshya is placed fifth, while Rashmika Mandanna, at No. 6, featured on the back of a notably diverse slate across languages, including Hindi films "Chhaava", "Sikandar" and "Thamma," as well as her Telugu-Tamil bilingual projects "Kuberaa" and "The Girlfriend".

Kalyani Priyadarshan (No. 7), Tripti Dimri

(No. 8), Rukmini Vasanth (No. 9) and Rishabh Shetty (No. 10) rounded off the top 10.

Among filmmakers, Aryan Khan took the second spot with his debut show "The Ba**ds of Bollywood". Lokesh Kanagaraj, Anurag Kashyap and Prithviraj Sukumaran followed, while R.S. Prasanna, Anurag Basu and Dominic Arun occupied the middle positions.

Laxman Utekar and Neeraj Ghaywan, whose film "Homebound" is India's official entry to the 2026 Academy Awards, completed the top 10 directors ranking.

Yaminie Patodia, head of IMDb India, said the introduction of the directors' list reflects a shift in audience engagement.

"In the 25 Years of Indian Cinema IMDb Industry Report, we highlighted the emergence of directors as the key architects of this new era of Indian cinema. Filmmakers now consistently appear on our weekly rankings alongside actors, signaling that directors themselves are becoming fan favourites, with world-building and storytelling as the new engines of fandom," Patodia said. (PTI)

'TEAMS MUST NOT 'PIGEONHOLE' TEST CRICKET'

India right to back spin-heavy approach: Jonathan Trott

DUBAI, Dec 3: Former England batter and current Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott believes teams must not "pigeonhole" Test cricket into one rigid style, insisting the format's strength lies in its diverse approaches, and noted that there is nothing wrong in India embracing a spin-heavy method that suits their conditions.

India's decision to go with a dry, 'underprepared' surface badly misfired in the opening Test in Kolkata, allowing world champions South Africa to seize control and eventually sweep the two-match rubber which was their first Test series win in India in 25 years.

"When you go to India, you know it's going to spin. You go to Sri Lanka, it's going to spin. When you go to Australia, it's going to be pacy and bouncy," said Trott, the head coach of Adani Sportsline-owned Gulf Giants in the ongoing DP World International League T20 during a select media interaction here.

"You don't want to suddenly have a roll. That's what makes cricket so great. That's what's always a challenge as a player and for somebody like me now as a coach -- to be able to coach in those different conditions and excel. That's the most important thing."

The former England batter, who also represented England in 68 ODIs and retired from interna-



tional cricket in 2015 after a stellar career interrupted by a stress-related Ashes withdrawal, cautioned against nostalgia-driven criticism of modern cricket.

"You saw the contrasting styles, the way Shubman Gill the India captain led from the front and then you can see the difference in the way Ben Stokes approached (with Bazball style)," he said referring to India's 2-2 draw in England last summer.

"Don't forget there was a day and age where we thought cricket was boring and there were too many draws... Now we're saying that cricket's too short and there's too many wins and losses. So we've got to be careful that we don't always think the grass is

greener," Trott said.

"So, I think we've got to be careful in that we don't try and pigeonhole Test cricket and ODI and what we should do is try and embrace the way that this team plays ODI cricket. That's what makes cricket interesting, everybody has a different approach to it," said Trott, whose decorated career also saw him rise to the world's No.1 Test ranking with England winning Down Under in 2010-2011.

On England's attacking 'Bazball' style, which has attracted criticism, the former England top-order batter defended the approach. "I think you need to embrace the way that you think is going to give you the best chance of winning.

That's the way that Brendon (McCullum) and (Ben) Stokes see their chances down in Australia. They are going to back it. They have lost games before and ended up winning series as well. I wouldn't bet against England in Australia," Trott said.

Asked about the proposal for four-day Tests, the 44-year-old coach was unequivocal: "No".

Calls for structured calendar Trott, who also sits on the Sourav Ganguly-led ICC Men's Cricket Committee, spoke on the proliferation of franchise leagues around the world and called for a need for structured calendars.

"I certainly feel there should be maybe windows of international cricket and windows of franchise cricket, and where the international sides and the franchises are when they play their tournaments. So that everyone can live together and everyone can make the game and sell the game and get more people interested.

"So people watching the game know, 'look, this month this is going to be franchise cricket everywhere around the world and in the next month or so it's going to be international cricket,'" he said.

"I was watching the highlights of the South Africa-India Test in Kolkata and that stadium looked full for a Test match. Also, I certainly feel the ODI game is a good product.

"You certainly see World Cups, there's a lot of interest. I know there'll be a lot of interest in the next 50-over World Cup in South Africa (in 2027).

"I think we've got to look after the game and we've got to find the right amount of time and certainly interest in the game is there. We've just got to manage it right."

Afghanistan are in the 'group of death' clubbed with South Africa and New Zealand in Group D in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in February.

But Trott believes they can still make the Super Eights like they did last time in USA and the Caribbean.

"We have got out of a tough group from the West Indies and would look to do that again."

He also said that with high-quality coaches and captains like Kieron Pollard and Tim Southee in the ILT20, the local UAE players will get rare opportunities to learn from top internationals which will accelerate their growth.

"You look at the quality of coaches that are there in Pollard, Southee... vastly experienced international players here in the tournament. It can only make the tournament stronger.

"So for the local players, they have the best opportunity in the world to learn and watch some of the greatest players," he signed off. (AP)

Woods dealing with uncertain times with his golf, Ryder Cup and reshaping PGA Tour

NEW YORK, Dec 3: So much about the future of Tiger Woods is uncertain. Woods said Tuesday in the Bahamas he has just been cleared to chip and putt since a seventh back surgery on Oct. 10. He is not playing in his Hero World Challenge and said he won't be playing in the PNC Championship in two weeks with his son. Even the indoor TGL League will have to wait.

"Unfortunately, I've been through this rehab process before," Woods said. "It's just step by step. Once I get a feel for practicing, exploding, playing, the recovery process, then I can assess where I'm going to play and how much I'll play."

As for the Ryder Cup, he turned down the captaincy for this year and was thought to be the logical choice for Adare Manor in Ireland in 2027. "No one's asked me about it," Woods said and then repeated it for effect.

That's not to say there hasn't been plenty of discussions between the PGA of America and Woods' manager. Woods can say a lot with few words. Translation: He's not ready to talk about that yet.

What's consuming his time is the one area that doesn't involve birdies and bogeys, and it might be far more important than whether he tees it up at the Masters or joins the 50-and-older circuit on the PGA Tour Champions a few times next year.

Woods is chair of the Future Competitions Committee, which new CEO Brian Rolapp commissioned to make significant change to the PGA Tour. Woods said the committee has met three times and taken input from everyone from title sponsors to television to tournament directors.

What began as a blank sheet of paper now has a thousand ideas. The hope is to have a new model by the start of the 2027 season. What emerges is unclear except it will be uncomfortable. Change isn't easily accepted.

"Yes, there's going to be some eggs that are spilled and crushed and broken," Woods said. "But I think that in the end, we're going to have a product that is far better than what we have now for everyone involved."

The three principles driving Rolapp's vision are parity, simplicity and scarcity.

It's the scarcity that has so many players nervous — fewer tournaments, shorter fields, slimmer odds for players who can't just show up and expect to contend the way Woods once did, and the way Scottie Scheffer does now.

"But don't forget, the golfing year is long," Woods said. "So there's other opportunities and other places around the world or other places to play that can be created and have events. So there's a scarcity side of it that's not as scary as people might think."

Rolapp also soothed some concerns about a star-driven tour when he said on the CNBC "CEO Council Forum" last week. "Every sport has stars. What really makes sports work is the middle class. ... You cannot build a lifelong sport that outlives the stars if you don't build a system that works beyond your stars."

There was nothing middle class



about Woods.

His legacy will be 82 titles on the PGA Tour, his 15 majors, the only player to hold all four major championships at the same time, the player who went more than seven years without missing a cut. And now, his leadership on a committee to reshape the PGA Tour could add to that.

Woods is motivated to play again because he simply loves golf. That chapter is not over.

This will be the first year without competing in a PGA Tour-sanctioned tournament since he made his debut in 1992 at age 16 in the Los Angeles Open (he played the PNC Championship in 2021 after missing the entire season after his car crash in Los Angeles).

Woods lost his mother in February. He ruptured his Achilles tendon in March. And then came another back surgery in October. So when he was asked why he wanted to stage yet another comeback, Woods smiled and replied, "Come back to what point?"

"I'd like to come back to just playing golf again," Woods said. His last documented round was Feb. 9 with President Donald Trump. "I've had a lot of things happen on and off the golf course that's been tough. And so my passion to just play, I haven't done that in a long time. Just play."

Age and injuries have left him on the verge of being a ceremonial player when he is healthy.

Woods has played only 11 times in nearly five years since his 2021 car crash. The four tournaments where he completed 72 holes, the closest he has been to the winning score was 16 shots behind. He has played 29 rounds and broken par six times. His scoring average is 74.14.

Come back to what point? Age and experience have put Woods in a unique role to modernize golf without ruining it. This is important to him, too. He thought back to his roots in public golf, to that first PGA Tour tee shot at Riviera at age 16, to winning the Masters at 21 and reaching No. 1 in the world longer than anyone.

"The PGA Tour gave me an opportunity to chase after a childhood dream," he said. "This is a different opportunity to make an impact on the tour. I did it with my golf clubs. Now I am able to make an impact in a different way for generations to come — not just generations that I played against, but for future generations like a 16-year-old looking for a place to play and maybe in hopes of playing the PGA Tour."

At the moment, that's his biggest challenge. (AP)

Dani Olmo scores and gets injured as Barcelona beats Atletico Madrid 3-1

MADRID, Dec 3: Barcelona increased its Spanish league lead by coming from behind to beat Atletico Madrid 3-1 on Tuesday, with Dani Olmo scoring the go-ahead goal but hurting his shoulder in the process.

Olmo injured his left shoulder in a fall after sending a left-footed strike into the net in the 65th minute for Barcelona's second goal at Camp Nou stadium. Atletico had opened the scoring with Alex Baena, and Raphinha equalized for the hosts in the first half.

Olmo was in visible pain after going down and couldn't celebrate the goal that left Barcelona four points ahead of Real Madrid. The Barcelona playmaker was immediately substituted and had to be assisted off the field by the club's medical staff.

The 19th-round match was

moved forward because the teams will be playing in the Spanish Super Cup in January. Real Madrid and Athletic Bilbao, who will also play in the Super Cup, will meet in Bilbao on Wednesday.

"It was a key match and these three points were important," Raphinha said after Barcelona's fifth straight league win. "They could help decide the league in the end." Atletico, sitting in fourth place, dropped six points behind Barcelona after 15 matches. Diego Simeone's team had won seven in a row in all competitions.

"Barça played better," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. "We had a couple of chances to equalize but we couldn't get it done. Unfortunately this ends our good run, but we have to lift our heads and move on." Barcelona is still playing at a

Camp Nou that can't be filled to capacity because of the lack of permits following its major renovation work.

Baena put the visitors ahead in a breakthrough in the 19th after picking up a long pass by Nahuel Molina behind the Barcelona defense. The goal had to be confirmed after a video-review check for offside.

Raphinha equalized in the 26th after a nice through ball from Pedri. The Brazil forward cleared Oblak inside the area before finding the open net.

Barcelona had a chance to move ahead in the 36th after Olmo was fouled by Pablo Barrios inside the area to prompt a penalty kick, but Robert Lewandowski sent his shot from the spot way over the crossbar in a rare miss for the veteran Poland striker. (AP)

Rana reprimanded for aggressive behaviour against South Africa's Brewis

DUBAI, Dec 3: India pace bowler Harshit Rana was on Wednesday reprimanded and handed out one demerit point by the ICC for his aggressive behaviour after dismissing South African batter Dewald Brevis during the first ODI in Ranchi.

"Rana was found guilty of breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct," said ICC in a statement.

The incident occurred in the 22nd over of South Africa's innings on Sunday, when the India pacer, after dismissing Brevis, gestured in the direction of the dressing room, which "could have provoked an aggressive response from the batter".

Rana was found to have breached Article 2.5 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to "using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon his/her dismissal during an International Match.

AITA extends Rohit's tenure as Davis Cup skipper till Dec 2026

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: The All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Wednesday reappointed Rohit Rajpal as captain of the Indian Davis Cup team, extending his tenure till December 31, 2026, as the country prepares to host the Netherlands in the Qualifiers.

Rajpal, who has previously led India in several Davis Cup ties, will continue at the helm for one more year, while Ashutosh Singh has been retained as the team's coach.

Rajpal's reappointment ensures continuity in leadership ahead of what will be a crucial home tie as India attempts to make the Finals.

He will oversee the team not only for the upcoming Qualifiers but also for all Davis Cup engagements during his renewed tenure.

Delhi and Karnataka have already expressed their desire to host the tie in February.

AITA, in its press release, added that further details, including Indian team nominations, would be released in due course. (PTI)

Harman's inputs most important part of auction process: MI mentor Jhulan

NEW DELHI, Dec 3: Mumbai Indians' bowling coach and mentor Jhulan Goswami says skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's inputs during the recently-held Women's Premier League auction led to the acquisition of players such as big-hitting all-rounder Amelia Kerr and pacer Shabnim Ismail. MI have been the league's most successful team so far, winning it twice since its inception in 2023. On Harmanpreet's role in the auction, Jhulan told JioHotstar, "As captain, Harman's inputs are always crucial during auction planning. At the end of the day, she leads this team and has been incredibly successful."

"Her inputs have been the most important part of the entire auction process. Our job is to support her on and off the field. Having her at the auction table was a huge advantage, her thoughts mattered deeply, and they helped us retain the core of this team," she added.

Explaining the team's strategy, Jhulan said it was important to retain the strong support group of players. "The important thing for us was to retain our strong support group of players. That's how we've won two championships in the last

three years. That was the basic plan, nothing more."

On their key buys this season, the former India fast bowler said, "Amelia Kerr (New Zealand) was a great buy. She gives us so much, variation, volume and balance. Over the last three years, she has performed exceptionally well in the tournament, and as an all-rounder, she is very important."

Maza scores as Leverkusen knocks Dortmund out of German Cup 1-0

BERLIN, Dec 3: Ibrahim Maza's first-half strike was enough for Bayer Leverkusen to knock Borussia Dortmund out of the German Cup with a 1-0 win in their third-round encounter on Tuesday.

Maza scored in the 34th minute after a team move from the back. Alex Grimaldo played the 20-year-old Algeria forward through, and though Waldemar Anton blocked Maza's first effort, he curled the ball in with his second after beating Anton and another Dortmund defender to the ball.

Leverkusen's Martin Terrier had a would-be goal ruled out for offside after a VAR check in the second half.

Karim Adeyemi had two good chances for dominant Dortmund before the break, and the fans thought he'd scored in stoppage time, but it was only side netting with his header from a difficult angle.

"We had a score to settle," said

Spain keeps Women's Nations League title as Pina scores twice in 3-0 victory over Germany



MADRID, Dec 3: Clàudia Pina scored twice and Germany crumbled as Spain retained the Women's Nations League title with a 3-0 victory in the final's second leg Tuesday.

Vicky López also scored after Pina finally broke the deadlock in the 61st minute with Germany stubbornly hanging on as Spain had done in the first leg, a 0-0 draw in Kaiserslautern on Friday.

Spain was without three-time Ballon d'Or winner Aitana Bonmatí, who broke her leg in training on Sunday.

López took Bonmatí's place and Spain dominated from the start. Esther González swept the ball just past the post and Marióna Caldentey forced a save from Ann-Katrin Berger early on as the flag-waving fans roared encouragement.

Nearly 56,000 supporters attended the match at Atlético Madrid's Metropolitano Stadium, easily a record for the Spanish team at home. Many children were also present on a cold night in the Spanish capital. None of the supporters seemed to mind the cold with most staying in their seats long after the final whistle.

"One of the most magical nights we have ever experienced, one of the best in my career," two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas said.

"Some of us have been playing for the national team for 13 years and never imagined this," Putellas said of the attendance. "It says a lot about what we have achieved with women's soccer in Spain. We will continue to inspire girls and boys to fight for their dreams, which sometimes come true."

González tried her luck with an acrobatic scissors kick, and Marióna, López, and Marióna again all had good chances before the break, with Berger doing well to deny the latter.

Nicole Anyomi had a rare opportunity for Germany in a one-on-one with Cata Coll before the halftime whistle, only to drag her shot wide of the right post.

"That has to go in, and she had another one in the box in the second half," Germany coach Christian Wuck said. "That's the difference between us and the technically gifted Spanish players."

Pina got the party underway in the 61st when she breezed past a German defender and played a one-two with Marióna before beating Berger with a low shot. Berger got her hand to the ball but couldn't stop its progress inside the right post.

The 19-year-old López scored seven minutes later when she cut in from the right and unleashed a curling shot inside the far post.

Pina sealed the win in the 74th after getting a gift of the ball from Germany's Janina Minge. The Barcelona forward set off for goal and let fly from around 20 meters (yards) past the despairing Berger.

"The goal was to win again and retain the Nations League title. It was all worth it," Sonia Bermúdez said after winning her first title as Spain coach. The former team captain took over from Montse Tomé in August.

It was only Spain's second win over old foe Germany. The previous came at the European Championship last summer when Bonmatí scored in extra time for a 1-0 win in the semifinals. Spain went on to lose to England on penalties in the final.

That was the only disappointment after reaching the finals of the last four tournaments. Spain beat England in the 2023 Women's World Cup and bettered France in the 2024 Women's Nations League. Tuesday's win over Germany makes it three wins from four finals. (AP)



Maza, referring to Dortmund's win in Leverkusen in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

Maza's former team Hertha Berlin enjoyed a 6-1 rout of second-division rival Kaiserslautern, the beaten finalist in 2024, to stretch its winning run to seven

for St. Pauli — which has lost its last nine Bundesliga games — to beat Borussia Mönchengladbach 2-1 away.

Christoph Baumgartner scored twice as Leipzig, the 2022 and 2023 champion, enjoyed a 3-1 win at home over second division Magdeburg.

Fans across all the games stayed quiet for the first 12 minutes away to protest against German government proposals to increase security measures around games.

The mooted changes include personalized tickets, increased surveillance including facial-recognition software and centralized stadium bans for alleged trouble-some fans. The proposals were to be discussed at a three-day interior ministry conference starting Wednesday.

Bayern Munich and defending champion Stuttgart play Wednesday, at Union Berlin and Bochum, respectively. (AP)

On a high, Indian shooters hope to hit bulls eye at ISSF World Cup Final

DOHA, Dec 3: India's top shooters, after a year sprinkled with major milestones and heaps of medals, will look to finish the season on a high at the elite ISSF World Cup Finals, which will commence here on Thursday.

The season-ending competition will see 14 of India's best, including Paris Olympics double-bronze medallist pistol shooter Manu Bhaker, world champion Samrat Rana and multiple World Cup medallist Suruchi Singh, vie for the honours in a field usually restricted to the world's top 12 shooters in the individual section in each event.

In a glorious outing for the country's shooters on the big stage, India came up with a record-breaking show at the World Championships, held in Cairo (pistol/rifle) and Athens (shotgun), where they won 14 medals, including three gold across Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines.

They will now look to convert that success in the World Cup Final, which not just gives winners the bragging rights but also comes loaded with attractive prize money of Euro 5,000, 4,000 and 2,000 for the gold, silver and bronze medallist respectively, in each category.

Two of India's top pistol shooters, Manu and Esha Singh will be among the favourites for podium finishes in 10m air and 25m



sports pistol after they made the top-12 on the basis of their ranking and performance in the World Cups and World Championship.

The men's 10m air pistol event will have the newly-crowned champion in Cairo recently, Kamal-born Samrat Rana, and Baghat's Varun Tomar, who took the bronze as India made history by taking two podium

spots in the showpiece event.

The men's 10m air rifle event will have former world champion Rudranksh Patil and Arjun Babuta, who finished fourth at the Paris Olympics, compete against a strong field that also has the indomitable Sheng Lihao of China, the reigning Olympic and Asian Games champion, and Hungary's Is-

tevan Peni.

Anish Bhanwala, who won silver at the World Championship after surviving two shoot-offs, too will be on a high after winning the biggest medal of his career, while women's 10m air rifle exponent Elavenil Valarivan will hope to continue her good form after a bronze-medal feat in Cairo.

Veteran Zoravar Sandhu, who became only the third trap shooter after Karni Singh and world champion Manavjit Singh to win medal at the worlds (a bronze in Athens), will also be a leading contender after seeking training from legendary England marksman Peter Wilson, who is now India's foreign coach.

With a strong line-up, India will look to better their medal tally from the previous edition, held in New Delhi, where they won two silver and as many bronze.

Men: 10m air pistol - Samrat Rana, Varun Tomar; 10m air rifle: Rudranksh Patil, Arjun Babuta; 25m rapid-fire pistol - Anish Bhanwala, Vijayveer Sidhu; 50m rifle 3P - Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar; Trap - Zoravar Sandhu.

Women: 10m air pistol - Suruchi Singh, Manu Bhaker, Esha Singh; 10m air rifle - Elavenil Valarivan; 25m pistol - Manu Bhaker, Simranpreet Kaur, Esha Singh; 50m rifle 3P - Sift Kaur Samra. (PTI)

Virat Kohli moves up to No 4 in ICC ODI rankings

DUBAI, Dec 3: Star Indian batter Virat Kohli on Wednesday moved up to No. 4 in the latest ICC rankings with a match-winning hundred against South Africa in the first ODI at Ranchi boosting his ascend.

Kohli made his 52nd hundred in the 50-over format, a 120-ball 135 that propelled India to a 17-run win over the Proteas on Sunday.

The 37-year-old now has 751 ranking points, and trails former India skipper Rohit Sharma (783), who retained his top spot, New Zealand batter Daryl Mitchell (766) and Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadran (764).

Kohli overtook India ODI captain Shubman Gill, who moved down to No. 5 after missing the ongoing three-match series against South Africa with a neck injury.

Shreyas Iyer, who is also recovering from an injury that he sustained during India's recent white ball tour to Australia, stood firm on 9th position.

Meanwhile, left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav gained one place to move to sixth after picking up four wickets in the first match against the Proteas. In the Test batter's list, India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal continued to station at No. 9, while Gill slid one place down to 12.

Wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant was also on a downward spiral, moving down from 12th to 14th.

In the rankings for Test bowlers, India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained on top of the pile with 879 points, well clear of New Zealand pacer Matt Henry (846).

However, modest outings in the two-match series against SA recently affected the rankings of pacer Mohammed Siraj (from 11th to 13th) and Kuldeep (from 13th to 15th).

In the T20I list, Indians dominated the top slot with Abhishek Sharma and Varun Chakravarthy keeping their numero uno positions. (PTI)

Unbeaten Punjab FC, East Bengal lock horns for place in final

MARGAO, Dec 3: Unbeaten in the group stage, Punjab FC will have their task cut out when they take on Kolkata heavyweights East Bengal in the first semifinal of the Super Cup here on Thursday.

Both teams progressed as group winners.

Punjab FC were unbeaten in the group stages with two wins and prevailed over Bengaluru FC in a winner-takes all final group stage match which was decided on penalty kicks after both teams ended 0-0 in regulation time.

Both teams finished with seven points and were tied on goals scored, which eventually led to the group winners being decided on penalties.

Punjab FC started the group stage with a comfortable 3-0 victory over Gokulam Kerala FC with the help of goals from Nikhil Prabhu, Princeton Rebello and an own goal from Gursimrat Singh and they followed up with another 3-0 victory over Mohammedan SC with the help of goals from Ninthoinganba Meeetei, Samir Zeljkovic and

Manglenthang Kipgen.

On the other hand, East Bengal were held to a 2-2 draw in the tournament opener by Dempo SC but came back to beat Chennaiyin FC 4-0. In the final group match against Kolkata rivals Mohun Bagan Super Giant, they held them to a 0-0 draw which ensured they qualified for the semifinals on goal difference.

Punjab FC head coach Panagiotis Dilmpers, who has trusted his young Indian core for the group stages, will be boosted by the return of Muhammad Suhail after missing the final group match against Bengaluru FC to injury.

The likes of Ninthoinganba Meeetei and Manglenthang Kipgen have shone in attack along with the midfield marshalled by captain Nikhil Prabhu and Princeton Rebello.

Dilmpers had also gone with an all-Indian defence of Suresh Meetei, Bijoy Varghese, Khaimingthang Lungdim and Muhammad Uvais in the group stage matches, but will be missing Uvais who will be serving his suspension for accumulating two yellow cards.

The foreign signings who joined ahead of the Super Cup, Dani Ramirez, Samir Zeljkovic and Nsungusi Effiong have been influential in the group stage matches while defender Pablo Renan Dos Santos is yet to make his debut.

The Shers have also added Nigerian winger Bede Amarachi Osuji to the ranks and will be an option in attack.

East Bengal have made some strong foreign signings along with the strong Indian players like Naorem Mahesh Singh, Bipin



Singh, Jay Gupta, Anwar Ali, Edmund Lalrindika among others.

Miguel Ferreira, Kevin Sibille and Hiroshi Ibusuki have already scored for the side and Saul Crespo has continued to marshal their midfield along with Palestinian international Mohammed Rashid.

Moroccan striker Hamid Ahadad has also shown his quality up front, leading the Red and Gold brigade attack.

With both teams topping their respective groups and coming into the semifinal in confident form, it promises to be a closely-fought contest. (PTI)

Ben Stokes: Robin Smith's death hits harder ahead of Ashes test

BRISBANE, Dec 3: Being in Australia, 1-0 down already in the Ashes series, meant learning of the sudden death of England great Robin Smith "hits harder" for Ben Stokes and his squad. England's test and second-string squads were in Perth last week, where Australia won the first test by 8 wickets in two days and an Australian XI also won a game against the Lions.

Smith, who played 62 test matches for England, died in Perth, Western Australia, on Monday. He was 62. The news emerged days after Smith met and spoke with the Lions squad.

"Just last week he was there chatting with the Lions who were out here," Stokes said Wednesday on the eve of the second test in Brisbane. "He was at the

game last week and talking to people and sharing, going into quite a lot of detail about his life and opening up quite a lot.

"It hits you a bit harder, I think, when you realize that it was only a week ago," Stokes said while he didn't know Smith very well, the England touring party was filled with people who knew the ex-test batter.

"The same thing kept on coming up pretty much, which was just that he was an absolute belter of a bloke," he said.

Stokes ended the news conference by saying England's ambition in Brisbane was the same as it was when the team arrived in Australia: to reclaim the Ashes. (AP)

New Zealand leads the West Indies by 96 runs after the 2nd day of the 1st test



CHRISTCHURCH (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 3: Shai Hope batted in sunglasses because of an eye infection but saw the ball well enough to compile his first test half century against New Zealand on Wednesday before the West Indies ended the second day of the first test trailing by 96 runs.

The West Indies were bowled out for 167 in their first innings, 64 runs behind New Zealand who reached 32 without loss in seven overs before stumps.

While it might have been incongruous to see Hope sporting large reflective glasses under his helmet in gloomy conditions, his innings of 56 stabilized the West Indies' first innings after the loss of two early wickets.

At the other end Tagenarine Chanderpaul labored diligently over a half century from 165 balls. A 90-run partnership be-

Virat Kohli, Ruturaj Gaikwad hundreds help India set 359-run target



RAIPUR, Dec 3: Virat Kohli's successive hundred, maiden century from Ruturaj Gaikwad (105) and KL Rahul's quickfire 66 not out propelled India to a formidable 358 for five against South Africa in the second ODI here on Wednesday.

Kohli (102 off 93 balls, 7x4s, 2x6s) and Gaikwad (105 off 83 balls, 12x4s, 2x6s) reset the record for highest third-wicket stand for India in ODIs against South Africa as their 195-run association built the platform for the hosts to launch themselves into a big score.

And Rahul's (66 not out off 43 balls, 6x4s, 2x6s) second fifty in a row ensured that, even as India continued to tinker with their batting line-up with the stand-in skipper coming in at No 5 ahead of Washington Sundar, who endured another failure.

Rohit Sharma (14) fell to one angling away from his body as Nandre Burger found an outside edge. This was after the India opener hit three consecutive fours earlier in the fifth over.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (22) made a promising start, hitting a couple of fours and a six but fell to a left-arter again with Jansen's knack of producing extra bounce inducing a mishit from the Indian opener.

Nevertheless, two wickets in the powerplay did not trouble India with the in-form Kohli joining forces with Gaikwad who had a point to prove.

Unlike at Ranchi where he did not look accustomed to batting in the middle order, Gaikwad emerged a perfect foil for Kohli as the two began racking up runs with ease.

With Ajinkya Rahane in tow, Kohli had put on 189 at Durban in February 2018 but perhaps on some counts, this partnership with Gaikwad was the one he may have enjoyed a little more as the Maharashtra batter matched his style of play.

The rotation of strike was deft, the singles were seamlessly converted into doubles and at times it was difficult for one to distinguish who had pierced the gap for those runs — not necessarily boundaries — as Gaikwad even appeared to be matching Kohli in terms of stroke-play.

If he was roughed up at the start, Gaikwad grew in confidence to post a fine half-century. Once past the milestone, he picked up pace.

Keshav Maharaj was hit over long on for a six and two fours in the 28th over before Gaikwad reached triple figures in the 34th over.

Off the blocks with a perfect pull shot which sent the ball sailing over the ropes, it was yet another day in the office for Kohli who did not put a foot wrong on way to a record extending 53rd ODI ton. (PTI)

Kush Maini to drive latest Formula 1 car in Young Driver Test in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI, Dec 3: Indian racer Kush Maini will get the taste of a modern Formula 1 machinery for the very first time when he takes the wheel of the current Alpine car in the Young Driver Test at Yas Marina Circuit here.

The test will take place next Tuesday, two days after the 2025 Formula 1 World Champion is decided on the same track.

"Following the race weekend, Kush will take part in Tuesday's post-season Young Driver Test, following the conclusion of the Formula 2 race weekend, for his first appearance in modern Formula One machinery in an official Formula One session," read a statement from Alpine Formula 1 team.

The 25-year-old from Bengaluru has previously driven in the team's Testing Previous Cars (TPC) programme and simulator as part of his role in the Alpine Academy. He is also one of the reserve drivers at the Enstone based outfit.

Nearing the end of his third Formula 2 season, Maini is understandably thrilled about getting in the cockpit of the latest Formula 1 car.

"I can't wait to take part in the post-season Abu Dhabi test and to have my first proper experience of the A525. The Yas Marina Circuit is one I know well from Formula 2 and it will be impressive to see the level of performance Formula One cars have around this track.

"I'm very appreciative of the team for trusting me in this role and will aim to do the best job possible with the programme the team gives me," said Maini.

Maini, who is aiming to become the third Indian to compete in Formula 1 after Narain Karthikeyan and Karun Chandhok, will be sharing the track with current Alpine driver Pierre Gasly who will be testing with Pirelli compounds for the 2026 season alongside other established drivers holding a super licence. (PTI)

Australia's Steve Smith has eyes on the prize in the 2nd Ashes test against England



BRISBANE, Dec 3: Now that he's worked out that he had them upside down, Steve Smith is more confident about wearing the black strips under his eyes while batting in the day-night Ashes cricket test at the Gabba starting Thursday.

More commonly used by foot-batters playing under lights, the black strips are part of Smith's attempt to leave nothing to chance facing the pink ball against England's bowling attack in changing light conditions.

The Australians are coming off an eight-wicket victory in the series-opener in Perth, which finished on Day 2 after Ben Stokes' England lineup wasted strong mo-

mentum at several stages while pursuing an attack-at-all-costs Bazball routine.

Smith is expecting more of the same from England. He said his lineup would also offer more of the Aussie approach to the game, describing it as a more pragmatic focus on playing to the conditions.

Hence, his new look — one he borrowed from ex-West Indies batter Shivnarine Chanderpaul and which gained plenty of attention around cricket circles when he experimented with it at practice this week.

"I actually messaged Shivnarine Chanderpaul and asked him what his thoughts were, whether he

wore the chalk or the strips. He said the strips, and he thinks it blocks out 65% of the glare," Smith said Wednesday at the captain's news conference on the eve of the second test. "He also said I've seen photos and you're wearing them the wrong way." "So yesterday I put them on the right way and ... I agree. It certainly stops the glare and yeah, I'll be wearing them."

Australian XI
The Australians have been forced into at least one change after Usman Khawaja was ruled out of the second test because of back problems that curtailed his participation in Perth last week, with most pundits predicting a return for Josh Inglis in the middle order and Travis Head continuing as an opener after his starring role in the first test.

Australia is delaying finalizing a starting XI until the toss, leaving Smith to deal with speculation about injured skipper Pat Cummins being rushed back into the lineup from outside the match squad. He fielded multiple questions without giving a definitive answer.

Cummins missed the first test with a back injury and was left out of the original squad for the second, but joined stand-in captain Smith and coach Andrew McDonald

for a pitch inspection Wednesday.

"He looks pretty good to me, the way he's bowled in the nets," Smith said of Cummins. "Obviously games are a different intensity. He's tracking really nicely, he knows his body well. We'll wait and see."

The Gabba

The Australians have an excellent record in day-night test matches, with the only one blemish. That was an upset eight-run loss to West Indies in January of last year at the Gabba, a ground where the Australians have been otherwise close to unbeatable for decades.

England hasn't won an Ashes test at the Brisbane venue since 1986, and hasn't won a test on Australian soil since the 2010-11 series.

Stokes has vowed to maintain England's "blueprint" for attacking approach, which was heavily criticized in Perth. Asked to describe Australia's way, Smith kept it simple.

"Adapting to conditions and what's in front of us — playing the game in real time," he said. "That's one thing this team's done really well for a period of time, been able to sum up the conditions, play what's in front in live time.

"And I think if you do that in test cricket, it holds you in pretty good stead." (AP)