

6 NATION
7 ARUNACHAL



- Circular economy to boost dairy farmers' income by 20 pc in 5 years: Shah
- Modi promised ease of air travel but gave 'cease of air travel', says Congress
- Cong complains to poll panel, alleges Arunachal min threatened to withhold govt funds if BJP loses
- Hoolock gibbon family rescued after four-day operation in Arunachal

Vol .No. XXVI

Issue No. 321

RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025

PAGES 8

PRICE ₹ 8

Probe into Zubeen's death almost complete, informs SIT head Charge-sheet to be filed on Dec 12

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Investigation into the death of Assam's cultural icon Zubeen Garg is almost complete, and the charge-sheet will be filed on December 12, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

Garg died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on September 19. Special Director General of Police of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Munna Prasad Gupta, while addressing a press conference here, said, "The investigation is almost complete. The details will be given in the charge sheet."

Gupta, who is leading the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing Garg's death, said seven arrests have been made so far and over 300 witnesses examined.

He said the charge sheet will be filed in CID case no. 18/2025, the original case registered after nearly



60 FIRs were filed across the state following Garg's death.

Investigation into the second case (CID case no. 19/2025), pertaining to property-related and other activities, is underway, he added. Gupta refused to share further details, adding that more will be known once the charge sheet is

submitted. On November 26, the chief minister said in the assembly that Garg's death while swimming in the sea in Singapore is a case of "plain and simple murder".

He was in the Southeast Asian nation to participate in the North East India Festival (NEIF) 2025.

NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, and his two band members, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his two PSOs, Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya, have been arrested in the case.

Singapore Police Force (SPF) is also carrying out an independent investigation into the incident of Garg's alleged drowning at sea.

In a statement on October 17, the SPF said that the preliminary investigations have not indicated any foul play in Garg's death and investigations may take up to another three months, after which the findings will be submitted to the State Coroner for further proceedings. (PTI)

Reap benefits of govt schemes, CM to beneficiaries

Cheques of ₹ 10,000 each distributed to 17,774 beneficiaries in Hailakandi and 20,045 in Dholai **
Dal, salt and sugar to ₹ 100 from Jan 1



GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday called upon the women of the state to reap maximum benefits of government schemes meant for their welfare and uplift.

He was speaking at the launch of distribution of seed capital cheques under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) for Hailakandi and Dholai assembly constituencies in the Barak Valley. A total of 17,774 beneficiaries (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India-Russia ties 'steadiest' globally: S Jaishankar 'We talk about what is called strategic autonomy and that continues'

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The India-Russia partnership has been among the "steadiest big relationships" in the last 70-80 years and President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi was about "reimagining" the ties with a focus on economic engagement, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

In an interactive session, he also disagreed with views that Putin's visit could complicate India's negotiations with the US on a bilateral trade agreement.

"No, I disagree with you. I think everybody knows that India has relations with all the major countries in the world," Jaishankar said at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit. "I think for any country to expect to have a veto or a say in how we develop our relations with others is not a reasonable proposition."

Jaishankar was asked if Putin's



two-day visit to New Delhi that focused largely on significantly enhancing the economic dimension of India-Russia ties will have a bearing on the negotiations with the US for the proposed trade deal. "Because (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Movie on Bhabendra Saikia's novel 'Moromor Deuta' to premiere at Chennai film fest

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: The film adaptation of a popular novel by renowned Assamese writer and director Bhabendra Nath Saikia is set to premiere at the 23rd Chennai International Film Festival, its makers said on Saturday.

The film is based on the Sahitya Akademi and Rajat Kamal awardee's book, 'Moromor Deuta' (Dear Father), originally published in 1989 in the children's magazine 'Xophura'.

Directed by Himjyoti Talukdar and produced by Mamata Mahilary, the film features debutant actor Bodhisattva Sharma in the lead role, alongside other actors, including Mintu Barua, Aparna Dutta Choudhury and Gaurav Bora. Saikia's novel remains one of the most treasured classics in Assamese literature and has long been part of academic study for its profound exploration of emotional and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tech developed to produce preservation-free, non-bitter tasting Kaji Nemu

AAU inks MoU with private co for production

By: Smita Bhattacharyya

JORHAT, Dec 6: The Assam Agricultural University (AAU) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an Assam-based private company for transferring technology developed by the University on producing "preservation-free and non bitter tasting Assam Lemon (Kaji Nemu) juice with prolonged shelf life under refrigerated conditions". The MoU for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)





Government of Assam
Department of Tea Tribes & Adivasi Welfare
Department of Sports & Youth Welfare



CHIEF MINISTER'S
TEA TRIBES & ADIVASI
FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT 2025-26 (U-17 Boys)
7 December 2025 to 7 January 2026

A platform for passion, talent and teamwork

Inaugural Ceremony

7 December 2025 5 PM Doomdooma Town Field, Doomdooma, Tinsukia



Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

29
Districts

89
LACs

1000+
Teams

Four-Stage Competition

7 Days LAC level

5 Days District level

4 Days Zonal level

3 Days State level (Inter-Zonal)

DIPR/D/HLT/24717-Dec-25

Published by Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Assam

Connect with us     @diprassam  dipr.assam.gov.in

INDIGO CRISIS DAY 5: OVER 800 FLIGHTS CANCELLED

Govt orders airfare cap, ticket refunds by Sun evening

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Domestic carrier IndiGo cancelled over 800 flights on Saturday, the fifth day of the ongoing crisis, even as the government imposed a cap on airfares and directed the airline to process all refunds by Sunday evening.



The airline's on time performance from six metro airports plunged to 3.7 per cent on Friday, as per the civil aviation ministry website. The government said regulatory action will be initiated against the airline in case of any non-compliance. With IndiGo flight disruptions impacting thousands of passengers, the civil aviation ministry on Saturday directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, and ensure baggage separated from the travellers are delivered in the next two days.

The airline's teams are focused on stabilising schedules, reducing delays, and supporting customers through this period. The airline has also been instructed not to levy any rescheduling charges for passengers whose travel plans were affected by cancellations. "These cells have been tasked to proactively contact affected passengers and ensure that refunds and alternative travel arrangements are processed without the need for multiple follow-ups."

It excludes User Development Fee (UDF), Passenger Service Fee (PSF), and taxes on air tickets. The ministry, in the statement, said it will continue to closely monitor fare levels through real-time data and active coordination with airlines and online travel platforms, adding that any deviation from the prescribed norms will attract immediate corrective action in the larger public interest, it added. "These fare limits shall be applicable for all forms of bookings, regardless of whether the purchase is made directly through the airline's official website or through various online travel agents' platforms," it said.

there is a need for a permanent policy in this regard. On Friday, when IndiGo cancelled over 1,000 flights from across airports, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers, after maintaining a stoic silence over the grave crisis for three days, apologised in a video message for the major inconvenience caused to passengers due to the disruptions.

The regulator DGCA provided temporary relief to IndiGo -- partially owned by Rahul Bhatia -- by rolling back the night duty definition to 12 am-5 am from 12 am-6 am earlier, and allowing its pilots to do six night-landings from two earlier, besides other relaxations. Meanwhile, the pilots' body, Airlines' Pilots Association (ALPA) India, has taken a "strong" objection to the DGCA's "selective and unsafe" relief to IndiGo, saying that the relaxations have not just "destroyed regulatory parity but also placed millions of passengers at "heightened risk".

Further, the ministry said the airline should ensure that baggage separated from passengers due to flight cancellations or delays should be traced and delivered to them within the next 48 hours. "The number of cancellations on Saturday dropped below 850

flights, much lower compared to Friday. We are continuing to work towards reducing this number progressively over the next few days," IndiGo said.

The ministry has also asked airlines to avoid steep or unusual upward fare revisions on sectors affected by the cancellations. An analysis of fares on airlines' websites on Friday showed that a one-way one-stop economy-class SpiceJet Kolkata-Mumbai flight ticket for December 6 costing up to ₹90,000, and a similar ticket of Air India for Mumbai-Bhubaneswar going up to ₹84,485.

Simplification of customs will be next big reform: FM

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Ahead of Budget 2026, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the simplification of customs would be the next big reform agenda for the government. During the current financial year, the government undertook reforms such as rate rationalisation and simplification of the income tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) in a bid to boost consumption by providing more cash in the hands of the common man.

Vedanta presents Jaigarh Heritage Festival 2025 with Esteemed Sponsors

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The Jaigarh Heritage Festival 2025 returns for its second edition, proudly presented by Vedanta, one of the world's leading critical minerals, energy transition metals, oil & gas, power and technology conglomerates. Under the guidance of Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur and produced by Teamwork Arts, the festival showcases Rajasthan's rich traditions through music, dance, heritage walks, craft workshops, and culinary experiences.

Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts, added, "The Jaigarh Heritage Festival is a celebration of Rajasthan's extraordinary artistic legacy, where music, craft, and storytelling come together to create experiences that resonate across generations. We are delighted to partner with Vedanta and our sponsors, whose support empowers artisans and communities, ensuring that our heritage and craft traditions thrive. This year, we continue our commitment to presenting moments that inspire, connect, and leave a lasting impression on every visitor. Sanjay Kohari, Trustee-KGK Foundation, remarked, "Art and music have always been more than creative disciplines to me - they are the silent architects of a society's identity. They shape how we remember our past, how we interpret our present, and how we imagine our future. Jaigarh Heritage Festival resonates deeply with my personal belief that culture must not only be preserved but continuously re-energised with new ideas and new expressions. Through the KGK Foundation, we remain committed to creating platforms that nurture talent, honour heritage, and encourage artistic courage. It is our endeavor to ensure that Jaipur's cultural landscape continues to evolve with dignity, depth, and a sense of purpose that speaks to generations beyond our own."

Vedanta's dedication to community empowerment is reflected in programs such as support for women-led micro-enterprises through Sakhi and Jiji Bai in Rajasthan, the establishment of over 10,000 modern anganwadis via Nand Ghar across 16 states, and sustainable livelihood initiatives that impact millions of lives across India. At the festival, sessions presented by Vedanta include: the Karigar Spotlight on ethnic and embroidery patchwork, Khadtal and Maganiyars performances, and the Uthori Street Play, each offering a platform to showcase local artisans and performers, while reinforcing the company's support for heritage-linked skill development. The 2025 edition of Jaigarh Heritage Festival proudly welcomes a group of committed sponsors who continue to invest in India's cultural landscape: Vedanta as Presenting Partner, in association with KGK, with Code Silver as the Official Festival Partner. Our Lifestyle Partner is Provogue, and we are grateful to Rajasthan Patrika for their support. We thank StoneX as our Art Partner, and Radio Mirchi and Gaana as our Entertainment Partners. Our Hospitality Partner Nouba, Celebration Partner AB InBev (CoronaSunset) and Pouring Partner Grover Wines add immense value to the festival experience. We also recognise Royal Treasure as our Décor Partner, AU Small Finance Bank as the Outreach Partner, and Bank of Baroda as the Banking Partner. We extend our appreciation to SDMH as the Care Partner, Stage Craft as the Official Set Design Partner, and Airtel as the Internet Partner. We are delighted to have Jaipur Uncharted as the Official Heritage Walk Partner and deeply grateful to Trevi for their support as Festival Patron.

Nirmala Durlabhji, Director, Code Silver "Code Silver is proud to support the Jaigarh Heritage Festival as the Official Festival Partner. The festival beautifully reflects our philosophy of honouring heritage while embracing contemporary expression. Rooted in Rajasthan's craft traditions, we are pleased to be part of an initiative that celebrates culture, creativity, and community in such a meaningful way." Yogendra Durlabhji, Secretary, SD Trust "At SDMH, community wellbeing has always been central to our mission. Supporting the Jaigarh Heritage Festival as the Care Partner reflects our commitment to serving people beyond the hospital walls. Festivals like these strengthen community bonds and celebrate our shared heritage, and we are pleased to contribute to an experience that is culturally vibrant, safe, and welcoming for all."

Speaking about Vedanta's association with the festival, Priya Agarwal Hebbbar, Non-Executive Director, Vedanta Ltd & Chairperson, Hindustan Zinc Ltd, said, "Rajasthan has always been home for Vedanta, and its culture continues to inspire us. We believe that preserving heritage is just as important as building for the future, and the Jaigarh Heritage Festival captures that spirit beautifully. It's a living celebration of craft, music, and storytelling that honours tradition while keeping it vibrantly alive. We are proud to support a platform that connects generations and reminds us that culture isn't what we inherit, it's what we carry forward."

Speaking about the collaboration with the festival, Pravin Prabhakar, CEO, Provogue India, said, "Heritage is not just to be remembered, but carried forward with pride. Our association with the Jaigarh Heritage Festival allows us to blend Rajasthan's cultural richness with Provogue's modern design philosophy. Through this collaboration, we proudly present MYN by Provogue, India's first customizable luggage platform, infused with the fort's motifs, artisanal influences, and a contemporary aesthetic. This Limited-Edition collection enables every traveller to carry a piece of heritage in a personal and premium way, reaffirming that style becomes truly timeless when rooted in tradition."

Contd. from Page 1...

India-Russia ties 'steadiest'

remember, the others can expect the same. I think we've always made it very clear that we have multiple relationships. We have a freedom of choice," he said. "We talk about what is called strategic autonomy and that continues and I cannot imagine why anybody would have reason to expect the contrary," he added.

The external affairs minister acknowledged that the focus of the Trump administration has been on trade and noted that India's approach in navigating it is totally driven by national interests.

"I think clearly right now trade is the most important issue there. We have, it's clearly very central to the thinking in Washington, much more than it was to earlier administrations, which is something which we have recognized and we are prepared to meet," he said. "But we are prepared to meet it on reasonable terms. I mean, for those of you who think that diplomacy is about pleasing somebody else I'm sorry, that's not my view of diplomacy. I mean, to me, it is about defending our national interests," he said. The 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 two sides are currently holding negotiations for the proposed a trade deal "We believe that there can be a landing point for our respective trade interests. Obviously, that is something which will be negotiated hard because it has an implication for livelihoods in this country," he said.

"At the end of the day, for us the interests of the workers and the farmers and the small business and the middle class matters. When we look at a trade agreement with a country like the US, you have to be extremely judicious about your position, about what you put on the table," he said. On President Putin's two-day trip to India, Jaishankar said for a "big" and "rising" country like India, it is important to maintain good cooperation with as many important players as possible in the world in line with freedom of choice. "I think if you look at India-Russia, the world has seen a lot of ups and downs in the last 70-80 years. I've said this before and I'll say it again, India, Russia have actually been among the steadiest big relationships, big power or big country relationships in the world," he said. "Even Russia's own relationship with China or US or Europe has had its ups and downs. Our relationships with many of these countries have had it too," he added. In any relationship, Jaishankar noted, it is natural that some aspects of it develop and some kind of don't keep up.

"In the case of Russia, what had happened for a variety of reasons, I think they visualized the West and China as their primary economic partners. We visualised perhaps the same." "So the economic side of the relationship had somehow not kept pace. You can see that in the numbers." Putin's visit in many ways was about reimagining the relationship, he said. "It was about building dimensions and facets which it lacked or didn't have in enough measure. If I were to pick two or three big takeaways, for me, the mobility agreement where Indians would now much more seamlessly find work opportunities in Russia was one big outcome."

The understanding on a joint venture on fertilisers was another major take away, according to Jaishankar. "We are the world's second biggest fertiliser importer after Brazil. It's a recurring issue that we have. And also because the fertilizer sources have been very unstable. They've turned on and turned off the tap. So we had an agreement to create an important substantial joint venture on fertilizers," he said.

On India's ties with China, Jaishankar said the key point that New Delhi made was that peace and tranquillity in the border areas is a prerequisite for good relations and it is being maintained and is being built upon.

"But it's not like that was the only issue in the relationship. There were many other issues, some of which predated Galwan. So there are issues about trade, there are issues about investment, there are issues about competition, about subsidies, about fairness, about transparency," he said. "These are real issues as well. We are trying to work our way through some of it. Some of it is easier, some of it is harder," he added.

To a question on Pakistan Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, Jaishankar said much of India's problem emanates from the military of that country and even referred to its support for terror groups. Like there are good terrorists and bad terrorists, there are good military leaders and apparently not-so-good ones, he said, seen as a reference to Munir. "I think for us, the reality of the Pakistani army has always been and much of our problems actually emanate from them. When you look at the terrorism, when you look at the training camps, when you look at the sort of a policy of almost ideological hostility towards India, where does that come from? It comes from the army," he said. Jaishankar said India and Pakistan should not be hyphenated at all. "Look at the state of Pakistan. See the differentials and the capabilities and frankly the reputation on either side. We should not get over obsessed and hyphenate ourselves with them. There is a challenge, there are issues that we'll deal with," he added. On Bangladesh, the external affairs minister said India is a well wisher of that country. "We think as a democratic country, any democratic country likes to see the will of the people ascertained through a democratic process."

"I'm quite confident that whatever comes out of the democratic process would have a balanced and mature view about the relationship and, hopefully things would improve," he said. Asked if former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina will continue to stay in India, he said: "She came here in a certain circumstance and I think that circumstance clearly sort of is a factor in what happens to her. But again, that is something which she has to make up her mind." (PTI)

Movie on Bhabendra Saikia's

familial relationships, the film's makers said. The story portrays the bond between a father and child, reflecting themes of love, separation and endurance. Speaking about the adaptation, managing trustee of Bhabendra Nath Saikia Children Welfare Trust and Saikia's wife, Preeti Saikia, said, "It is a moment of profound pride and emotion to see 'Moromor Deuta' come alive on the big screen. This was a work extremely close to his heart, and over the years, it has touched countless readers. Witnessing it find a new life through cinema is truly special, as it carries his legacy to a new generation of audiences." 'Moromor Deuta' is scheduled for a theatrical release in 2026. (PTI)

Reap benefits of govt

from Hailakandi and 20,045 from Dholai received cheques of ₹ 10,000 each under this initiative. Addressing a meeting at the cheque distribution programme for Hailakandi, the chief minister said the scheme was launched to ensure sustainable economic empowerment of women in the state. He said that in the last two months, cheque distribution programmes had been held in 50 constituencies, benefitting 12 lakh women across the state.

Sarma said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisions transforming three crore women across India into 'Lakshmi Didas', who can earn more than ₹ 1 lakh annually through various income-generating activities.

Referring to Assam, he said 40 lakh women in the state are associated with four lakh self-help groups (SHGs) and the government aims to transform each one of them as 'Lakshmi Baideu' through this initiative. He further announced that from January 1, ration card holders will be able to buy dal, salt and sugar at ₹100 per kg, instead of the existing ₹117. Urging beneficiaries to make the best use of the fund, the chief minister emphasised that the ₹ 10,000 cheque is only the beginning. "If women deposit this seed fund in their SHGs, a working capital of ₹ 1 lakh can be created, which can be used either for group-based enterprises, individual ventures or expansion of existing family businesses," he said. "After an assessment of fund utilisation in six months, beneficiaries will be eligible for subsequent support of ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000. Only beneficiaries with up to three children will be eligible for these benefits," he added.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister laid the foundation stone for the installation of a statue of Syama Prasad Mukherjee on Puranibazar Road in Hailakandi. Later, at another programme for handing over the cheques in Dholai, Sarma said the state government has been consistently working to empower women associated with SHGs and help them progress step by step to become successful entrepreneurs under the MMUA.

He said that by engaging with SHGs, these women have been making significant contributions not only to their families but also to the overall economy of the state. Their involvement in income-generating activities has enabled them to become self-reliant, while enhancing their status within their families and society, Sarma said. Urging the beneficiaries to utilise the seed capital effectively for productive activities, he said that women who properly use the initial support of ₹ 10,000 will subsequently receive ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000, amounting to a total assistance of ₹ 85,000 per beneficiary. With the judicious use of this capital, SHG members will not only become 'Lakshmi Baideus' but also emerge as role models for other women in their localities, he added. (With inputs from PTI)

India, US seek punitive

'designations dialogue', held on December 3 in New Delhi. In the talks, the Indian side thanked the US State Department for designating The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of LeT, as both a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). The TRF had taken responsibility for the Pahalgam terror attack. The two sides emphasised that confronting terrorism requires concerted action in a sustained and comprehensive manner, according to a joint statement released on Saturday.

Against this backdrop, the two sides renewed their commitment to strengthening multilateral cooperation in the field of countering terrorism, including in the UN, Quad and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). "The two sides called for additional designations of ISIS and al-Qa'ida affiliates, and LeT and JeM and their proxy groups, supporters, sponsors, financiers and backers, under the UN 1267 sanctions regime, ensuring their members face a global asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo," the statement said.

It said the meetings underscored the importance of bilateral cooperation in countering terrorism, reflecting the "spirit and breadth" of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. "Both sides unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism. They expressed concern over the increasing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), drones, and AI for terrorist purposes," the statement added. It said the two sides strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam and the recent heinous terror incident near the Red Fort, while stressing that those responsible for terrorism should be held accountable. "The two sides reviewed a wide range of traditional and emerging threats and challenges such as terrorist recruitment, abuse of technology for terrorist purposes, and financing of terrorism."

"Both sides discussed ways to strengthen cooperation against challenges, including through training, cybersecurity, exchange of best practices and information sharing through continued bilateral and multilateral efforts," the statement noted. India and the US also discussed strengthening law enforcement and judicial cooperation, including through information sharing and cooperation on mutual legal assistance requests. (PTI)

AAU inks MoU with private

transfer of technology for commercial production of the State official fruit (Assam Lemon) juice having prolonged shelf life was signed between Dr Sanjay Kumar Chetia, Director of Research (Agriculture), AAU and Dr KN Singh, an official of the Trinity Fructa Private Limited (SRD Group Industries, Mangaldoi) at the University's Jorhat campus. It is to be mentioned here that the Assam Lemon was granted Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2019 following AAU facilitating in the process in collaboration with 'CRS-Naa Diding Nemu Tenga Unnayan Samity', Tinsukia. Describing the development as another positive development of the institution to offer benefit to all stakeholders of the agriculture sector, Dr Chetia said that soon people would soon find fresh Kaji Nemu juice without any additives in the market.

He said that the technology was developed by the university after four years of research by scientists which extends the shelf life for a period of 18 months when kept under refrigerated conditions.

Dr Chetia observed that commercialisation of this technology is expected to largely benefit the State's agricultural economy. He added Kaji Nemu, rich in Vitamin C and antioxidants, remains one of the state's most valued horticultural products, but nearly one-fourth of the annual produce goes to waste due to lack of preservation and processing facilities. Dr Manashi Das Purukayastha, a former AAU faculty led the research team which comprised student Jyotishmita Konwar that developed the technology. Dr Mrinal Saikia, Associate Director, Research (Agriculture), Dr Ananta Saikia, Dr Gargi Sarmah, Dr Moloya Gogoi (all faculty members) and Dr Manashi Das Purukayastha were present during the MoU signing ceremony.

E-AUCTION NOTICE
N.I.T. No. Auction No. 148
Under the provisions of Rule 32, 33 & 34 of the Assam Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 2013, Bids are invited online by the undersigned from registered Companies / Firms / Societies / Individuals, etc. for the award of seized stack materials under Cachar Division, Silchar as follows:-
At Ujagram = 42.408 st.m3 of Sand
Details of spot e-auction will be available on https://assam-forestonline.in from 09-12-2025.
Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer, Cachar Division: Silchar
DIPR /C/HLT/246/7-Dec-25

Jitendra Chaudhury cites Calcutta HC ruling, urges state to pursue case on humanitarian grounds

Tripura LoP urges govt to take up 10,323 teachers' termination case at appropriate level

AGARTALA, Dec 6: Leader of the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly, Jitendra Chaudhury, on Saturday urged the state government to take up the matter of 10,323 teachers' termination at an appropriate level for reconsideration.

The CPI (M) leader cited the recent verdict of the Calcutta High Court, which overturned a single bench's order on the dismissal of 36,000 teachers in West Bengal.

Following writ petitions challenging the Recruitment Rules, the High Court of Tripura had terminated the services of 10,323 teachers in 2014, and later the verdict was upheld by a division bench of the Supreme Court in 2017.

"The Calcutta High Court's division bench has set a precedent by overturning the single bench's verdict of dismissing 36,000 teachers. The Calcutta High Court has passed the verdict on humanitarian



grounds and did not consider if the teachers were eligible or ineligible as they had performed their duties for many years," Chaudhury said.

Claiming that the recent verdict of the Calcutta High Court has become a topic of discussion in various circles in the state, he pointed fingers at the entire recruitment

process conducted by the Trinamool Congress-led government in West Bengal.

"There were allegations that several candidates did not even appear for the recruitment examinations, leading to the termination of 36,000 teachers. But Tripura's situation was different from that in

West Bengal," he claimed.

"In Tripura, the High Court had terminated the appointment of 10,323 teachers adopted by the Left Front government in 1980 were found faulty. Several hundred people employed under the RRs are still working in almost all the government departments, but 10,232 employees lost their jobs because of the court's order," he pointed out.

Chaudhury urged the government to take up the 10,323 teachers' case at the appropriate level for reconsideration in the wake of the Calcutta High Court's landmark verdict.

"Since Chief Minister Manik Saha holds the education portfolio, he can make an attempt for the terminated teachers on humanitarian grounds as many of them have lost their lives and many others are facing severe hardships," he stated. (PTI)

KA to host Ginger Festival and Buyer-Seller Meet

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 6: The Agriculture Department of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) will host a Ginger Festival and Buyer-Seller Meet on December 9 at Arboretum, Matipung in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Assam Agriculture University and the Tourism Department.

The festival will showcase GI-tagged ginger, turmeric and pineapple, bringing together Farmer Producer Companies, entrepreneurs, exporters and institutional buyers for direct trade and partnerships. The initiative aims to empower local farmers, improve market access and enhance the value of indigenous products. A grand Ginger Festival cum Buyer-Seller Meet is also planned for January 2026, further supporting the district's agricultural community.

Gauhati University denies claims of last-minute exam form fill-up

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Gauhati University has refuted allegations that examination form fill-up was opened a day before exams, calling them baseless and misleading. The University clarified that the form fill-up window was intentionally kept open to accommodate students facing genuine constraints.

With over 250 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the University said scheduling exams is complex, especially under NEP-2020, which has nearly doubled examinable courses. The compressed schedule from 45 to 30 days was designed to balance operational needs with student interests.

Registrar Prof Utpal Sarma stated that the move ensured no student was disadvantaged and reinforced holistic learning with adequate teaching hours. The University urged affiliated colleges to complete admissions, registration and examination approvals within prescribed timelines to maintain result schedules.

Diphu MP tables Assam Reorganisation Bill for Karbi Dimanchal Autonomous State

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 6: Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao Autonomous State Demand Committee (KADHASDCOM) and its allies have hailed Diphu MP, Amarsing Tisso for tabling the private member bill, the Assam Reorganisation (Karbi Dimanchal) Bill, 2025 for the formation of the State of (Karbi Dimanchal) Assam, during the Winter Session in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of Parliament on Friday last (December 5). The bill No.252 by Tisso was placed during the government business from 11 AM to 3.30 PM yesterday.

After the bill has been tabled by Tisso, the members of the House will take up for discussion on the main political issue concerning Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao for creation of an Autonomous State (Karbi Dimanchal) within Assam for the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, aiming for greater self-governance, a demand echoing long-standing aspira-

tions for separate administration in the hill districts.

The Winter Session of Parliament has started from December 1 and will end on 19 of this month.

It may be recalled here that the similar bill was introduced by former MP Birensing Engti in 2016. Attempt was made to introduce the same bill by successive MP Horensing Bey in 2023, but has failed.

In a press conference held here at KADHASDCOM office on Saturday last (December 5), Tisso said the demand for greater autonomy or statehood for the hill districts of Assam has existed since the 1950s. Notable is the signing of MoU by ASDC in 1995 and the MoS 1 and 2 signed by armed organisations in 2011 and in 2021 respectively giving more autonomy to the present Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

Hailing the move by Tisso, the KADHASDCOM president, Tisso expressed his sincere thanks to the MP for his initiative

taken for the implementation of Article 244(A) of the constitution for Autonomous State. Tisso also expressed his gratitude to Chief Executive Member (CEM), KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang for his strong support and continuously pressuring the State and Central government on the issue.

Urging every political party, social organisation and communities and tribes to support for the granting of Autonomous State Tisso said, "It was out of political pressure and compulsion that has led to the signing of MoU and MoS 1 and 2 for more powers. But we should forget the past mistakes committed and now we should all stand united in one umbrella to support the Autonomous State issue spearheaded by KADHASDCOM." All political parties, social organisations, intellectuals and different communities and tribes should unite together for one cause i.e. achieving the long standing demand for an Autonomous State, Tisso pleaded.

Sharada Prasad Mushahary wins Assam Sahitya Award 2025

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 6: Sharada Prasad Mushahary, a distinguished Bodo language writer from Bagansali, Kokrajhar has been selected for the Assam Sahitya Award 2025. The Government of Assam announced the award for 18 writers across the state, recognising their literary contributions.

A retired officer of the Public Health Engineering Department and current Vice-President of the Bodo Writers' Academy, Mushahary expressed his delight at receiving recognition as a literary figure. He credited his wife, Asha Mushahary, as a key source of inspiration in his writing journey.

Sharada Prasad Mushahary has published seven books, spanning short stories, novels and poetry

collections. Notable poetry works include 'Ba Gosai' (Old Bathou), 'Kobam Bihu' (Moon's Festival), 'Bisombini Cher Cher Bisombi' (Through Memories), 'Bwisaguni Cher Cher Bwisagu' (Bihu and Beyond), 'Angni Muthiche Sonet Kanthai' (My Handful of Sonnets), and 'Gochothounaini Cher Cher Bordaui Kanthailu Hung' (Poems of Love). He also announced that his upcoming poetry collection, 'Akhrangni Raja Lamayao Gupungnai Hadri' (Golden Dust Flying over the Sky Elephant) will be published soon.

Mushahary appealed to the younger generation to cultivate the habit of writing and contribute to the growth of literature, emphasising the importance of preserving and promoting regional languages.

Historic Krishna Cinema Hall demolished

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 6: In a blow to Nagaon's cultural heritage, the historic Krishna Cinema Hall, a long-standing symbol of Assamese cinema, was demolished on Friday, leaving locals and cinephiles deeply saddened. The cinema hall, once a hub for Assamese and Hindi films, had been a cherished gathering place in the heart of Nagaon town for decades.

Built by a group of cultural enthusiasts, Krishna Cinema Hall showcased numerous superhit films over the years and drew audiences from across central Assam. Its legacy had made it a significant cultural landmark, contributing to the city's identity as a center for cinema and entertainment.

Assam Congress launches 'Aspirational Boxes' under statewide outreach drive

'Raijor Podulit, Raijor Congress' aims to build people-driven manifesto for upcoming Assembly polls

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 6: The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Friday launched a major statewide campaign, "Raijor Podulit, Raijor Congress," introducing "Aspirational Boxes" to collect public suggestions for drafting a people-centric manifesto ahead of the next Assembly elections. The initiative was formally rolled out in Dibrugarh in the presence of senior party leaders, community representatives and grassroots organisations.

APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, Manifesto Committee Chairman Pradyut Bordoloi, Senior vice president Pranati Phukan, former minister Prithvi Majhi, former Union Minister Paban Singh Ghatowar and District Congress president Bipul Rabha jointly inaugurated the campaign. Representatives from numerous organisations across Eastern Assam, including labour unions, student bodies, legal associations and cultural groups, participated in the programme.

Speaking at the launch, Manifesto Committee Chairman Pradyut Bordoloi said the Congress aims to create a roadmap that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of all communities in Assam. "This initiative is not just

for an election, it is for the future. We want the voices of the people to be heard, understood, and reflected in a manifesto that truly represents them," he said. Bordoloi added that party workers will reach out to people across various sectors to gather inputs on employment, salaries, youth welfare and everyday challenges.

During the event, APCC leaders held informal interactions with community groups to collect feedback on organisational issues and suggestions for strengthening grassroots engagement.

APCC president Gaurav Gogoi said the party is focused on taking its growing organisational momentum directly to the people. As part of the outreach, health camps were launched in tea garden areas on November 30, followed by direct community interactions from December 6. By the end of the month, APCC teams divided into five groups, will conduct a statewide Yatra across Eastern, Central and Western Assam, the Barak Valley and Hill Districts to engage with farmers, labourers, contractors, youths and other sections.

Gogoi criticised the current government's approach, alleging that governance under the ruling dispensation resembles "monarchy," where public grievances

even over essential services lead to punitive action rather than solutions. He also said opposition parties, after their November 12 alliance meeting, plan to hold a joint convention in January to present a united vision.

Over the next few weeks, Congress committees at booth, mandal and district levels will place more than 4,000 Aspirational Boxes across public spaces such as markets, community halls, tea garden labour lines, playgrounds, bus stops and educational institutions. Citizens will be able to submit written suggestions highlighting issues they wish to see addressed in the party's manifesto.

The campaign launch comes amid persistent concerns in Assam, including the unfulfilled promise of a flood-free state, low wages for tea workers, the pending ST status demand of six communities, high maternal mortality, child trafficking, inadequate rural healthcare, school dropouts and increasing man-animal conflict.

AICC General Secretary and APCC in-charge Jitendra Singh will oversee the implementation of the campaign across the state. Congress leaders said the objective is to prepare a "People's Manifesto" that reflects the real needs and aspirations of Assam's diverse population.

Gogoi writes to Jaishankar, seeks response on 'association' of Zubeen death case accused with MEA

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has urged External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to clarify the "association" of his ministry with a key accused in connection with the death of singer Zubeen Garg.

Gogoi has also sought a statement from Jaishankar over Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's claim that Garg's death in Singapore was an incident of murder.

Garg had died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on September 19. He was in the island nation to participate in the North East India Festival (NEIF), 2025.

The SIT of Assam Police has so far arrested seven people in the case, including the chief organiser of the festival, Shyamkanu Mahanta.

Gogoi, in a letter to Jaishankar on Thursday, said that the festival was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs with support from the High Commission

of India in Singapore.

The Congress leader pointed out that one of the accused in the ongoing police investigation was "directly associated with the organisation of the festival", in an apparent reference to Mahanta.

Gogoi alleged that the accused ran an organisation, which has received payments amounting to several lakhs of rupees from Jaishankar's ministry for holding festivals and events.

"The relationship between the Ministry of External Affairs and a person who is one of the accused in a murder as claimed by the Chief Minister of Assam is deeply troubling," he said.

"I am bringing this to your attention and requesting the Ministry to issue a statement regarding the claim of the Chief Minister of Assam and also clarify the association between senior leadership of Ministry of External Affairs and the one of the accused in the case," Gogoi said. (PTI)

Lyngdoh rejects rumours of quitting UDP for NPP

SHILLONG, Dec 6: United Democratic Party (UDP) leader Paul Lyngdoh has firmly dismissed rumours suggesting he might switch to the National People's Party (NPP), describing the claims as baseless "conjectures and theories." Speaking to reporters, Lyngdoh clarified that he has no intention of severing ties with the UDP, a party he has been associated with for years.

He acknowledged that dissatisfaction exists among certain sections within the UDP following a recent reshuffle carried out by the party leadership. Lyngdoh noted that such concerns are natural in a political organisation but insisted they should be addressed through internal dialogue rather than public speculation.

"Of course, there are various sections within the party which are not happy with the way the reshuffle was handled by the party leadership, but these are matters which we will discuss internally," he said.

Reaffirming his dedication to the party, Lyngdoh emphasised that he remains committed to the UDP and has no plans to quit. "I insist on one point, which is that throughout my career in the political sphere, I have always been a fighter and never a quitter. I will not quit that easily," he stated, putting to rest the rumours of an imminent defection. (NNN)

Man Killed by Train at Jorhat Town station

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 6: A 37-year-old man, Biki Saikia of Panjabari, Guwahati, died on the spot after being hit by the Mariani-Alipurduar intercity express around 10 AM on Saturday at Jorhat Town station.

Saikia, who had come to Jorhat to attend a wedding was reportedly crossing the tracks when the accident occurred. The Railway Police have sent the body to JMCH for post-mortem.

LOST

I lost my B.Ed. 4th Semester marksheet of Assam University, Silchar, bearing Roll 031817 No.11020704 with registration No.41-150068411 in and around Diphu town on 1st December, 2025. Any person (s) finding the same may kindly contact at the address or mobile No. mentioned below.

Name: Subhobroto Mazumdar, S/O Manik Mazumdar Address: Sitlabari, Ward No.2, Diphu town. P.O. & P.S.- Diphu, Dist.- Karbi Anglong, Assam. Mobile No.88221-32755.

Stone-pulling ceremony in Hornbill

HT Correspondent

KOHIMA, Dec 6: Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio, along with the tourism department, hosted the ceremonial stone pulling ceremony at Touphema village in Kohima district on Friday, with Union communications and DoNER minister Jyotiraditya Scindia attending as the chief guest. The ceremony, a major highlight of the ongoing Hornbill Festival, drew significant participation from villagers and visitors. In his address, Scindia said the stone pulling tradition was more than a physical act, describing it as a union of body, mind, soul, heart and spirit that reflected the collective strength and cultural depth of the Naga people.

Two-day consultation on humanitarian response and climate resilience concludes

Experts and communities call for locally led, climate-resilient solutions for Brahmaputra Basin

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 6: A two-day people's consultation on Strengthening Humanitarian Response and Climate Resilience in the Brahmaputra Basin concluded on Friday evening at a hotel in Jorhat. The event was organised by the North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) in collaboration with the Inter Agency Group (IAG), Assam and brought together humanitarian actors, climate practitioners, community leaders, academics and civil society representatives from across the Brahmaputra valley.

The consultation focused on Assam's growing humanitarian and climate challenges, including recurrent floods, severe riverbank erosion, displacement and changing hydrological patterns affecting communities across the basin. The programme opened with welcome remarks and regional reflections by Tirtha Prasad Saikia, Director of NEADS, followed by an inaugural address from development practitioner Ravindra Nath, who highlighted the increasing



vulnerability of riverine communities amid intensifying climate risks.

Over two days, participants engaged in thematic discussions on humanitarian trends, climate impacts, and disaster preparedness and response. Key speakers including Luit Goswami (RVC), Deborah Sangma (State IAG Assam), Wilfred Toppo

(PAD), Keshav Krishna Chatradhara (North-East Watertalk) and Rajen Saikia (District IAG Dhemaji) shared insights on institutional gaps, community experiences and the need for locally led solutions. Testimonies from community representatives highlighted displacement, livelihood loss and traditional coping mecha-

nisms. Working groups explored areas such as climate-resilient livelihoods, ecosystem restoration, local governance, social protection, community-based disaster response and effective localisation. They presented actionable recommendations emphasising anticipatory action, stronger institutional coordination and community-led resilience-building.

A major highlight of the consultation was the release of the People's Declaration for a Resilient Brahmaputra Basin, which consolidates recommendations for future humanitarian and climate action. The declaration advocates for people-centred, climate-informed, locally led approaches to empower vulnerable communities and strengthen regional resilience systems.

Participants concluded the consultation with a call for deeper collaboration among civil society organisations, government institutions, academia and local communities to address Assam's escalating climate and humanitarian crises.

ENGINEERING WORKS UNDER ALIPURDUAR DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No.: 106/W-2/APDJ

Dated: 03-12-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

Tender No: 37-AP-III-2025. Name of Work: "Supply of shingle boulder minimum 35 kg to 55 kg each and unscreened shingle for recoupment of flood reserve stocks at different stations/locations of Alipurduar division". Tender Value: ₹1,59,53,877.11; Earnest Money: ₹2,29,800.00. E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 26-12-2025 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 26-12-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM (Works), Alipurduar Jn. NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers with a smile"

HIRING OF LIGHT MOTOR VEHICLE FOR DAY-TO-DAY WORK'S INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

GeM Bid Number: GEM/2025/BI/6962123, Dated: 03-12-2025. (NIT No. SCL-ENGG-96-OF-2025). E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. SN. 1. Brief Description of item: Hiring of 02 (two) nos. light motor vehicle (Mahindra XUV500/Scorpio/Toyota/Innova or similar) for day-to-day work's inspection activities of ADEN/Imphal at Silchar & ADEN/Aizawl at Bhairabi for a period of one year. Tender Value: ₹14,16,470.00/-; Earnest Money: ₹28,300.00/- Bid End Date/Time: 26-12-2025 at 15:00 hrs. Bid Opening Date/Time: 26-12-2025 at 15:30 hrs. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 26-12-2025 in website <http://www.Gem.gov.in>

DRM (Works), Lumding at Silchar NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers with a smile"

E-AUCTION FOR GUEST HOUSE AT SOUTH BANK OF RIVER BRAHMAPUTRA, BOGIBEEL, DIBRUGARH

E-Auction for Guest House at South Bank of river Brahmaputra, Bogibeel, Dibrugarh over Tinsukia Division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days: 1096.

Auction Catalogue No. GUESTHOUSE25-01

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	MSS-TSK-DMGN-STGen-31-25-1 (Misc-Static-Services-Static General)	Guest House at South Bank of river Brahmaputra, Bogibeel, Dibrugarh

Auction Start Date & Time: 11:00 hrs. & Closing at: 11:30 hrs. of 26-12-2025. Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Divisional Commercial Manager (IC), Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers With A Smile"



By: Dipak Kurmi

Homen Borgohain is acknowledged and esteemed as one of the most brilliant astrotologers of contemporary Assamese literature. His literary persona is distinguished by its unmatched singularity, owing to the versatility of his talents. He excels as a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, and preeminent journalist. He is a diligent and astute intellectual, whose erudition is widely recognised.

In the latter half of the 1960s, Homen Borgohain assumed the editorship of the weekly newspaper Nilachal, which prompted him to delve deeper into the sociopolitical, economic, and educational concerns of Assam. He expressed his viewpoints on various significant issues of national importance, and succeeded in involving people from diverse backgrounds to participate in the discourse. He also managed to inspire the youth of Assam to engage with the intellectual world, emerging as a 'new man' in the 1960s and facilitating discussions on various topics during a challenging period in the country's history. Despite the lack of financial security that came with leaving his job as a senior officer of the Environmental Public Service Commission of Assam to pursue a career in journalism, Homen Borgohain chose the path less traveled, driven by a noble purpose and

ideal. The Weekly Nilachal broke away from convention and brought innovation to the field of journalism in Assam, appealing to readers with diverse interests and shining a new light on issues related to society, politics, economy, culture, and education.

It is crucial to recognize the significance of societal issues in the advancement of a country. Homen Borgohain's remarkable contribution lies in his ability to stimulate and motivate the younger generation to think and act. Nevertheless, he speaks of his disinterest in journalism during his early career, stating that he continued in the field without any satisfaction as it was not his primary source of livelihood. However, the people of Assam may question this claim. After leaving Nilachal, he went on to edit several newspapers and magazines, and everywhere he went, he left a lasting impression, with each publication becoming a voice for people from all walks of life in Assam. His journalistic principles are unconventional and entirely his own. In his editorials, he presents issues related to the state with such force and conviction that he captures the attention of all concerned parties. Moreover, his readers express significant interest and involvement in the news articles published or written by him. Homen Borgohain's journalism and newspaper do not solely rely on political events or sensational news stories of

Homen Borgohain's contributions to Assamese literature and journalism

Homen Borgohain is a distinguished literary figure and a responsible journalist who faces the challenges of both creative writing and uncovering the truth of society's everyday life. It is worth noting that he entered journalism only after establishing himself as a writer. However, he has shown rare and intricate examples of balance thus far. He is no longer a half-hearted journalist like many of us. The demands of journalism are specific to a particular time, while the demands of literature are timeless, and he understands that. As a journalist, I notice a marked difference between his views on current political news and his cultural views. His genuine sensitivity to the character and qualities of Assam's limited and restrained cultural works is distinct and nuanced compared to that of many gifted and intelligent individuals

violence and terrorism, but instead serve as a medium to cater to the cultural sensibilities and preferences of his readership.

Through his newspaper, Homen Borgohain brings to our attention a wide range of topics, from a special book by an author from somewhere in the world to the life story of an unknown person in a remote village in Assam, and from issues of violence and terror to the presence of a few trees in the middle of a city. He possesses the ability to engage people from all walks of life, be it ordinary readers or expert writers, in deep and meaningful debates on various issues that span a long-term period in the newspaper. Typically, newspapers tend to fill their pages with current problems or events, but our societal indifference is evident as soon as another newsworthy event arises, causing the previous one to fade from our memories. However, by raising public awareness, Homen Borgohain is able to bring the issues to the forefront in a profound manner.

During his extensive career as a journalist, Homen Borgohain has had his fair share of conflicts with others. His unflinching clarity, fearlessness, and rational approach have often led to clashes with the majority over several critical issues of national importance. One such instance was during the deportation movement, where his stance and statements resulted in his expulsion. Even during the movement, the newspapers that Borgohain edited were only accessible to a handful of his loyal readers. It is noteworthy that reading the weekly newspapers Nagari and Janakranti, edited by Homen Borgohain, during those tumultuous times was considered an act of courage. But now, as time has passed, it is widely accepted that the arguments put forth by Homen Borgohain during the Assam Movement were indeed correct. Al-

though his articles were limited in number, they served as a guiding light for a small number of admirers during the dark days of the movement.

Despite living among people, Homen Borgohain is not a passive observer of his surroundings. He actively observes and analyzes the daily events in society, seeking to understand their origins and impact on people at all levels, particularly the disadvantaged and young. He voices his opinions on various issues in a timely manner, without resorting to street protests. From his early days as a student at Cotton College, Borgohain has maintained an uncompromising stance, which he carries into his current work as a journalist.

Homen Borgohain's newspapers were a platform for discussing and debating various issues, including the promotion of the Assamese language and the timely provision of appropriate textbooks for school students. He was always eager to facilitate these efforts and ensure their success.

Homen Borgohain's concern lies in the well-being and future prospects of children, adolescents, and young people, enabling them to become responsible citizens of a beautiful, unspoiled world. He believes that the elders of society, including parents, teachers, writers, journalists, social scientists, and naturalists, all have a role to play in shaping their future. As an editor of several newspapers and magazines, he has actively worked towards nurturing the creative talents of teenagers and young people.

Homen Borgohain stands out from his contemporaries as a writer, and can be considered in a league of his own. From the moment he first began writing as a student at Cotton, it was clear that he possessed a unique talent. He has a distinct style as a poet, short story writer, essayist, novelist, critic, and more. His character as a writer is unconventional, and sets him apart

from others in his field.

Homen Borgohain is a distinguished literary figure and a responsible journalist who faces the challenges of both creative writing and uncovering the truth of society's everyday life. It is worth noting that he entered journalism only after establishing himself as a writer. However, he has shown rare and intricate examples of balance thus far. He is no longer a half-hearted journalist like many of us. The demands of journalism are specific to a particular time, while the demands of literature are timeless, and he understands that. As a journalist, I notice a marked difference between his views on current political news and his cultural views. His genuine sensitivity to the character and qualities of Assam's limited and restrained cultural works is distinct and nuanced compared to that of many gifted and intelligent individuals. (A letter in search of Homen Borgohain).

The phrase "man for man" holds value only when a person dedicates their life to the betterment of humanity in all its forms, and to the progress and development of their country and nation. It requires a deep inner strength and unwavering self-confidence. Such individuals are resolute and possess the ability to provide a precise vision of the future. They approach every problem from an analytical perspective and do not easily succumb to the opinions of others. There are numerous ways to enhance one's self-confidence and ability to confront life's challenges. Homen Borgohain was a selfless, intrepid journalist and a distinguished writer. The ideals he instilled in our national life through his devotion and sacrifice, particularly as a journalist, will forever serve as a source of inspiration for the nation. (*The writer is a journalist and commentator based in Guwahati, can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com*)

Homen Borgohain: The Polestar in the Intellectual Firmament of Assam

By: Lalit Nath

The renowned litterateur, journalist, short-story writer, novelist, poet, distinguished prose artist and former President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha, Homen Borgohain, occupies an unforgettable place in the thoughtful reading community of Assam. Born on 7 December 1932 in Baligaon, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district, he obtained his Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Cotton College, Guwahati, in 1954. In the early phase of his career, he served as a teacher at Dhakuakhana Higher Secondary School. In 1955, after successfully clearing the Assam Civil Service examination, he worked as Sub-Deputy Collector in various districts of Assam. However, because of his irresistible attraction towards literature and journalism, he resigned from government service and devoted himself fully to literary creation.

Homen Borgohain established himself as a short-story writer during the Ramdhenu era itself. His first book, 'Bivinna Koras' was published in 1957, and in the same year he took over as editor of the weekly 'Nilachal', completely immersing himself in journalism. That marked the beginning of his long, active and highly influential journalistic career. Starting from 'Nilachal', he served as editor of numerous newspapers and magazines such as Lokayata, Nagarik, Ajkal, Samakal, Sutradhar, Asom Bani, Dainik Batari, Amar Asom, Satorni, Niyamiya Barta, GNRC Swasthya, Kishor Alochona and many others, discharging his duties with utmost dedication and shining brightly as a journalist.

His contribution to literature is equally unforgettable. He displayed mastery in almost every genre, short stories, novels, essays, criticism, autobiography, etc. Some of his notable works include 'Bivinna Naraka', 'Mor Priya Panchta German Galpa', 'Prem aru Mrityur Karane, Swapna, Smriti aru Bishad', 'Galpa aru Naksha, Astitwar Jatirimay Chetna, Sampaw, Teertha Phukan and others. His stories are marked by profound psychological analysis, social inequality, the pain, anguish, anger, despair and frustration of the lower strata of urban life, as well as the decaying social order.

From the 1960s onwards, Borgohain shifted from short stories to novels and within a very short time became even more popular as a novelist. His major novels include Halodhiya Soraye Baodhan Khay, Saudor Puteke Nao Meli Jya, Pitaputra, Atmarag, Nisangata, Kushilav, Subala,

Tantrik, Timir Tirtha, Edinur Diary and Matsyagandha. The central themes of his novels are humanism, respect for human values, deep experience of rural life and the harshness of urban existence, suffering, spiritual realization, profound humanistic vision, the scent of village soil, superstition, urban loneliness and hypocrisy, existential conflicts of human beings, solitude, love, sorrow, fear of death and the reflection of outer and inner life.

One distinctive feature of his novels is the exquisite harmony between emotion and form. Thanks to his mature experience, his novels have become the most truthful and humane documents in Assamese literature. His only poetry collection, Haimanti, is a profound expression of his philosophy of life. In this book, observation of nature is not merely external, it assumes a self-reflective stance. Especially in the title poem Haimanti, through the barren atmosphere of late autumn, he subtly feels the transience of life. The changing nature of the seasons reflects the impermanence of human life and through this the poet unveils an eternal truth, the beauty of life lies precisely in its fleeting nature. This idea is a unique contribution to Assamese poetry that immerses the reader in deep contemplation.

His autobiographical works such as Atmanusandhan, Dhumuhaar Ramdhenu, Mor Hridoy Ekhon Juddhakshetra and numerous essay collections like Uchchhakanksha, Prajnar Sadhana, Amak Kitap Lage, Kitap Parbar Anand, Kam Karar Anand, Jivanar Madhuratam Samay, Sukh-Dukh, Atma Dipo Bhaba, Antahin Prerana, Anand aru Bedanar Sandhanat, Bipadar Bandhu, Jivanar Sadhana, Manuh Huwar Gaurav, Sustha Debat Sustha Man, Saransha, Moi Jetiya Klanta Haun, Rahasyamoy Bishad aru Yantrana, Adhunik Yugar Janma Kahini, Mor Jivanat Ishwar, Mor Tokabahir Para, Axir Daxakar Dastabej, Bichitra Abhigyata aru Anubhuti, Sharir aru Hridoy, Gadyar Sadhana, Pathakar Tokabahi, Jijnasa, Swarga aru Naraka, Hridayar Manchitra, Saral Jivan Sukhi Jivan and many more have added new dimensions to Assamese literature. These writings infuse fresh life into the reader's mind, as if administering the elixir of immortality.

The poverty, suffering, conflicts, struggles and protests against injustice of rural life, as well as the lamentations of the deprived and the afflicted, always found a place in his writings. Homen Borgohain wrote perceptive essays on numerous Western short stories, novels,

poems, and their authors, poets, philosophers and intellectuals. With his powerful and lucid prose, interspersed with relevant quotations from Western writers, he offered readers an astonishing intellectual delight and further established the depth of his reasoning. As the anchor of the discussion programme News Live, he became widely known among the public as a frank and rational personality.

Another unforgettable achievement was his role in inspiring and providing publishing opportunities to talented young writers of the new generation. Many poets, prose writers and thoughtful readers were born at his editorial desk. He greatly expanded the horizon of Assam's intellectual world. Until the very end of his life, readers eagerly awaited his Sunday column Mor Tokabahir Para. His writings on health practices, the power of prayer and even the small joys of life provided indomitable strength.

One of his statements teaches us self-examination, "We Assamese actually live only half-alive. The other half we remain dead. We have not learned to derive joy from diverse sources such as music, painting, literature, drama, travel and good company. Most middle-class Assamese consider the ultimate success of life to be the ability, even if by shouting and showing off, to build a concrete house, eat chicken legs twice a day or a piece of roush and ostentatiously display their wealth at their son's or daughter's wedding in the most shameless and tasteless manner. No higher aim or ideal in life disturbs them even for a moment or awakens any other hunger in their hearts."

Yes, for most of the Assamese mid-

dle class, the definition of happiness seems confined to a concrete house, fish and meat twice a day and pompous weddings. We have no time to think about art, literature, music, travel, or the subtle beauties of life. Therefore, though we appear alive from the outside, inwardly we are half-dead. The words may be bitter, but they are the truth."

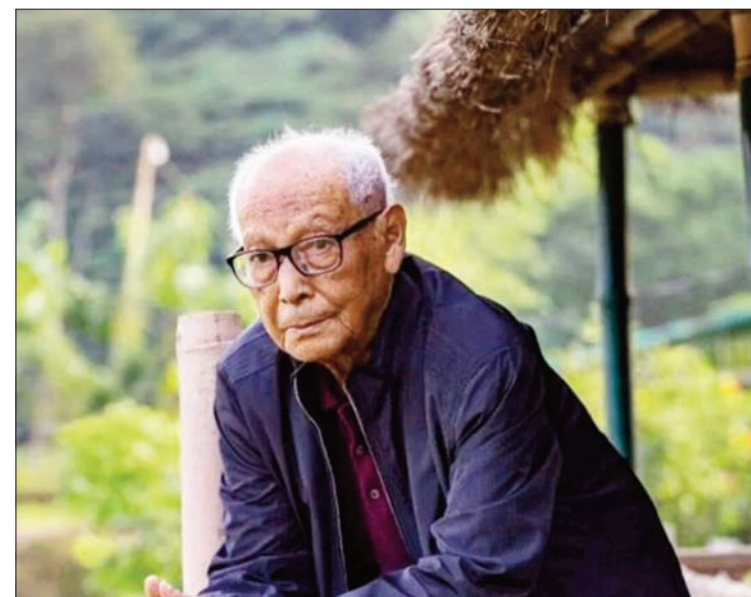
In recognition of Homen Borgohain's literary contributions, the Government of Assam honoured him with the Srimanta Sankardeva Award, the Assam Valley Literary Award and numerous other honours. Notably, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for his novel 'Pitaputra'.

However, in 2015, as a strong protest against growing intolerance and communalism in Indian society, he returned the Sahitya Akademi Award along with the cash prize – a rare and courageous act that stands as a shining example of his integrity and social consciousness.

He was elected President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha twice, in 2001 and 2002 one of the greatest honours of his life. All these prove that Homen Borgohain was not only a great writer but also a courageous, honest and responsible citizen.

Though he passed away on 12 May 2021, his thoughts, vision, courage and commitment to truth continue to guide Assamese society even today.

The life and work of Homen Borgohain compel us to remember forever that a true writer never dies. Even though his body has merged with the earth, his words will live on as the heartbeat in every reader's heart. On this sacred day of his birth anniversary, I offer my deepest homage and tribute to him.



The Immortal Legacy of Padmanath Gohain Baruah

By: Satyabrata Borah

Padmanath Gohain Baruah is a luminous star in the firmament of Assamese literature. Born on the midnight of 29th August, 1871, in the village of Nakari under present-day North Lakhimpur district, this extraordinary son of Assam left an immortal legacy in almost every sphere of life. He was at once a poet, novelist, dramatist, biographer, humorist, essayist, journalist, educationist, and social reformer. Together these many facets made him one of the chief architects of modern Assamese literature. As the first president of the Asom Sahitya Sabha, he bestowed upon the Assamese language and literature a distinct dignity and prestige.

His father, Ghinaram Gohain Baruah, and mother, Lambidevi, were deeply religious and lovers of culture. The family belonged to the royal Ahom lineage of Thaumung Klinglungmung Buragohain. Descending from his grandfather Kinaram Gohain Dekabarua, Padmanath was born as the eighth child of his parents. From his earliest childhood, a profound attraction towards literature and learning was evident in him.

In 1879, at the tender age of eight, he began his formal education at the North Lakhimpur Primary School. At that time the influence of Bengali-medium education was overwhelming in Assam. Yet his brilliant intellect and unwavering perseverance enabled him to surmount every obstacle. From Lakhimpur he went to Sibsagar and then to Kohima High School. Finally, in 1890, he passed the Entrance examination from the Dibrugarh centre and gained admission to Ripon College in Calcutta. While pursuing his F.A., he moved through different institutions such as St. Xavier's and the General Assembly's Institution, and even enrolled in the law classes, but he returned to Assam without completing the course. In recognition of his exceptional scholarship, Calcutta University conferred upon him the B.A. degree.

Upon returning to Assam he first joined as headmaster of Kohima Middle English School. In those days there was an acute scarcity of textbooks in the Assamese language. Padmanath himself wrote numerous textbooks such as Nitishiksha, Adi Shiksha, Buranjai Bodh, Bhugol Darpan, Assam Buranjai, and Hindu Buranjai, thereby laying a strong foundation for Assamese-medium education. Later he served at Tezpur Normal School, Tezpur Government High School, and Jorhat Government High School. Alongside teaching, he plunged into social reform. In Kohima he founded the Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha and the Kohima Sahitya Sabha. In Tezpur he established the Tezpur Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha, a Namghar, and the famous Baan Theatre. He served as chairman of Tezpur Municipality, member of the Assam Legislative Council, and was

associated with organisations such as the Ahom Association, Asam Rayat Sabha, and Jaymati Utsav Samiti. In 1917 he was appointed a second-class magistrate and in 1941 a first-class magistrate. The British government honoured him with the titles Rai Sahab and Rai Bahadur.

Literary pursuit was in his very blood. While still a student at Lakhimpur he composed the poetry collection Padmanani in collaboration with his friend Panindranath Gogoi. During his student days in Calcutta he came into contact with the Jonaki magazine and, together with Benudhar Rajkhowa, published the collection of Bihu songs titled Deka-Gabharu. When Jonaki branded the book obscene, the two young writers, deeply hurt, left Jonaki and launched their own magazine Bijuli in 1890 and founded the Assam Literary Club. After Bijuli ceased publication, he brought out Asam Banti from Tezpur in 1901 and later the magazine Usha from 1907 to 1912. Asam Banti in particular continued uninterrupted publication until 1946, serving as the mouthpiece of Assamese language and literature and fearlessly raising its voice even against British rule.

His literary creations are astonishingly varied. The first historical novels in Assamese, Bhanumati and Lahori, were written by him. He played a pioneering role in historical drama as well. Plays such as Joymoti, Gadadhar, Sadhani, and Lachit Borphukan brought to life the glorious chapters of Assam's past on the stage. His farces remain unmatched even today; Gaonburha, Teton Tamuli and Bhoot ne Bhram are still read with laughter and delight. The mythological play Baanraja also came from his pen. Among his poetry collections, Lila (composed in memory of his first wife Lilawati), Juroni and Phular Saneki are especially noteworthy. His autobiography Mor Sowroni is an invaluable treasure of Assamese literature. Religious works such as Srikrishna and Gitasar, along with the biographical compilation Jivani Sangrah, reveal the many dimensions of his genius. In all, he published thirty-three books.

His personal life was touched by sorrow. After the untimely death of his first wife Lilawati, he married Hirawati for the second time. From Hirawati he had seven daughters and one son.

On 7th Baisakh, 1946 (21 April), this great litterateur, educationist, and social servant departed from the world. With his death Assamese literature suffered an irreparable loss. Yet his creations and ideals continue to illuminate our path even today. Padmanath Gohain Baruah was not merely a man of letters; he was a symbol of the awakening of the Assamese nation, a guardian of its language and culture. His name shall remain forever engraved in golden letters in the heart of every Assamese.

INGRATITUDE

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

After her results brought humiliation rather than hope, she hurried into a love marriage, convinced that freedom meant removing herself from all parental "restrictions." Her husband got a job abroad, and she followed him gladly into the glossy streets of Europe. They lived in a London apartment with glass walls and polished floors, far from the crumbling plaster and dust of Kolkata. She worked—though halfheartedly—and sent WhatsApp messages twice a week that were chirpy but hollow: We're fine, Baba... yes, we're busy... maybe next year you can visit... we don't have space now... maybe later... The father and mother, aging quietly, understood the tone. They were unwanted

The afternoon light slanted through the half-closed shutters of the small North Kolkata house, striping the room with golden bars that looked almost like prison rails. Inside, seated at his wooden desk, was the man who once dreamed of writing great books—books that would speak of humanity and memory, of cities unfolding like ancient scripts, of rivers that carried the burden of lost destinies. But his hands now trembled with fatigue and failure, and his manuscripts remained unfinished, the pages yellowed like the wings of old moths. He was known as "Dadubhai" to his little granddaughter somewhere far away in London. To the world, he was a good scholar, global researcher in Cancer studies whose papers had once made rounds in small academic circles. But at home he was simply a father. And that identity—warm, burdensome, endlessly demanding—had consumed everything else he could have become.

His daughter, the only child he had, had grown up wrapped not only in his affection but also in the sacrifices he made so silently that she never noticed them. He bought her a car by taking a crushing loan; he built a house she barely appreciated; he spent nights awake nursing her through the fog of depression and illness. He abandoned conferences, turned down university invitations, shut the door on editorial boards and research residencies—because she needed him. Because she was fragile. Because he believed children were the extension of one's soul, and souls, he thought, must be protected even at the cost of one's dreams. Sometimes for relief he used to write poems and used to talk with stranger friends. He tried to pass some time in singing. But no relief came.

The daughter never quite understood the father's terrible frustration and sorrows and he became an insomniac. She grew into a young woman who mistook affection for servitude and sacrifice for obligation. She studied without interest, failed to build discipline, and wasted afternoons gossiping with friends, turning evenings into glittering displays of consumer life—cafés, restaurants, mall-hopping, makeup tutorials, boutique shopping. And the father watched silently, believing her youth would pass, responsibility would come, and she would eventually recognize the worth of what he gave.

It didn't happen that way. After her results brought humiliation rather than hope, she hurried into a love marriage, convinced that freedom meant removing herself from all parental "restrictions." Her husband got a job abroad, and she followed him gladly into the glossy streets of Europe. They lived in a London apartment with glass walls and polished floors, far from the crumbling plaster and dust of Kolkata. She worked—though halfheartedly—and sent WhatsApp messages twice a week that were chirpy but hollow: We're fine, Baba... yes, we're busy... maybe next year you can visit... we don't have space now... maybe later... The father and mother, aging quietly, understood the tone. They were unwanted. They had become burdens to be tolerated only in festival video calls or hurried conversations where the daughter glanced at the clock every few minutes.

But one miracle in this bleak desert was the granddaughter—Anu.

Anu, with her large searching eyes and soft curls, had a heart that held warmth like a lamp in winter. Whenever video calls happened, she would push past her parents and shout, "Dadubhai! Dididibhai! When will you come here? I want to show you my school, my garden, the river! Come soon! I want you to stay with me forever!" Those words were like sunlight on the father's weary heart. Only the child saw the truth of love—as children often do.

Years passed. Anu grew older, wiser, more observant. She began sensing discomfort in the air whenever she asked about India. She overheard arguments—her mother complaining that bringing her parents would be "trouble," her father staying silent out of convenience. Anu watched. And one day, when visiting Kolkata wasn't allowed and the elders couldn't travel,

she asked, "Dadubhai, why don't you come? Is it because you don't want to?"

The question stabbed him gently. He smiled through the video screen. "It is not that, Anu. Grown-ups... sometimes things become complicated."

But I want you here," she insisted.

"And I want to be there," he whispered.

That night, she confronted her parents with a maturity beyond her age. "They did everything for you," she told her mother. "How can you forget that?" Those words cracked something, maybe guilt, maybe realization, maybe the softening of an old wound. Slowly, reluctantly, the mother and son-in-law agreed to bring the grandparents to London.

The father—Anu's Dadubhai—was hesitant at first. Pride had grown like an unpruned plant around his pain. But Anu's voice melted him. "Come for me. I need you," she had said.

So preparations began. Passports renewed, visas applied for, medical checks done, suitcases bought. For the first time in years, hope spread its wings inside the old man's chest. He even dared to dust his manuscripts, thinking perhaps in London, with the child near him, he could begin writing again—not for success, but for the story of his life.

Plans were made for departure in a month. But life is never a straight line; it spirals, it fractures, it bends in cruel ways. One morning, he felt an exhaustion that tasted like metal. His legs trembled. His vision blurred. A check-up confirmed what he had ignored for months—his kidneys were failing. A transplant was required urgently. He didn't fear death. What he feared was breaking the promise he had made to Anu: I will come and stay with you. Dadubhai will always be behind the door.

Doctors advised immediate surgery. The date coincided with the week of their intended departure. He didn't tell Anu the details. Only that there was a "small treatment" he must undergo. His wife, Anu's Dididibhai, held his hand through the nights, whispering prayers through tears she tried to hide. On the morning of the surgery, just before he was wheeled into the operation theatre, he wrote a letter addressed to Anu. His handwriting trembled, but his sentences carried the weight of a lifetime.

He never woke up again.

A sudden cardiac arrest during the procedure.

Everything ended in a matter of minutes—the life of a man who had sacrificed everything for a child who never truly understood him. The news travelled across continents. He used to write stories and many reviews of his books were appreciated by his readers. They expressed condolence in newspapers. In London, little Anu collapsed into her mother's lap, crying with a grief that tore through her small body. Her mother sat stunned, shaken, as though all the years of negligence and ingratitude stood before her like a cold, accusing monument. The letter arrived a few days later.

It was placed gently into Anu's hands. She went to her room, shut the door, and opened the envelope with trembling fingers.

The letter read like this:

"Dear Dididibhai, I may not meet you again. But when I will be a star for you in the sky, remember my words. Love your parents. Never show ingratitude to them who are doing everything for your happiness and well-being. Family is the only truth that survives when everything else disappears.

I once promised you that I would be with you forever behind the door. I wanted to keep that promise. I wanted to watch you grow, hear your laughter in the mornings, see your exams and your first victories and failures. But God has taken me in another direction.

Even if you cannot see me, even if I am a memory, remember this—when you look at the night sky and find a star shining a little brighter than the rest, that will be Dadubhai. I will watch you and wait for you, standing behind the door, though you might not find me as I am dead. But love remains. Always.

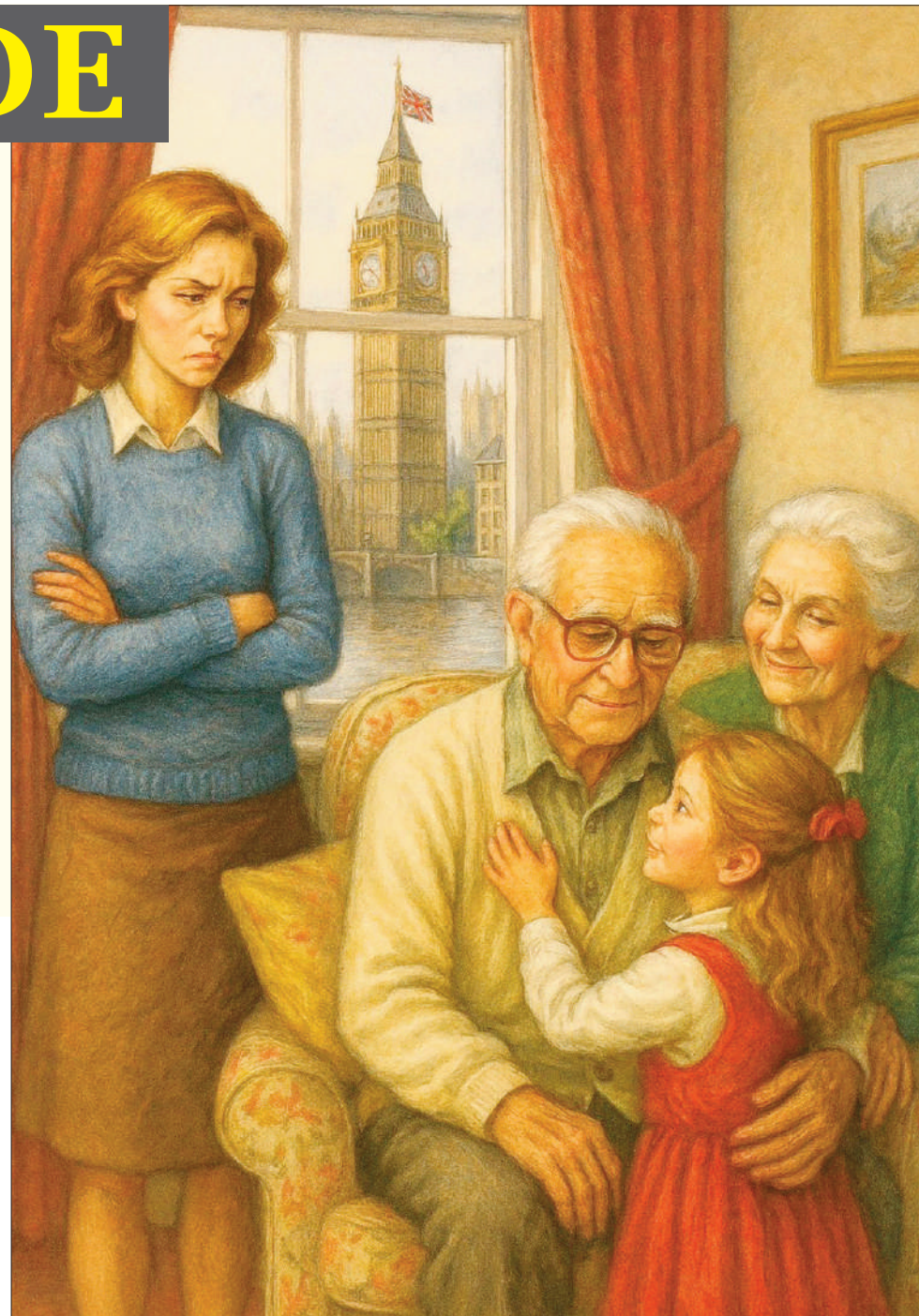
Your Dadubhai."

Anu read the letter again. And again. And again.

Her tears dropped onto the paper, smudging some of the letters, but she kept reading until the words blurred into white silence. She didn't speak. She didn't scream. She simply sat with the letter pressed to her chest, a quiet statue of sorrow. Outside her window, the London sky darkened. Evening folded itself gently around the world, and the first star appeared—small, distant, shimmering with a strange steadiness.

Perhaps it was coincidence. Perhaps something more.

Her parents stood outside her door, listening



to the soft sound of her crying. The mother leaned her head against the wooden frame and wept silently. She had lost her father—not by death, but by her own choices long before this night. His physical death only carved the final shape of a grief she now recognized as her own doing.

Life, indeed, is stranger than fiction. Because fiction tries to make sense of things—gives patterns, resolutions, reasons. Life doesn't. Life leaves loose ends. It leaves unfinished manuscripts. It leaves promises suspended in air. It leaves letters that arrive too late. It leaves a child waiting at an airport that will never see her grandfather's footsteps. It leaves regret.

After the funeral in Kolkata, after the rituals and the flowers and the smoke, after the mother returned to London with her family, something began to change inside her. She was quieter, humbler, more patient with her own daughter. Every time she looked at Anu, she saw a reflection of the love she had thrown away but which had returned in another form.

One evening, months later, she found her daughter staring at the night sky from the balcony.

"What are you looking at, Anu?" she asked softly.

"The star," she said. "The one that looks like him." Her mother's chest tightened. She placed an arm around her.

"Do you miss Dadubhai?"

"Yes," Anu whispered. "But he told me to love you. So I will."

The mother broke down. Tears streamed freely as she hugged her daughter, holding her as though trying to hold onto the last remnant of the man she had lost. Somewhere deep within her, a realization settled like a stone sinking gently to the riverbed:

Repentance does not change the past, but gratitude can shape the future.

Months later, in the old Kolkata house where the walls carried the silence of a missing presence, Grandma placed the manuscript pages—the ones he had hoped to rewrite in London—inside a wooden trunk. She tied it with a string and whispered, "Someone will read your words one day. You didn't die unfinished."

In London, Anu kept the letter under her pillow, reading it every night before sleep. She began writing stories of her own—stories about loyalty, about elders, about gratitude, about stars that watched from the sky. One day she would grow up. One day she would become a woman wiser than her parents had been at her age. And one day perhaps she would come to Kolkata, sit by the river where her grandfather once walked, and say in the whispering wind:

"I did not forget you." For love, even unreturned, leaves traces that generations follow. And sometimes, the most painful stories become the ones that teach us how to live. Life is really stranger than fiction. But sometimes, from its strangeness, comes truth. (International Tagore Awardee writer Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee is an Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and columnist. Email: prof.ratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

Echoes of a Promise

A Love Story Beyond Time

(Contd. From Previous Issue)

By: Chafikhur Rahman

The next morning was cool and gray, the kind of morning when the mist sits low on the hills and every tree looks taller than usual. Rudra Baruah drove his white SUV along the narrow road toward Borsinga village, the place where Ratneswar Rahang had lived. Beside him sat Kaberi Mahanta, wrapped in a soft shawl, her hair tied neatly as always. Neither spoke much. The silence between them was not uncomfortable; it was heavy with thought.

The file with photographs lied in the back seat, locked in a pouch. They did not need to look at it again; the faces were already burned into their minds.

Borsinga was a small village, surrounded by paddy fields and bamboo groves. The houses were built of wood and tin, some on stilts, some on plain earth. Smoke rose from chimneys, roosters crowed, and children with sleepy eyes watched curiously as the official car stopped near the village square.

An old man, tall but bent with age, came forward and folded his hands. "Namaskar, sa'ab, Madam. You are welcome." His voice was cracked but warm.

"I am SP Baruah," Rudra introduced himself. "This is DC Mahanta. We want to meet the relatives of Ratneswar Rahang. Can you guide us?"

The old man's eyes softened. "Ah, Ratneswar... everyone here remembers him. Come, come."

They were led to a bamboo veranda where a group of elders sat on mats, drinking tea in small cups. When Rudra and Kaberi were introduced, the elders shifted to make space. One woman, her hair fully white, placed a tray of rice cakes and bananas before them.

The old guide said, "This is Aita—

Ratneswar's aunt. And this is his cousin, Dhan."

Kaberi greeted them with folded hands. "We are here to know about Ratneswar and Kabita. Please tell us what you remember."

At first, the villagers were shy. Then, slowly, words began to flow.

"Ratneswar was the brightest boy in our village," said the aunt. "Always helping, always studying. He worked in the fields in the morning and read books at night. He wanted to be a teacher. He said, 'Aita, one day I will wear a white shirt and stand in front of students, and they will call me Sir.'"

Her voice broke, and she wiped her eyes with the edge of her saree.

Another elder added, "He was good at football too. Fast like the wind. In the local tournament, he scored two goals against the town team. We all clapped for him."

Then a woman in her fifties, who had been silent until now, spoke softly. "And Kabita... she was gentle. She used to come here with Ratneswar sometimes. She brought sweets from her house. She would sit with the village children and teach them poems. Everyone loved her."

As the villagers spoke, Rudra and Kaberi realized that Ratneswar and Kabita's love had not been a secret here. It was a story the whole village carried like a memory-song.

"They studied in Diphu College together," one man said. "They walked to class side by side. They sat under the banyan tree. Once during Bohag Bihu, they sang together in the naamghar. People said, 'Look, even their voices match.'"

"Yes," another said, "their families had agreed at first. We all thought, after graduation, there will be a wedding. We were waiting for the day to beat the dhol and dance."

"But then..." The speaker fell silent.

His eyes darkened. "Then the river



swallowed them."

The aunt spoke again, her voice trembling. "His father, Hari... after the death, he lost his mind. He went to the river every day, calling Ratneswar's name. Thirty years he has done this. People call him mad. But tell me, sa'ab, if your son is taken, if his blood flows into the river, and no justice comes—will you not go mad too?"

Her words struck both Rudra and Kaberi. They sat in silence for a while, listening to the sound of chickens scratching the ground, the rustle of bamboo in the wind.

Finally, Rudra said gently, "We will meet him. Where does he go?"

"At dawn, to the river bend," the aunt said. "Even now. He sits there and talks to the water."

Kaberi's throat tightened. She pictured the lonely figure by the river, whispering the same name for thirty years.

After an hour in Borsinga, Rudra and Kaberi thanked the villagers and promised, "We will not forget this case. We will try again." The elders looked at each other, half hopeful, half doubtful. They had seen promises before.

From Borsinga, the SUV moved toward Kathar house, where Kabita had lived. The road narrowed and became rough. Fields of ginger and betel nut groves spread on both sides.

The Kathar house was larger, with a tin roof and a courtyard. But it looked strangely empty, as if no laughter had lived there in many years.

An old woman, thin and bent, greeted

them. She was Kabita's mother's sister. "I am the only one left," she said. "Kabita's parents died in a road accident years ago. The house is quiet now."

They sat inside the wooden hall. Dust lay on the furniture. A framed photo of Kabita as a child hung on the wall, her hair in two braids.

The aunt spoke slowly. "Kabita was the flower of this family. She loved reading, she loved music. Her father was strict but proud. At first, he accepted Ratneswar. He said, 'If the boy studies well, let them marry.' But later he grew angry. Some say his nephew Nirmal poisoned his ears. Some say he wanted a richer groom. I do not know. But in the last months, Kabita cried often. She told me once, 'Aita, I will not leave Ratneswar. Even if the world turns against us, I will hold his hand.'"

The woman wiped her eyes. "And she did. She held his hand till death."

When Rudra and Kaberi left the Kathar house, the air felt heavy. They walked toward a grove of bamboo near the edge of the village. For a long time, they said nothing.

Finally, Kaberi whispered, "Everywhere we go, I feel like I am walking through my own memories. As if I was here once, in another life."

Rudra looked at her. "I feel the same. When they talk of Ratneswar, it feels like they are talking of me. Of us."

Kaberi closed her eyes for a moment. "Rudra... what if we really are them? What if our lives are the continuation of theirs?"

(Contd. to next Issue)

Dark Embrace

By: Otteri Selva Kumar

In the heart of Chennai City, nestled amidst the bustling streets and vibrant markets, stood the imposing structure of the Law College Male Hostel. It was a place known for its rich history and academic excellence, but little did its residents know that within its walls lurked a dark secret.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the courtyard, two mysterious figures emerged from the shadows. They moved with an eerie grace, their laughter echoing off the walls like a sinister melody. These were the two female devils, known only by their wicked reputation.

Rangan, Murugan, Davit, and John, four inseparable friends studying law at the college, found themselves inexplicably drawn to the female devils. Despite the warnings of their fellow students, they could not resist the allure of danger that surrounded these enigmatic beings.

One fateful night, as a thick fog enveloped the hostel, the two female devils appeared before the group, their eyes gleaming with a malevolent light. They beckoned the boys to follow them into the depths of the hostel, where shadows danced menacingly on the walls.

Rangan, the bravest of the group, took the first step, his heart pounding with excitement and fear. Murugan followed close behind, his hands trembling with anticipation. Davit and John exchanged nervous glances before mustering up their courage and joining their friends.

As they ventured deeper into the dark corridors, a sense of foreboding washed over them. The air grew colder, and whispers filled the empty halls, promising unspeakable horrors to those who dared to tread further.

Suddenly, the female devils stopped in front of a weathered

wooden door, its surface etched with ancient symbols. With a sinister smile, they pushed it open, revealing a hidden chamber bathed in an eerie red light.

Inside, the boys found themselves surrounded by twisted figures and grotesque paintings adorning the walls. The female devils' laughter grew louder, blending with the sounds of scratching and whispers that seemed to emanate from the very walls themselves.

In a moment of clarity, Rangan and his friends realized the gravity of their situation. They had stumbled upon something beyond their comprehension, something dark and otherworldly that threatened to consume them whole.

As the malevolent forces closed in around them, Rangan, Murugan, Davit, and John fought to escape the clutches of the female devils. Their hearts racing and their minds clouded with fear, they raced through the labyrinthine corridors, their breath echoing in the stillness of the night.

Just when all hope seemed lost, a sliver of moonlight pierced through the darkness, illuminating a staircase that led to freedom. With one last burst of adrenaline, the boys sprinted towards the light, their screams echoing in the empty halls behind them.

And as they emerged into the cool night air, gasping for breath and trembling with adrenaline, they knew that they had narrowly escaped a fate worse than death. The two female devils, their laughter fading into the night, watched from the shadows, their eyes gleaming with the promise of future mischief.

And so, the legend of the Law College Male Hostel and the two female devils lived on, a whispered tale of horror and mystery that would haunt the dreams of those who dared to wander too close to its dark embrace.

Yes it is only dark embrace...

Circular economy to boost dairy farmers' income by 20 pc in 5 years: Amit Shah

SANADAR (GUJARAT), Dec 6: Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday expressed confidence that implementation of the circular economy model across the country will increase dairy farmers' income by 20 per cent in the next five years.

Shah was addressing cattle rearers associated with Banas Dairy at an event held at Sanadar village in Gujarat's Vav-Tharad district to mark the inauguration of the dairy's bio-CNG and fertiliser plant and ground-breaking of its milk powder plant.

He praised Banas Dairy's management for successfully developing a model for a circular economy in the dairy sector, which includes generating extra income for farmers through various means, such as converting cattle dung into biogas and bio-fertiliser.

Shah informed the audience that he has brought several members of Parliament to Banaskantha to understand the circular economy model of Banas Dairy.

"So far, our cooperative dairies have received huge success in procuring milk from farmers and giving back the income generated from selling milk products. Now, the time has come to focus on the circular economy. You will get



your share from the income generated by the dairy by selling biogas and fertiliser produced from cattle dung procured from farmers," he said.

A concrete plan for the implementation of this circular economy model across the country will emerge from the meeting of MPs in Banaskantha in the evening, the minister said.

Shah also informed the gathering that chairpersons and managing directors of all the major cooperative dairies will visit Banas

Dairy in January 2026 to understand more about the initiatives taken by the dairy, considered Asia's largest dairy with a turnover of ₹ 24,000 crore.

"Apart from the usual milk products like paneer and curd, there are many products that are in demand across the globe, but they are not produced in India. If we focus on those products, dairy farmers can earn extra income," he said.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created a system

wherein dairies will get the required finance and technology to adopt this circular economy model, which also includes leather production from the hide harvested from the cattle that died naturally.

"Our government has created three cooperatives for the agriculture sector and three for the dairy sector. I want to assure you that the circular economy will increase dairy farmers' income by 20 per cent in the next five years," he said.

Shah said his ministry and the Centre have done detailed planning for implementing the circular economy model in the dairy sector.

He expressed confidence that targets set by PM Modi under the "White Revolution 2.0" initiative will be achieved through collective efforts.

On the occasion, Shah praised women dairy farmers for their contribution and efforts in strengthening the sector in this arid region of Gujarat.

"Women dairy farmers of this region sent a message to NGOs around the world that advocate for women's empowerment. Without any agitation, you worked hard to create a system where your earnings are deposited directly into your bank account," he noted. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Taking a swipe at the government over the IndiGo flight disruptions, the Congress on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised ease of air travel but gave "cease of air travel" and asked whether Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu would take responsibility for the "unprecedented crisis".

The opposition party claimed that the ongoing IndiGo chaos was not an accident but the direct outcome of the BJP government's "relentless push to manufacture a duopoly in the sector".

With IndiGo flight disruptions impacting thousands of passengers, the Ministry of Civil Aviation on Saturday directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, as well as ensure that the baggage separated from the travellers is delivered in the next two days.

A day after the country's largest airline, IndiGo, cancelled more than 1,000 flights and caused disruptions for the fifth day on Saturday, the ministry said that any delay or non-compliance in refund processing will invite immediate regulatory action.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress leader Sasikant Sheth said IndiGo's cancellation of flights has brought the nation's air travel to its knees.

"This crisis is not a natural breakdown; it is the predictable fallout of the BJP government that has been hell-bent on crushing competition, rewarding favourites, and reshaping an entire national industry to suit a tiny circle of corporate allies," Sheth said.

"The BJP government's reckless handling of aviation safety exposes the full extent of its negligence. After releasing the Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules on January 8, 2024, and after partially implementing them on July 1, 2025, the BJP government now shamelessly withdrew these critical safety protections in the middle of a sector-wide meltdown," the Tiruvallur MP said.

"This is not just irresponsible; it is outrageous. By scrapping rules specifically designed to prevent pilot fatigue, the BJP government has allegedly jeopardised passenger safety and thrown the well-being of cockpit crew into uncertainty," he said.

Instead of stabilising the situation, they have deepened it, proving once again that safety and accountability mean nothing to this administration when weighed against the convenience of their preferred corporations, Sheth said.

"The BJP government's obsession with creating monopolies is visible across India's infrastructure landscape. Why does only one corporate group repeatedly receive such large, strategically important assets?" he said.

Tharoor's remarks came a day after President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet for the visiting Russian president at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here.

'Warm and engaging atmosphere reigned': Shashi Tharoor

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, who on Friday attended a banquet for Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, on Saturday described the atmosphere there as "warm" and "engaging", and said he enjoyed his conversations with many of the attendees.

Tharoor's remarks came a day after President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet for the visiting Russian president at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here.

"Attended the @rashtrapatibhvn banquet for President Putin last night. A warm and engaging atmosphere reigned. Enjoyed my conversations with many of the attendees, especially my dining companions from the Russian delegation!" Tharoor said in a social media post.

Murmu, while welcoming President Putin and his delegation at the banquet, had said that his visit marked an important milestone -- the 25th anniversary of the India-Russia strategic partnership, which was established in October 2000 during his first visit to the country as president.

Murmu also appreciated Putin's support and personal commitment to the India-Russia special and privileged strategic partnership.

The Congress on Friday said that the leaders of the opposition, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, were not invited to the banquet, and took a swipe at Tharoor for accepting the invite.

The party's media and publicity department head, Pawan Khera, accused the government of breaking protocols daily and not believing in democratic principles.

"There is no invite to both the LoPs, Mr (Mallikarjun) Kharge and Mr (Rahul) Gandhi. This comes as a surprise, but I don't think we should be surprised. This government is known to be breaching all protocols. What else to say, ask the government," Khera said on Friday.

PANAJI, Dec 6: At least 14 domestic flights of IndiGo from Goa's Dabolim airport were cancelled on Saturday due to the ongoing disruption of the airline's operations, a senior official said.

Several passengers were seen stranded outside the Dabolim airport, located in South Goa, as some of the cancellations were announced at the last minute.

As per a post on the airport's X handle, 14 flights, which were to take off for Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Cochin, Kolkata, Bangalore, Delhi and Indore, were cancelled till Saturday afternoon.

The airport management on Friday appealed to the passengers to check their latest flight status before heading to the airport.

The flight disruptions have cast a shadow on Goa's tourism industry, with stakeholders fearing a drop in footfall at a time when the tourism season is at its peak in the coastal state.

Jack Sukhija, president of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa, on Friday said that IndiGo enjoys more than 60 per cent share in the Indian aviation market and disruptions in its flight operations will have an adverse impact on the tourism industry. (PTI)



It reflects a government that has weaponised policy, regulation, and public assets to build dominance for its chosen conglomerates, whether in aviation, telecom, ports, or infrastructure, Senthil claimed.

"What the country is now witnessing is the full-blown result of the BJP government's crony capitalism, a model that rewards political loyalty over merit, centralises power over markets, and destroys entire industries in the process," he said.

Senthil alleged that the crisis is a government-made disaster, crafted day by day through the government's policies, negligence, and blatant favouritism.

"It has crushed the aviation sector, endangered passengers, destabilised markets, and exposed the government's complete disregard for transparency, competition, and public interest," he said.

Posing questions to the government, Senthil asked why it has, in the last 11 years, allowed aviation to "shrink into a monopoly and duopoly instead of building a competitive, diverse sector".

"Why did the DGCA fail to ensure IndiGo complied with the FDTL rules released in January 2024 and partially implemented from July 2025 and fully on November 1? Did the government ever issue warnings or compliance notices to IndiGo, or was the airline protected from enforcement altogether?" he asked.

"Given the electoral bond disclosures showing massive purchases by InterGlobe group entities and its promoter, is the BJP's financial proximity to IndiGo the real reason behind this extraordinary leniency at the cost of passengers' safety?" Senthil questioned.

Will Naidu take responsibility for this unprecedented crisis, or continue hiding behind generic, meaningless statements while passengers remain stranded, he further asked.

On Saturday, more than 400 flights were cancelled at various airports.

IndiGo has been instructed by the government to set up dedicated passenger support and refund facilitation cells. (PTI)

14 IndiGo flights cancelled at Goa's Dabolim airport



He said the huge disruptions will definitely have an impact on the tourism industry, a key revenue earner for Goa.

Meanwhile, regional airline FLY91 said it has introduced extra flights between Hyderabad and Goa over the next three days to help travellers reach their destinations.

"These flights are being operated to ensure continued access between the two destinations at a time when many passengers are

struggling to secure seats on the sector," it said in a statement.

The additional services will operate as a daily round trip, with flight IC 7001 departing Hyderabad at 2030 hrs and arriving at Manohar International Airport (MIA) North Goa at 2210 hrs, followed by IC 7002 departing MIA Goa at 2235 hrs and landing in Hyderabad shortly after midnight at 0015 hrs, it added.

"We understand how difficult

this period has been for travellers. By operating these extra services, we are helping in our own way to ensure that people can continue their journeys with confidence," FLY91 managing director and CEO Manoj Chacko said.

On Friday, IndiGo cancelled over 1,000 flights from across airports.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday provided temporary relief to IndiGo, by rolling back the night duty definition to 12 am-5 am from 12 am-6 am earlier, and allowing its pilots to do six night landings from two earlier, besides other relaxations.

Meanwhile, the pilots' body, Airlines' Pilots Association (ALPA) India, has taken a "strong" objection to the DGCA's "selective and unsafe" relief to IndiGo, saying that the relaxations have not just "destroyed regulatory parity but also placed millions of passengers at 'heightened risk'".

Following the meeting convened by the Ministry of Civil Aviation with ALPA India and other pilot associations on Friday, the ministry announced that it has decided to place the implementation of the revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) in abeyance. (PTI)

Want to send strong message that SC meant for common man: CJI Surya Kant

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Sending a "strong message" that the Supreme Court is meant for the common man, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said a predictable timeline and a unified national judicial policy-based early decision of pending cases would be his priority.

Speaking at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit here, the CJI referred to access to justice, and said his priority is to ensure how to reduce the cost of litigation, and how to prescribe a reasonable timeline within which matters are decided.

Asked about the independence of judiciary, Justice Kant referred to the constitutional philosophy of separation of powers, and said the Constitution has beautifully defined the respective roles of the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive, while ensuring that there is no overlapping.

"My first priority will be a predictable timeline and a unified national judicial policy-based early decision of the pending cases. I am not saying elimination of all the arrears. That will never happen. That should not happen because litigation is an ongoing process. People have trust and faith in the judicial system," the CJI said.

"Cases will be filed but the old cases which are staring on our face need to be tackled and for that, one needs to explore mediation as one of the powerful game-changers," he said.

There will be some reforms in the Supreme Court in the coming days, including on prioritisation of certain litigations, he said.

"I just want to send a very clear and strong message that the Supreme Court is also meant for the common man, and any ordinary litigant will also have sufficient space and time in the Supreme Court. And for that, I am doing some prioritisation of the matters to be listed," he said.

Justice Kant also said he cannot do this alone and the judges of the apex court have extended their full cooperation in this regard.

Stating that the judicial system will face new challenges, the CJI cited cases of digital arrest and cyber-crimes.

"So, new challenges will continue to come. First, we need to update our judiciary," he said, adding, "We must update our judicial officers with newer challenges and how to deal with those issues".

Speaking about optimum utilisation and fair evaluation of human resources, he said there must be recognition of merit in the institution.

Asked about diversity in judiciary, the CJI said there is a paradigm change in the Indian judicial system in the way the society has grown and the way the country has moved forward.

He said there is a concerted effort now to bring judges from different regions to ensure community and regional representation.

"And in that process, we have always kept in view that the persons having the background of marginalised communities, the women, they must get adequate and fair representation. And that inclusivity, that diversity, has really brought a very rich culture in the Supreme Court," Justice Kant said.

On judicial independence, he said when we talk of independence of the judiciary, one must keep in mind the basic principle, which is the constitutional philosophy of separation of powers.

"The judiciary, the legislature and the executive... the Constitution has so beautifully defined their respective roles, ensuring that there is no overlapping. But at the same time, it is the beauty of our Constitution that a unique compatibility, a unique complementary relationship qua each other, is what our constitutional philosophy says," the CJI said.

He added that the inter-dependability in the Constitution is also well defined.

"So, it's a machinery where all three organs work together, complement and supplement each other, maintaining their independent identity," Justice Kant said.

He also stressed that mediation is proving to be a very effective tool as it is cost-effective as compared to the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and creates a win-win situation for both parties.

Speaking about access to justice, the CJI said, "One of the challenges when we talk of access to justice is how to ensure that a person belonging to the vulnerable classes or the marginalised sections of society gets quality legal assistance in court."

"Now, when I talk of access to justice, my first priority is to ensure how to reduce the cost of litigation and how to prescribe a reasonable timeline within which the matters are decided," he said.

Justice Kant said that for cost-effectivity, the judiciary has expanded the platform of free legal aid, especially for the vulnerable classes or those living below the poverty line.

He also talked about a massive programme throughout the country to provide quality legal assistance, and said that competent lawyers are being engaged to ensure quality legal assistance to those who need it.

The CJI said that as far as timeline and predictability are concerned, "the district judiciary needs to be sensitised".

Justice Kant also said that he is a very optimistic person, and he is absolutely confident that both the Indian democracy and the justice delivery system have a very bright future.

"The reasons are very obvious. First, Indian people have absolute commitment to the constitutional principles. Second, Indian people are committed to the rule of law. And third, Indian people have commitment to democracy," the CJI said. (PTI)

Russian military hardware, spare parts for Indian military to be manufactured in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Russia agreed to encourage joint manufacturing in India of military hardware and spare parts for maintenance of Russian-origin arms and defence equipment.

Ways to bolster overall bilateral defence cooperation figured prominently during summit talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday.

It has been a long-standing grievance of armed forces that the supply of critical spares and equipment from Russia takes a long time, affecting the maintenance of military systems procured from that country.

"Both sides agreed to encourage joint manufacturing in India of spare parts, components, aggregates and other products for maintenance of Russian origin arms and defence equipment under Make-in-India programme through transfer of technology," a joint statement said.

It said both sides also agreed to set up joint ventures for meeting the needs of the Indian armed forces as well as subsequent export to mutually friendly third countries.

The joint statement said the India-Russia defence partnership is being reoriented to take up joint co-development and co-pro-



duction of advanced defence technology and systems.

In their meeting on Thursday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov resolved to expand bilateral defence cooperation.

In the meeting, the Indian side showed keen interest in procurement of additional batches of S-400 missile systems from

Moscow to bolster its combat prowess.

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).

Three squadrons have already been delivered. The S-400 systems played a crucial role during Operation Sindoor. India may also look at procuring the S-500 missile systems from Russia.

In the Modi-Putin talks, the two sides also agreed to continue jointly developing systems of bilateral trade settlements through the use of national currencies.

Additionally, the two sides agreed to continue their consultations on enabling the interoperability of the national payment systems, financial messaging systems, as well as central bank digital currency platforms.

Modi and Putin appreciated the ongoing intensification of the joint work on a free trade agreement on goods between India and the Eurasian Economic Union, covering sectors of mutual interest, the joint statement said.

They also directed both sides to intensify efforts in negotiations on a mutually beneficial agreement on the promotion and protection of investment, it said.

India and Russia also welcomed steps to ensure long-term supply of fertilisers to India and discussed the potential establishment of joint ventures in this area. (PTI)

'Historic blunders' on J-K, China are Nehru's legacy: BJP hits back at Sonia Gandhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The BJP on Saturday alleged that "historical blunders" like "allowing" Pakistan and China to occupy Indian territory and giving special status to Jammu and Kashmir are Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy, as it hit out at Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over her accusation that the ruling dispensation's main objective is to vilify him.

Hitting back at the Congress parliamentary party chairperson over her allegations that the ruling BJP's goal is not just to "erase" the legacy of the country's first prime minister but to "destroy" his social and political foundations, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said the word destruction that Sonia Gandhi used in her accusation is "synonymous with" her son Rahul Gandhi.

"If there is any 'Bhasmasur' in Indian politics today, he is Rahul Gandhi. He destroyed the parties of Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra, then Arvind Kejriwal by forging an alliance with his party during the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi," Bhatia charged.

"After destroying Tejashwi Yadav recently in Bihar (polls), he is now heading for Uttar Pradesh to destroy Akhilesh Yadav in the state," he added.

Bhasmasur is a demon in Hindu epics known for a boon he received from Lord Shiva that allowed him to turn anyone into ashes (bhasma) by touching their head. However, this power ultimately led to his destruction. Sonia Gandhi on Friday alleged that a systematic attempt is being made to denigrate, distort, demean and defame Nehru, which was not acceptable.

Addressing an event to launch the Nehru Centre India at Jawahar Bhawan, she said that the project to vilify Nehru is the main objective of the ruling dispensation.

She said the sole objective of this is to not only diminish Nehru as a personality but also his universally recognised role in India's independence struggle and to demolish his legacy in a crude and self-serving attempt to rewrite history. (PTI)

Opposition alleges Panchayat Minister warned of withholding govt funds if BJP candidates lose

Cong complains to poll panel, alleges Arunachal Min threatened to withhold govt funds if BJP loses



ITANAGAR, Dec 6: The opposition Congress in Arunachal Pradesh on Friday filed a complaint with the State Election Commission, alleging that Panchayat Minister Ojing Tasing threatened

voters with the denial of government schemes and funds in areas where BJP candidates fail to win. The Congress claimed the statement, made by Tasing at an election rally in Lower Dibang Valley

district on Wednesday, amounts to intimidation of voters and misuse of official position ahead of the December 15 panchayat and municipal elections in the state. It said the remarks, captured in

video recordings and supported by eyewitness accounts, was a serious violation of the model code of conduct.

The Congress said that withholding development schemes and public funds on the basis of electoral outcomes is "undemocratic, unethical, and illegal", stressing that such statements have the potential to create fear among voters and compromise the neutrality of the electoral process.

The Congress urged the SEC to take immediate cognisance of the minister's remarks, initiate appropriate disciplinary and legal action and issue directives to ensure that government machinery is not used for political gains.

The letter also requested the SEC to safeguard voters from coercive pressure and maintain an atmosphere where elections can proceed freely and without intimidation.

The state BJP is yet to comment on the allegations. (PTI)

Three ANSU executives claim court stay on their termination

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 6: Three executive members of the All Niyishi Students' Union (ANSU) on Monday claimed that the court has stayed their termination order. Addressing a press conference at the Arunachal Press Club (APC), the trio said they were "wrongfully terminated" from their posts within the union.

The members, who served as Assistant Secretary (Women Affairs), Convenor (Women Affairs) and Co-Convenor, stated that they approached the court after what they termed an unjust removal from their respective positions.

According to them, the Civil Judge (Junior Division) of Papum Pare district, Yupia has stayed the termination order "till further orders or till compliance of the procedure is adopted." They asserted that due process was not followed by the union leadership before issuing the termination and said they are now awaiting the court's next direction on the matter.

Jackey Teli named governing body member of NRAI

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 6: Jackey Teli, son of Teli Had of Balijan in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh, has been appointed as a governing body member of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

Teli is among the 12 members selected for the 2025-29 session. As per the new organisational structure, one person has been appointed as senior vice-president, six as vice-presidents and another six as joint secretaries of the NRAI.

The national office-bearers include Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo as president, Pawan Kumar Singh as secretary general and Meghasham Shripad Bhangle as treasurer. Kanwar Sultans Singh and Sushma Singh have been named vice-presidents, while Ran-deep Maan and Gauri Mohanty take charge as Joint Secretaries, along with seven Executive Committee members.

Apart from Teli, IPS officer Chukhu Apa from Arunachal



Pradesh also participated in the national convention held in New Delhi.

A cultural extravaganza followed at Touphe Phezou resort, held in commemoration of the stone pulling event. Rio extended warm greetings to Scindia and expressed gratitude for his presence at the celebration.

Meanwhile, the fifth day of the Hornbill Festival at the Naga Heritage Village in Kisama featured an array of vibrant traditional performances. The day showcased the cultural diversity of Nagaland through presentations by various tribes, drawing visitors into the state's rich heritage, history and communal spirit.

Banned NSCN (K-Niki Sumi) member arrested in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, Dec 6: An active cadre of the banned NSCN (K-Niki Sumi) faction was arrested in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district, officials said on Saturday.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Assam Rifles and the state police conducted an operation in Hukanjuri area on Thursday and apprehended Jenlong Supong, a self-styled captain of the proscribed outfit, they said.

Security forces also recovered one pistol, a magazine, six cartridges, a mobile phone and a PAN card from his possession, the officials said.

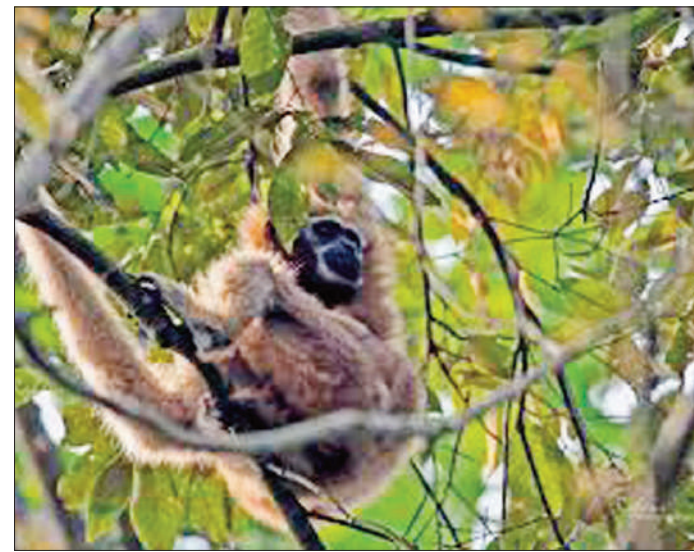
Supong was handed over to the Khonsa Police Station along with the seized arms and materials for further investigation and legal proceedings, they said.

The operation reflects the "continued commitment, vigilance and seamless coordination" between central and state security agencies in maintaining stability in Arunachal Pradesh, one of the officials said.

"The intelligence-driven actions of this kind remain crucial to curbing insurgent movement and strengthening the security environment along sensitive border districts," he added. (PTI)

Hoolock gibbon family rescued after four-day operation in Arunachal

Stranded apes freed from isolated treetop and released into Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary



ITANAGAR, Dec 6: A stranded family of Hoolock gibbons was rescued after a challenging four-day operation in Horu Pahar village in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Dibang Valley district, officials said on Saturday.

The rescued group, comprising an adult male, an adult female and a juvenile, was released inside Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary and is now under intensive monitoring.

"We spotted all three individuals near the release site on Friday morning and they appear to be in a stable condition," Divisional Forest Officer of Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary, Mito Rumi, said.

The Hoolock gibbons were trapped on a 45-metre ficus tree after agricultural expansion fragmented the surrounding canopy.

"Their habitat had been reduced to a single tree. With no canopy connectivity, the animals were being forced to come down to the ground, which is extremely dangerous for an arboreal ape," the official said.

Veterinary assessment conducted by Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) experts showed the animals were underweight.

Dr Bhaskar Choudhury of WTI, who led the veterinary team, said, "The family had been nutritionally stressed and isolated for a long time. Their survival chances would have dropped sharply without timely intervention."

WTI Director Sunil Kyarong, under whose supervision the rescue was executed, said the operation demanded significant technical skill.

"Extracting gibbons from such heights requires precision, calm coordination and a deep understanding of their behaviour. Any misstep could have led to fatal falls," he said.

The state forest department acknowledged the contribution of mountaineering volunteers.

"We are grateful to Amaro Meto and Hachu Lombo for training our personnel in modern rope-climbing systems. Without these techniques, safe extraction would not have been possible," Rumi added.

Officials said more stranded families have been identified in the agricultural landscape of Denlo village.

"Given the height of trees and difficult terrain, rescue operations will continue in staggered phases over the next three months," an official said.

Highlighting the conservation significance of the species, Dr Choudhury noted that the Hoolock gibbon is India's only ape and a Schedule I species. It is a vital indicator of forest health and habitat fragmentation is pushing these populations to the brink.

The state forest department reiterated its commitment to protect the endangered apes.

"Community support has been strong and together we will ensure the survival of these gibbons," Rumi said.

The operation was jointly conducted by Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary officials and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) earlier this week. (PTI)

Arunachal governor's residence renamed 'Lok Bhavan'



ITANAGAR, Dec 6: Arunachal Pradesh Governor K T Parnaik implemented a central directive and renamed his official residence here 'Lok Bhavan', according to a notification.

The notification, issued by the Governor's Secretariat on December 4, said Raj Bhavan shall henceforth be referred to as "Lok Bhavan, Arunachal Pradesh".

The name change was implemented following a communication from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the direction of the governor.

Commissioner to Governor, Pawan Kumar Sain, stated that the new name will be mandated for use in all official communications, records, signage, digital platforms, stationery and other references related to the governor's establishment.

The commissioner in the notification directed all departments, offices under the state government and concerned agencies to note the change and ensure necessary amendments in their official documents, websites and correspondence. (PTI)

Four held after counterfeit notes with ₹ 1.12 lakh face value seized in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Dec 6: Four people have been arrested after counterfeit notes with a combined face value of ₹ 1.12 lakh were seized from their possession in Arunachal Pradesh's Naharlagun, a senior officer said on Saturday.

The seizure and the arrests were made as part of an investigation into an alleged attempt by two persons to purchase grocery items using fake notes in Polo Colony area earlier this week, a senior officer said.

Naharlagun Superintendent of Police (SP) Nyelam Nega said the case started on December 2 after two individuals allegedly tried to buy grocery items from a shop using counterfeit notes of ₹ 500 denomination. When the shopkeeper confronted them, the two fled the spot, he said.

Based on intelligence, an accused, hailing from Itanagar's Gohpur, was arrested, the SP said.

Acting on his lead, a police team carried out raids across multiple locations under the supervision of Naharlagun SDPO Rishi Longdo, the officer said.

"During the operation, the police arrested a person who hails from Amba, Doimukh. Subsequently, two suspected suppliers from Assam were apprehended," the officer said. "Altogether, 224 counterfeit notes of ₹ 500 denomination with a face value of ₹ 1,12,000 were seized around 3 am on December 3," Nega said. (PTI)

Shi Yomi tribes showcase rich cultural heritage; ministers urge youth to preserve tradition

Podi-Barbi harvest festival celebrated with fanfare in Itanagar

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 6: The Podi-Barbi harvest festival of the Ramo, Pai-Libo and Bokar communities of Arunachal Pradesh's Shi Yomi district was celebrated with vibrant traditional gaiety and enthusiastic participation in the state capital on Thursday.

The day-long celebration featured a variety of programmes, including sports events, literary activities and colourful cultural performances that highlighted the deep-rooted traditions of the participating tribes. Marking the harvest season, the festival serves as a reminder of the bond between the communities and nature while showcasing their enduring cultural identity.

Health & Family Welfare Minister Biyuram Wahge, who attended the event as chief guest, urged the people to preserve their roots, cultural values and traditional practices. He appreciated the state government's initiative in establishing Gurukul institutions for various tribes, saying such steps would strengthen efforts to safeguard indigenous heritage.

Wahge cautioned that neglecting language and cultural practices could lead to the loss of identity, calling on all sections of society to come forward to protect their traditions



for future generations.

Chayangtajo MLA and Advisor to the WRD Minister, Hayang Mangfi, attending as guest of honour, also stressed the importance of cultural preservation amid rapid societal changes.

Education Minister P D Sona, who is also the Chief Patron of the Podi Barbi Festival

Celebration Committee, said the festival represents more than a cultural event—it is an expression of gratitude, unity and the community's connection with nature. He highlighted the role of festivals in sustaining traditional songs, dances, attire and rituals and appealed to the youth to carry forward these legacies. Sona assured full support to

the celebration committee.

Committee President Boli Yore, General Secretary Nima Piyasang and Culture Secretary Jyoti (Diru) Taluk were among others who addressed the gathering, expressing pride in the successful conduct of the festival and reaffirming their commitment to preserving the region's cultural identity.

Waiting for govt response: Arunachal Cong on SC order over firms getting contracts

ITANAGAR, Dec 6: The Congress unit of Arunachal Pradesh on Friday said it is in a wait-and-watch mode after the Supreme Court directed the state government to submit an affidavit detailing all contracts awarded from 2015 to 2025, including those to firms of family members of Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, which observed it would consider whether any inquiry is required or not, passed the order on December 2, while hearing a plea seeking a CBI probe into the award of contracts for public works in the state to the firms owned by the family members of Khandu.

Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) spokesperson Kon Jirjo Jotham said the party would refrain from making political comments since the case is sub judice, stressing that it was the prerogative of the state government to comply with the Supreme Court's order.

He said that the PIL concerned was filed by civil society organisations and pressure groups, and not the party.

"The Congress would wait for the legal process to unfold," Jotham said.

The apex court bench had said that it was alleged before it that the difference between tenders of the competing firms was minuscule.

Noting that "the coincidence is absolutely remarkable," the bench observed, the court said if the difference is minuscule that shows cartelisation. "If that is so, that becomes serious," it said.

The Comptroller and Auditor General has previously flagged several irregularities in the awarding of contracts to firms owned by the chief minister's relatives, adding another layer of scrutiny as the case continues to develop. (PTI)

Jaiswal's maiden ODI ton, bowlers' diligence carry

India to 9-wkt win and 2-1 series victory over SA

VISAKHAPATNAM, Dec 6: Yashviji Jaiswal reeled off an unbeaten maiden ODI hundred, carrying India to a nine-wicket victory in the third and final one-day and a 2-1 series win against South Africa here on Saturday.

It was always a case of the margin of victory once Jaiswal (116 not out, 121 balls) and his senior opening partner Rohit Sharma (75, 73 balls) stitched 155 runs in 25.5 overs, and it turned precisely so as India finished with 271 for one in 39.5 overs, chasing 271.

Virat Kohli contributed a classy 65 not out off 45 deliveries.

Quinton de Kock made a refined 106 off 89 balls, his 23rd ton in ODIs, but it remained a shiny footnote as Indian batters dictated the course with authority.

Jaiswal was not comfortable initially in his innings but the assured presence of Rohit at the other end was a massive blessing for him.

Rohit guided the understudy, who was playing only his fourth ODI, through some early turbulent phases, and also did the bulk of the scoring.

The 38-year-old reached his fifty in 54 balls, tranquil by his standards but those patented, magical swivel pull shots, three of them sailed for sixes, lent the innings a touch of aggression.

It enabled Jaiswal to collect runs unhurriedly, and walked to fifty in 75 balls. But once he reached his fifty, the left-hander grew in confidence and opened a lot more, unbuckling some of those drives and cuts that he carefully avoided in the early phase of his innings.

Rohit, who became the fourth Indian bat-



ter to reach 20000 international runs during his knock after Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Kohli, looked set for another hundred.

But an ill-timed sweep off left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj cut short his stay. But that didn't deter Jaiswal, who, accompanied by Kohli, kept India's innings moving.

The 23-year-old reached the coveted three-figure mark in 111 balls with a single off pacer Corbin Bosch and immediately tore his helmet away to slip into an energetic celebration — a combination of sprint, jump, roar and punch in the air.

Jaiswal and a typically assertive Kohli added 156 runs for the second wicket as India calmly went past the target to whip

some frenzy among a nearly 27000-strong crowd.

Earlier, a largely disciplined bowling effort also played its part in keeping South Africa to a manageable total, an effort led by pacer Prasidh Krishna (4/66) and Kuldeep Yadav (4/41).

After Arshdeep Singh sent back Ryan Rickelton early, De Kock (106, 89 balls, 8x4, 6x4) struck his seventh century against India and put on 113 runs off 124 balls with skipper Temba Bavuma (48, 67 balls) as the visitors moved to a healthy position.

De Kock was severe on Prasidh (4/66), who erred on length continuously in his first spell (2-0-27-0). The left-hander biffed the pacer for 6, 6, 4 in his second over to

milk 18 runs.

The 32-year-old quickly pounced on anything that was short, and pacers Prasidh and Harshit Rana offered him plenty of feed on his pet areas.

De Kock moved to fifty in 42 balls, and never let the tempo down reaching his hundred in 79 balls.

India found temporary relief when Ravindra Jadeja induced a false slash from Bavuma (48, 67 balls) to get caught by Kohli at point.

But the tourists got another move on through a 54-run partnership between De Kock and Matthew Breetzke for the third wicket, and at 168 for two in 28 overs they were in a good position to press on.

But Breetzke's punishment of part-time spinner Tilak Varma forced a rethink in the Indian camp, as skipper KL Rahul brought back Prasidh for a second spell.

What a masterpiece it turned out to be! The Karnataka man broke the back of South Africa's top and middle-order in an exceptional second spell (4-0-11-3).

Breetzke was the first to go, trapped plumb in front and four balls later Aiden Markram chipped a fuller delivery to Kohli at short covers.

Prasidh then castled De Kock, whose ugly cross-batted swipe failed to connect a full length delivery.

All of a sudden, South Africa found themselves at a shaky 199 for five, losing three wickets in three overs.

Once Prasidh was done away with the top and middle-order, left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep (4/41) took over and mopped up the tail as South Africa fell short of even a par total on this track. (PTI)

Greaves' 202 earns the West Indies a draw with New Zealand in the 1st test



CHRISTCHURCH, Dec 6: Justin Greaves made an unbeaten 202 in a 230-run partnership with Kemar Roach as the West Indies won an endurance contest against a threadbare New Zealand attack Saturday to draw the first test after being set 531 to win.

The West Indies' second innings of 457-6 was the highest fourth-innings score since tests have been limited to five days. At times they flirted with the highest winning run chase in history Saturday until with six wickets down in the last session Greaves and Roach finally put up the shutters.

Greaves batted for almost 9 1-2 hours, first in a 196-run partnership with Shai Hope, who made 140 before being only of only two West Indies batters dismissed on the final day. Roach, who finished 58 not out, faced 233 balls to add a half century to his five-wicket bag in the New Zealand second innings.

"Resilient is the word we've thrown around in the dressing room a lot so far for me to be there at the end of the day was really important. Anything for the team at the end of the day," Greaves said.

"It's a special, special day for me, a special day for the team. We were pretty much up against it."

At the same time, New Zealand's heavily depleted attack toiled through part of the fourth day and all of the final day with only two fit seamers, both novices,

a spin bowling allrounder and a part-time spinner. New Zealand lacked the armory on a flat pitch to take the six wickets it needed on the fifth day to win the match and take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

After injuries to the attack spearhead Matt Henry and to medium pace allrounder Nathan Smith, the only fit pacers New Zealand had were Jacob Duffy and Zak Foulkes, both playing in their first test at home and only the second test of their careers.

New Zealand seemed poised to complete a convincing first-test victory on the fourth day when, after setting the West Indies a mammoth total to win, it had the tourists 72-4 early in the second session.

Greaves and Roach gave only a couple of chances to the field in all of the final day. New Zealand exhausted its reviews early in the day and paid the price when an lbw appeal and an appeal for a catch behind against Roach both were declined by the umpires and shown to be out on replay.

New Zealand had the upper hand in the match from the end of the first innings when it dismissed the West Indies for 167 in reply to its 231. Kane Williamson top-scored with 52 in New Zealand's first innings in his first test since 2024. Hope made 56 and Tegenarine Chandernaul 52 in the West Indies' reply. (AP)

Gill cleared by CoE to play 1st T20I



CUTTACK, Dec 6: India's T20I vice-captain Shubman Gill has been cleared by the Sports Science team of the BCCI's Centre of Excellence to play the opening T20I against South Africa after successfully completing his rehabilitation from a neck injury sustained during the Kolkata Test.

Gill was selected in the squad subject to fitness and had to undergo all rehabilitation and skill-training protocols required for Return To Play (RTP).

"Shubman Gill has successfully completed his rehabilitation at CoE and has met the requisite criteria to be declared fit for all formats of the game," a communication from the CoE has gone to the team management's Sports Science and Medicine (SSM) team, comprising physio Kamlesh Jain, strength and conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux and sports doctor Dr Charles.

Gill had suffered a whiplash on the second day of the Kolkata Test and had to be hospitalised for a couple of days and administered injection. He missed the ongoing ODI series but all doubts over his availability for the T20 leg were dispelled as he completed his rehabilitation and also performed his skills training -- batting and fielding -- in match simulation at CoE.

On Saturday, all those who only play T20Is will be linking up in Cuttack to start their first session from Sunday. (PTI)

India need to lift its game to prevail over Germany in FIH Junior WC semifinals

CHENNAI, Dec 6: Eyeing to reclaim the crown after nine years, the Indian men's hockey team will have to raise its game by leaps and bounds if it hopes to get past seven-time champions and title holders Germany in the semifinal of the FIH Junior World Cup here on Sunday. Two-time champions India last won the title way back in 2016 in Lucknow.

The Indians had a relatively easy pool outing, scoring 29 goals and conceding none against lowly sides like Chile, Oman and Switzerland to breeze into the quarterfinals.

But the PR Sreejesh-coached side faced their first real test against Belgium in the quarterfinals. India had to dig deep into their reservoir to eke out a 4-3 shoot-out win against Belgium after both the sides were locked 2-2 at the end of regulation time.

It took a superlative effort from goalkeeper Prineedeeep Singh to keep India in the hunt.

Prineedeeep not only made some fantastic saves in the regulation 60 minutes but also effected two brilliant saves in the shoot-out to take India forward.

India's defence was hardly tested in the pool stages, but against Belgium got a taste of what is awaiting for them in the knockout stages of the tournament against quality opponents.

Sreejesh was not at all happy with the team's performance against Belgium despite the win and asked his players to keep their "feet on the ground".

"I sweetly made them understand that it was not the final. To keep your feet on the ground is



most important and we need to focus on the next match," Sreejesh said after the Belgium match.

He listed the areas which India need to improve going ahead if they desire to reclaim the title.

"...we expect the same (performance) from Germany too in the next match. So we have to raise our level according to the occasion. What we need to do is score and that's the most important thing," he said.

"Another important thing is to focus on the mistakes you have committed. What is easy is to keep in your mind what good things you have done in the match but what is important is to learn from the mistakes we have committed inside opponent's D and how to get more outcome."

The Indian forwards, who shone bright in the pool stages against weaker opponents, fell flat against Belgium despite creating numerous scoring chances.

And come Sunday, the likes of Manmeet Singh, Dilraj Singh,

Starc torments England with the bat in 2nd Ashes test

BRISBANE, Dec 6: Mitchell Starc tormented England with the bat on Saturday to add another facet to his dominance so far in this Ashes series, leading the scoring for Australia as it took a 177-run first-innings lead in the day-night match at the Gabba.

The 35-year-old pace bowler scored 77 off 141 balls, his highest test score since 2016, and guided Australia to 511 late in the middle session on Day 3 in the second test, replying to England's 334. For just the third time in almost 150 years of test cricket, all 11 Australian batters reached double figures in a test innings. Starc's was one of five half-centuries, following opener Jake Weatherall (72), No. 3 Marnus Labuschagne (65), stand-in skipper Steve Smith (61) and wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey (63). (AP)

Mexico optimistic about World Cup chances after group-stage draw

MEXICO CITY, Dec 6: World Cup co-host Mexico was optimistic about its chances of advancing from the group stage after being drawn to play against South Africa, South Korea and a yet-to-be-determined European team.

While some TV analysts described the group as "easy," coach Javier Aguirre was more cautious.

"We faced Korea and they are not an easy team. They do their job. They are disciplined and organized, while South Africa is not easy either," he said after the draw in Washington on Friday. "They are good teams, but we have a chance, we are at home and with our people."

Mexico faces South Africa on June 11 in Mexico City in the opening match of the 2026 World Cup. A week later El Tri will play South Korea in Guadalajara. The last group stage match will be against the winner of a European playoff involving Denmark, North Macedonia, Czech Republic and Ireland.

The country has high hopes despite being eliminated in the group stage in the 2022 World Cup and

mixed results in international matches ahead of next year's tournament.

"There won't be any easy opponents, but it could have been worse," said striker Ruben Jimenez, who plays for Fulham in the Premier League. "I think it's a good group, from which we can learn a lot, and we're taking it one game at a time because what we want is to win and finish first."

Mexico has played South Korea twice in World Cup history and won both games, in France 1998 and Russia 2018. The teams tied 2-2 in a friendly match last September. "It's basically a European team, everyone is in Europe except the goalkeeper, they have a coach I know and they have physical strength which makes them a very strong opponent," Aguirre said.

Mexico's only World Cup encounter with South Africa was a 1-1 draw in the opening game of the 2010 tournament, which South Africa hosted. That Mexico team was coached by Aguirre, who is now at the helm for the third time. (AP)

Argentina and Messi will open their World Cup defense against Algeria

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: All around the globe, eyes focused on the stage where World Cup paths were sorted, nations' names chosen one by one in a draw that determined Argentina and Lionel Messi will start their title defense against Algeria.

Twenty-seven months after qualifying began, teams from five-time champion Brazil to newcomers Cape Verde, Curaçao, Jordan and Uzbekistan learned their group-stage opponents in the expanded 48-nation, 104-game tournament that starts June 11 in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"Exciting for the island, for the people there. They're so proud," said Dick Advocaat, the 78-year-old Dutchman leading Curaçao, a Caribbean country with a population of 150,000, into an opener against four-time champion Germany.

On a day that began with snow falling on the nation's capital, the ceremony at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts included U.S. President Donald Trump receiving a newly created peace prize awarded by FIFA, soccer's governing body. Trump, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney picked up plastic spheres containing their own nations' names from bowls — Sheinbaum drew more applause from those gathered in the

hall than Trump.

FIFA's lead-in show, featuring music and stars from sports and entertainment, was almost as long as a 90-minute soccer match, with the actual draw starting nearly 1 1/2 hours into the proceedings. Tom Brady, Shaquille O'Neal, Aaron Judge and Wayne Gretzky took part. New Zealand was the last orb picked.

"Just watching Americans on stage and the president giving speeches and performances, it made it feel like an American event already," said U.S. midfielder Tyler Adams, who watched from England, where he plays for Premier League club Bournemouth. "And I think we know the expectation of what it's going to be like when we go there and there's going to be halftime shows and there's going to be celebrities and the big draw of what America brings to sports."

Three-time champion Argentina opens on June 16 at either Kansas City, Missouri, or Santa Clara, California. Specific sites for all group stage games and kick-off times were to be announced Saturday. The Albiceleste then face Austria and Jordan in Group J. Argentina surprisingly lost its 2022 opener to Saudi Arabia before going on to win the final over France on penalty kicks.

Messi, who turns 39 during the tournament, hasn't committed yet to playing but it would be shocking if he decided



against appearing in a record sixth World Cup.

"We are just awaiting for him to decide," coach Lionel Scaloni said. "In principle, everything is going well."

The U.S., which reached the semifinals at the inaugural World Cup in 1930 and the quarterfinals in 2002, starts Group D against Paraguay on June 12 in Inglewood, California. The Americans play

Australia six days later at Seattle, then face Turkey, Romania, Slovakia or Kosovo — one will emerge next year from playoffs — on June 25 back at SoFi Stadium.

Mexico hosts the tournament opener at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City on June 11 against South Africa in Group A, a rematch of the 1-1 draw at the 2010 opener in Johannesburg. El Tri then meets South

Korea and closes the first round against the Czech Republic, Ireland, Denmark or North Macedonia.

Forty-two of the teams have been determined; 22 are competing in playoffs for six berths that will be decided March 31.

Winners and second-place nations from the 12 groups advance to the new round of 32 along with the top eight third-place teams. All games from the quarterfinals on will be in the U.S., culminating in the July 19 final at East Rutherford, New Jersey.

England, which won its only title in 1966, plays Croatia, Ghana and Panama in Group L. Players from Chelsea and Manchester City experienced summer U.S. conditions at this year's Club World Cup.

Five-time champion Brazil opens against 2022 semifinalist Morocco, then plays Haiti and Scotland in Group C.

"It is a difficult group," coach Carlo Ancelotti said.

Top-ranked Spain, the 2010 champion, faces Cape Verde, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay in Group H, while four-time champion Germany follows its Curaçao match by playing Ivory Coast and Ecuador in Group E.

Two-time champion France starts June 16 against Senegal at East Rutherford, New Jersey, or Foxborough, Massachu-

setts. France then faces Bolivia, Iraq or Suriname in Group I and closes perhaps the most daunting group against Norway in a matchup of Kylian Mbappé and Erling Haaland.

Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, like Messi expected to play in a record sixth World Cup, has Group K matches against Uzbekistan, Colombia and Congo, Jamaica or New Caledonia. If Portugal and Argentina win their groups, Ronaldo and Messi could meet in a quarterfinal at Arrowhead Stadium.

Other groups include:

G: Belgium, Egypt, Iran, New Zealand.

B: Canada, Switzerland, Qatar and Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Wales or Northern Ireland.

F: Netherlands, Japan, Tunisia and Sweden, Ukraine, Albania and Poland.

No team has repeated as champion since Brazil won in 1958 and '62, and only eight nations have won soccer's biggest prize. Italy has four titles and Uruguay two.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino gave Trump a large gold-colored peace prize trophy and a gold-colored medal hanging from a blue ribbon, which Trump hung around his neck. Standing next to Trump, Infantino lavished praise.

"This is truly one of the great honors of my life," Trump said. (AP)