

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- China positive on Putin's India visit; calls for stronger trilateral cooperation
- Zelenskyy heads to London for talks with European allies on peace plan, security
- PM Modi slams Congress for overruling Mahatma's wishes on Vande Matram
- PM tried to rewrite history in 'Vande Mataram' debate, BJP can't blot Nehru's legacy: Cong

2 more arrested for piracy of Zubeen Garg's last film

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Two more persons were arrested from Bengaluru in connection with the alleged piracy of Zubeen Garg's last film 'Roi Roi Binale', which was released on October 31, police said on Monday.

Those arrested were identified as Md Saddam Hussain and Mousam Gogoi.

Hussain was apprehended on Saturday, while Gogoi was nabbed on Sunday, they said.

Another person, Md Rofidul Islam, was arrested in Kokrajhar on November 20 for allegedly uploading video clips from the film on his YouTube channel 'Rafiqul R Vlogs'.

A case was registered at the cyber police station in Panbazar on the basis of a complaint filed by the film's producer, Shyamantak Gautam, alleging that the film was being (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Demand for inclusion of Tiwa council under 6th Schedule: Students, policeman injured during protest

ATSU threatens intensified stir from Jan

MORIGAON, Dec 8: Several people, including a police personnel, were injured in Morigaon district of Assam on Monday during a lathicharge on protesters, who were demanding inclusion of Tiwa council areas under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, officials said.

The All Tiwa Students' Union (ATSU) staged a protest at Jagiroad during the day, blocking a stretch of National Highway-27 to press for their demands, including the issue concerning the Tiwa council areas.

"The BJP-led governments, in the state and the Centre, showed an apathetic attitude towards solving the basic problems of Tiwas. If they fail to fulfil the demands, we will go for an intensified agitation from January," ATSU general secretary Tarun Madar asserted.



The protesters have been demanding that the Tiwa Autonomous Council be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, eviction of illegal encroachers from the tribal belt and block, and employment of local educated

Tiwa youths in the Tata semiconductor unit, among others.

The agitators have also demanded conducting a special Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) examination to appoint Tiwa language teachers, and recognition of

the community as 'Tiwa' instead of 'Lalung' in the Constitution's tribal list.

A senior police officer said as the agitators blocked the highway for a long time, they were asked to clear the way for traffic.

"This highway is the only link connecting Upper Assam with Guwahati. If it is blocked for 30 mins, a massive traffic jam takes place, creating difficulties for commuters," he said.

When police tried to clear the highway, a scuffle ensued, and to control the crowd, the personnel lathicharged on the protesters, the officer said.

"In the scuffle, a sub-inspector was injured. Some protesters also suffered minor injuries. The situation is under control now," he said.

All the injured received medical care, the officer added. (PTI)

Obtain driving licence, wear helmet, CM tells recipients

11,250 students receive scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday launched the distribution of scooters under the Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award at a function held at Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra, gifting scooters to 11,250 students, including 6,860 girls, who secured 80 per cent and above in the Higher Secondary Examination

2025.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister said the scheme was introduced to promote academic excellence.

Since its inception in 2017-18, a total of 1,86,442 students have received scooters, with the government spending over ₹1,043 crore.

He urged students to avoid riding scooters (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Molestation charges bar Abedin's reinstatement

SC grants bail to Gossagaon College prof in anti-India post case

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: The Supreme Court on Monday granted bail to a former professor at an Assam college, arrested for making an anti-India post on social media but advised that the relief granted to him should not lead to his reinstatement.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi noted that he has been named in two other cases, accused of molesting girl students and making objectionable remarks against them on social media.

Earlier, the professor was termed "pervert" and "a threat to young girls" by the bench.

The bail was granted considering that he has been in jail for over six

months, and the conclusion of the trial against him is likely to take some time, the court said.

"Taking into consideration all the factors, let him be released on bail, subject to furnishing bail bonds. Let him be present in court for every hearing," the bench ordered while clarifying that the relief shall not be construed as a ground for his reinstatement, given the allegations involving students.

CJ Kant told the counsel for the Assam government that his suspension from college should remain as it is. On November 12, the top court came down heavily on Md Joynal Abedin, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

WKA demands eviction of encroachers

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 8: As eviction drives continue across several parts of Assam, a parallel demand for similar action has emerged in West Karbi Anglong, where a group of residents has launched an indefinite hunger strike seeking eviction of alleged encroachers from PGR and VGR lands.

The protest, held at Phelangpi, is led by Litsong Rongphar, who said he represents "a section of the indigenous, conscious public of Karbi Anglong" and is not affiliated with any organisation.

The demonstrators are demanding (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati emerges as Northeast India's commercial powerhouse: Report

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Guwahati has emerged as Northeast India's commercial powerhouse, with major infrastructure investments set to reshape the region's real estate landscape through 2028, according to a report.

The report titled 'Beyond the metros: Insights into India's emerging real estate stars' by leading commercial real estate and investment management company JLL pointed out that the city's strategic positioning as the gateway to eight northeastern states, combined with world-class



educational institutions and a thriving business ecosystem, is

attracting unprecedented investor interest across office, retail, and

logistics sectors.

"Guwahati represents one of India's most compelling real estate investment opportunities today, combining strategic location advantages with transformational infrastructure development and exceptional market fundamentals," said senior managing director, East and Emerging Markets, India, JLL, Surekha Bihani.

"The convergence of 80 per cent office stock growth, declining retail vacancy and limited industrial availability, supported by large (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



অসম চৰকাৰ

অসম চুক্তি ৰূপায়ণ বিভাগৰ উদ্যোগত
আৰু সাংস্কৃতিক পৰিক্ৰমা বিভাগৰ সহযোগত

অসম আন্দোলনৰ শ্বহীদসকলৰ পৰিত্ৰ স্মৃতিত

শ্বহীদ দিৱস ২০২৫ উপলক্ষে

বিশেষ অনুষ্ঠান

কাৰ্যসূচী

বিয়লি ৪:০০ বজা	থাপনা স্থাপন
বিয়লি ৪:০৫ বজা	ভাগৱত পাঠ
বিয়লি ৪:৩০ বজা	'শ্বহীদ প্ৰণাম জ্যোতি' প্ৰজ্জ্বলন
বিয়লি ৪:৩৫ বজা	৮৬০গৰাকী শ্বহীদৰ পৰিত্ৰ স্মৃতিত এগছিকৈ বস্তি প্ৰজ্জ্বলন আৰু গায়ন-বায়ন
সন্ধিয়া ৪:৪৫ বজা	দিহা নাম
সন্ধিয়া ৫:১৫ বজা	থিয় নাম

মুখ্য অতিথি

ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মা
মুখ্যমন্ত্ৰী, অসম

গৌৰৱময় উপস্থিতি

শ্ৰীঅতুল বৰা
মন্ত্ৰী, অসম চুক্তি ৰূপায়ণ ইত্যাদি বিভাগ, অসম

অনুষ্ঠানত সকলোৰে উপস্থিতি আন্তৰিকতাৰে কামনা কৰা হ'ল

শ্বহীদ স্মাৰক ক্ষেত্ৰ, পশ্চিম বৰাগাঁও, গুৱাহাটী ৯ ডিচেম্বৰ ২০২৫

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

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অসম বাৰ্তা ছাবস্ক্ৰাইব কৰিবলৈ ৭৬৩৬৮৩৪৯৪৩ ত Assam লিখি ৱাটছএপ কৰক

DIPR/D/HLT/248/9-Dec-25

Stock markets nosedive on profit-booking, foreign fund outflows

MUMBAI, Dec 8: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty nosedived on Monday after two consecutive days of gains, as investors rushed to take profits amid the unabated selling of stocks by foreign investors.

Analysts said investors turned defensive ahead of this week's US Federal Reserve policy decision, which further weakened the sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged by 609.68 points, or 0.71 per cent, to close at 85,102.69. During the day, it plummeted by 836.78 points, or 0.97 per cent, to hit the intraday low of 84,875.59.

Snapping a two-day gaining streak, the 50-share NSE Nifty declined by 225.90 points, or 0.86 per cent, to settle at 25,960.55. In the intraday session, it dropped 294.2 points, or 1.12 per cent, to hit a low of 25,892.25.

Among the Sensex constituents, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Eternal, Trent, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India, PowerGrid, Asian Paints, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Titan, NTPC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bharti Airtel were among the laggards.

Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank were the only gainers.

"The market experienced a broad-based decline, slipping below the 26,000-mark as investors turned cautious ahead of this week's Fed policy decision," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

He added that despite robust domestic growth figures and the RBI's recent rate cut, short-term sentiment remains overshadowed by global monetary policy con-



cerns, persistent FII outflows, and currency depreciation.

"Volatility was further amplified by a surge in Japanese bond yields to multi-year highs, sparking fears of a potential unwinding of the yen carry trade, Nair said.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 1.73 per cent, while small-cap index dropped 2.20 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Services tumbled by 3.70 per cent, Realty by 3.50 per cent, Capital Goods by 2.83 per cent, Telecommunication by 2.53 per cent, Industrials by 2.21 per cent, Utilities by 2.10 per cent, Metal by 1.96 per cent, and Power by 1.84 per cent.

As many as 3,348 stocks declined, while 950 advanced and 187 remain unchanged on the BSE.

"Indian equities declined on Monday, with the Nifty slipping a little over 1 per cent to 25,897 and the Sensex falling nearly 800 points. The pullback was led by profit-taking in small- and midcap stocks, along with selling pressure in select index heavyweights.

"Market breadth remained weak, and FII outflows continued,

while investors stayed cautious ahead of Wednesday's US Federal Reserve policy announcement," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Garg attributed the weakness to elevated valuations, unwinding of leveraged positions, and global risk-off sentiment.

The rupee depreciated to 90.11 against the US dollar, while higher crude prices and a rise in the India VIX also weighed on sentiment.

"Persistent FII selling, influenced by uncertainty around the global rate-cut trajectory and soft cues from Asian markets, remained a key factor for domestic equities," he said.

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation, the parent company of IndiGo, declined by nearly 9 per cent to close at ₹ 4,926.55 apiece on the BSE as the disruptions in the crisis-hit airline's flight operations entered the seventh day.

During the day, the scrip of Gurguram-based company slumped by 9.85 per cent.

IndiGo which has been facing heat from both the government and the passengers for cancelling

hundreds of flights since December 2, citing regulatory changes in the pilots' new flight duty and regulations norms, which resulted in lakhs of passengers getting stuck at airports pan-India.

Meanwhile, aviation minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said in the Rajya Sabha on Monday that the government has initiated an inquiry into Indigo's mass flight cancellations and will take strict action against the operator to set an example for other airlines.

Blaming the airlines for its failure to manage the crew and duty roster through its day-to-day operations, Naidu said, "We are not taking this situation easily. We are doing an inquiry. We will take very, very strict action not only for this situation but also as an example."

Other Asian markets largely closed on a positive note, with South Korea's KOSPI rising 1.34 per cent, Shanghai's SSE Composite index climbing by 0.54 per cent, and Japan's Nikkei 225 benchmark increasing by 0.13 per cent, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index fell 1.23 per cent.

The European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended higher on Friday.

Meanwhile, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 438.90 crore on Friday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 4,189.17 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.61 per cent to USD 63.37 per barrel.

On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark advanced 447.05 points to settle at 85,712.37, while the 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 152.70 points to close at 26,186.45. (PTI)

Investors lose ₹ 7.12 lakh cr as Sensex tumbles on profit booking, FII outflows

MUMBAI, Dec 8: Market investors became poorer by ₹ 7.12 lakh crore as Sensex nosedived on Monday after two consecutive days of gains, as investors rushed to take profits amid unabated selling of stocks by foreign investors.

The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 609.68 points, or 0.71 per cent, to close at 85,102.69.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by ₹ 7,12,514.68 crore to ₹ 4,64,19,108.91 (USD 5.15 trillion).

"Indian benchmark indices concluded the day with significant losses, as the Sensex tumbled over 610 points to close at 85,103 and the Nifty50 shed 226 points to settle at 25,961," Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

He added that the market-wide sell-off was driven by cautious sentiment ahead of the US Federal Reserve's rate decision, continuous FII selling, and widespread profit booking across the broader market.

From the Sensex firms, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Eternal, Trent, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India, PowerGrid, Asian Paints, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Titan, NTPC, Kotak Mahindra Bank,



Larsen & Toubro, and Bharti Airtel were among the laggards.

However, Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, Reliance Industries, and HDFC Bank were the only gainers.

"The sustained weakness in the rupee and continued FII outflows further aggravated concerns around inflation and import-cost pressures, adding to the bearish tone," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 1.73 per cent, while smallcap index dropped 2.20 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, services tumbled by 3.70 per cent, realty by 3.50 per cent, capital goods by 2.83 per cent, telecommunication by 2.53 per cent, industrials by 2.21 per cent, utilities by 2.10 per cent, metal by 1.96 per cent, and power by 1.84 per cent.

As many as 3,348 stocks declined, while 950 advanced and 187 remain unchanged on the BSE. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Obtain driving licence

until they obtain a driving licence and reminded them to wear a helmet every time they ride. Sarma said that minor modifications in the scheme's implementation this year resulted in a reduced number of eligible recipients compared to last year's 48,673.

However, he noted that the Nijut Moina scheme now covers more than five lakh girls. To encourage boys, a similar scheme will be launched on January 1, he announced, adding that such measures aim to build a stronger academic culture in Assam.

The chief minister also urged students to cultivate positive thinking, stating that pessimism leads to disorder and often derails students from their goals.

He said his government has been working to counter negative mindsets and promote confidence and resilience among youth.

Drawing a parallel between human cognition and artificial intelligence, he said habits and mindset profoundly shape one's personality.

Highlighting Assam's rapid development in the education sector, Sarma said the state now has over 25 medical colleges, with 15 functional and 10 under construction.

Medical seats have increased from 250 to 2,000 and are expected to reach 5,000 by 2030.

He noted that Assam, once dependent on other states for higher education opportunities, now has two central universities and around 25-26 state universities.

Nearly 30 engineering colleges, including IIT Guwahati and NIT Silchar, also mark the state's progress.

Sarma said Dassault Systèmes is establishing a facility worth about ₹200 crore at Assam Engineering College to train students in designing digital tools and aerospace-related products.

An institute for maritime engineering has started in Dibrugarh, and plans are underway to set up a Google data centre and a mobile manufacturing unit in Assam.

Work on a green hydrogen plant at Numaligarh will begin next year, and land has already been allotted.

The state is also aiming to set up a bio-aviation fuel unit and is progressing towards establishing a 3,200-MW thermal power plant, which he said will enable Assam to supply electricity to Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura by 2031.

Education secretary Narayan Konwar delivered the welcome address.

Education minister Ranaj Pegu, adviser for Higher Education Prof Debabrata Das, dignitaries and hundreds of students attended the event.

2 more arrested for

uploaded on the internet within a few days of its release. Emotions ran high since the pre-dawn release of Garg's swan song on October 31, with the musical breaking box office records and becoming the highest-grossing in the history of the Assamese film industry, earning over ₹ 33 crore. (PTI)

Molestation charges bar

who was a professor at the Gossaigaon College in Kokrajhar district of the state, saying he cannot be released from jail easily.

"You are in the habit of harassing women on social media and making obscene remarks. You are a perverted man and a threat to young girls in college.

"What kind of professor are you? You are a shame to the word professor. You should not be allowed to enter the college," the top court said, after perusing the case records.

His counsel earlier told the bench that he had apologised for the post -- which led to his arrest on May 16 -- and as soon as he realised it was against the country's interests, he had deleted it.

Abedin moved the top court challenging the denial of bail by the Gauhati High Court. He sought bail on the grounds that he has been incarcerated for over six months, and despite the filing of a chargesheet by the police, the trial in the case has not commenced.

His counsel claimed there was no judicial officer at the Gossaigaon court, due to which there is uncertainty over the conclusion of the trial in the near future.

The top court earlier requested the Gauhati High Court chief justice to look into the issue of filling the vacant post or transfer his case to the sessions court in the Kokrajhar district.

Abedin, who is a resident of Gossaigaon, had allegedly made anti-India posts in May, for which he was initially detained and later arrested. (PTI)

WKA demands eviction

immediate eviction from Professional Grazing Reserve and Village Grazing Reserve lands in the district, a longstanding issue among the Karbi community seeking protection of their "jati, mati, bheti."

Speaking at the protest site, Rongphar questioned why issues affecting Karbi Anglong do not receive the same attention as those of the rest of Assam.

He said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has justified eviction drives elsewhere as being carried out in honour of martyrs, and noted that Karbi people too have made sacrifices for the state.

Rongphar said that despite three years of protests, submissions of memorandums and facing coercive state action, no concrete steps have been taken.

He alleged that while evictions have taken place in other parts of Assam and encroachments cleared, the situation in Karbi Anglong remains neglected, leading to fears that the indigenous population is becoming a minority in their own district.

He added that Karbi Anglong "is no longer functioning as a protected Sixth Schedule area."

Protesters accused both the Government of Assam and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) of ignoring the issue.

They said the hunger strike would continue indefinitely until the authorities respond or give due importance to their demands.

Guwahati emerges as

infrastructure investments, positions Guwahati as the definitive gateway for Northeast India's economic expansion," she said.

Investors who recognise this inflection point will gain from the city's evolution into a major commercial hub serving millions across the region, she added.

The report said the office market demonstrates a robust expansion trajectory, with total stock projected to surge 80 per cent from 2 million sqft in 2024 to 3.6 million sqft by 2027.

"Game-changing infrastructure projects are accelerating market transformation with the 93-km Guwahati Ring Road, to be completed by 2026, will decongest the urban core while unlocking development potential in Azara, Baihata, and Narengi corridors," it added.

The 6-lane Guwahati-North Guwahati Bridge will reduce cross-river travel time from an hour to 15 minutes, boosting north bank development.

Expansion of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport to a 10-million-passenger capacity by April 2025, and the 5.44-km Dighalipukhuri Flyover—Assam's longest—will further enhance connectivity, it added.

Premier institutions such as IIT Guwahati, the Guwahati College of Architecture and Planning, and AIIMS ensure a steady supply of skilled talent, supporting the city's rise as a Business Process Management (BPM) and startup hub with expanding co-working spaces catering to food-tech, fintech and software enterprises, the report said.

It added that the city also offers quality-of-life advantages, including lower living costs than Tier-1 cities, better air quality, political stability and expanding healthcare and education networks. (PTI)

ICI Prudential Life records industry-leading 99.33% claim settlement ratio

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: ICI Prudential Life Insurance has announced that it achieved an industry-leading claim settlement ratio of 99.33% in the first half of FY2026, the highest among the country's top life insurance companies.

The insurer reported an average settlement turnaround time of just 1.1 days for non-investigated claims, while death claims worth ₹893.38 crore were settled during the period.

Amish Banker, chief operations officer of ICI Prudential Life Insurance, said the company's claim settlement framework is built on sensitivity and efficiency.

"In H1-FY2026, we achieved a claim settlement ratio of 99.33%, with an average turnaround time of only 1.1 days for non-investigated claims. We also settled death claims totalling over ₹893.38 crore," he said.

Banker added that the company's customer-first approach and increasing digitalisation have significantly enhanced ease of access.

Through the mobile app, WhatsApp, chatbot and website, customers can lodge and track claims with convenience.

Highlighting the company's "Claim for Sure" initiative—which guarantees settlement of eligible claims within one day of submitting all required documents—Banker said death claims worth ₹157.25 crore were settled under the programme in H1-FY2026.

He added that the company also recorded an industry-leading settlement ratio of 99.60% in Q1-FY2026.

Elekta unveils AI-Powered Evo CT-Linac at AMPICON 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Elekta has introduced Evo, its latest AI-powered linear accelerator (linac), to the Indian market, showcasing the advanced CT-Linac system at the Annual National Congress of the Association of Medical Physicists of India (AMPICON) 2025 in Guwahati.

The system, already launched in Europe and other global regions, is now available to clinicians across India.

Evo was first presented in India at AROICON in Kolkata on November 29 and subsequently demonstrated at AMPICON on December 4.

The highly versatile platform brings high-definition, AI-enhanced imaging and online adaptive radiotherapy capabilities designed to personalize and refine cancer treatment.

Feras Al Hasan, Head of TIMEA at Elekta, said the introduction of Evo will significantly enhance India's radiotherapy capabilities. "Evo brings a new level of flexibility to India's radiotherapy landscape and is designed to help centres deliver more personalised, efficient care.

Its ability to support both online and offline adaptive treatments on a CT-Linac gives clinicians confidence to adjust therapy based on daily anatomical changes—crucial in India, where many patients present with advanced-stage disease," he said.

Shankar Seshadri, VP & Head – India Sub-continent, said Evo aligns with India's growing clinical needs. "India needs radiotherapy solutions that combine precision with practicality. Evo's adaptive capabilities and streamlined workflow help high-volume centres treat more patients without compromising quality. Its arrival marks a significant milestone in strengthening Elekta's presence in the region," he added.

Adaptive radiotherapy, or Adaptive Radiation Therapy (ART), adjusts the radiation plan throughout treatment to account for changes in a patient's anatomy or tumour characteristics.

Evo supports this approach with Iris® high-definition, AI-enhanced imaging for clearer visualisation and Elekta ONE Online software offering distributed treatment planning, faster dose calculation and AI-driven automation for contouring and dose planning.

Elekta says Evo will help clinicians in India deliver more personalised, precise and accessible cancer care.

US, India to hold trade talks on Dec 10-11

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: A delegation led by Deputy US Trade Representative (USTR) Rick Switzer will meet his Indian counterpart Rajesh Agarwal on the proposed bilateral trade agreement here this week, official sources said.

The USA's chief negotiator for the pact, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch, will hold discussions with India's chief negotiator and Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce Darpan Jain.

"A delegation from the office of the US Trade Representative, led by Deputy US Trade Representative Ambassador Rick Switzer, will be visiting India from December 9-11, 2025. Talks on 10th and 11th will happen on all trade-related issues," they said.

The visit is crucial as India and the US are working to finalise the first tranche of the pact.

This visit of the US officials marks their second trip since the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff and an additional 25 per cent penalty on Indian goods entering the American market due to the purchase of Russian crude oil. The US officials last visited India on September 16.

On September 22, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal also led an official delegation to the US for trade talks. Goyal had also visited Washington in May. (PTI)

Gold falls to ₹ 1,32,600/10g amid subdued demand in Delhi markets

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Gold prices fell by ₹ 300 to ₹ 1,32,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday due to subdued demand in the local markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹ 1,32,900 per 10 grams on Friday.

However, silver prices jumped by ₹ 1,500 to ₹ 1,85,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), marking their second consecutive day of gains. It had settled at ₹ 1,83,500 per kg in the previous market session. Globally, spot gold rose by 0.18 per cent to USD 4,205.26 per ounce. "Spot gold witnessed heightened volatility and was trading with a gain of around 0.20 per cent at USD 4,210 per ounce ahead of the upcoming US Fed Reserve's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) monetary policy meeting due on December 10," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Inderbir Singh Jolly, CEO of PL Wealth Management, said, "Gold continues to reinforce its position as an important asset class amid global market uncertainty."

He added that with central banks maintaining a steady pace of gold accumulation and investors seeking inflation resilience, the metal remains a key diversifier in both institutional and retail portfolios. "We're seeing consistent



traction across digital gold investments, reflecting growing recognition of gold's role as a strategic long-term asset," Jolly said.

Meanwhile, spot silver was trading marginally higher at USD 58.41 per ounce. On Friday, the white metal had soared by USD 2.2 or 3.84 per cent to touch an all-time high of USD 59.33 per ounce before settling at USD 58.39 per ounce. Jolly of PL Wealth Management said bullion prices traded in a steady range, supported by softer dollar movements and sustained exchange traded fund (ETF) inflows.

"Domestic demand remained firm as investors rebalanced portfolios toward safe-haven assets. On the retail front, digital gold transactions rose by over 12 per cent. "Looking ahead, we expect gold to remain supported in the near term, with potential upside driven by ongoing geopolitical risks and expectations of gradual rate cuts in early 2026," he added. (PTI)

No. ACEH/TECH/CS/27/2025-26/4

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong invites bids on behalf of the Governor of Assam for the work-Construction of Boundary Wall at EMRS, Haflong (WII: Ardaopur) in Dima Hasao District from approved and eligible contractors registered with Public Works Department (Building), Assam amounting to Rs. 1,80,04,802.00 (Approx. inclusive of GST).

Details may be seen at the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd-
Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong

DIPR /CF/HLT/3035/9-Dec-25

Minister calls for mission-mode PMAY-G execution Dass sets 75-day deadline for rural push in Cachar



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Assam Panchayat & Rural Development Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Sunday chaired a high-level review meeting with the Cachar district administration and heads of various departments, setting a strict 60-75 day deadline to complete all ongoing rural development works.

Held at the new conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's of-

quality. He directed that Gaon Sabhas be held across all Gram Panchayats to validate beneficiaries identified through the Anvesha App survey, stating that the process is vital for eliminating discrepancies and strengthening community participation.

The minister instructed the CEO, Zilla Parishad, and all Block Development Officers to ensure time-bound completion of works under close supervision.

District officials were asked to extend full administrative and logistical support, while PRI members were urged to actively participate in monitoring and co-ordination.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to responsive and result-oriented governance, Dass called upon all officials to work cohesively and with a mission-oriented approach.

The review meeting, he said, marks a renewed push toward measurable outcomes and citizen-focused rural development in Cachar.

RC-EMEx 2025 begins at Kampur College



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Dec 8: The Revenue Circle Emergency Management Exercise (RC-EMEx 2025) commenced today at the Kampur College auditorium, marking a significant step towards strengthening disaster preparedness at the grassroots level in Nagaon district.

The programme has been organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Nagaon, and the Kampur Revenue Circle, in collaboration with the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) and the Disaster Management Cell of Kampur College.

The Circle Officer of Kampur Revenue Circle, who attended as the chief guest, inaugurated the event in the presence of the principal of Kampur College, the District Project Officer of DDMA Nagaon, resource persons, field officers from Kampur, Rupahi, Samaguri and Raha Revenue Circles, IA and DEOC officials from Nagaon, along with over 150 participants from various departments and community volunteer groups.

In her inaugural address, the Circle Officer stressed the importance of strong coordination and preparedness at the local level to ensure timely and effective disaster response.

She termed RC-EMEx 2025 a significant initiative towards building disaster-resilient communities.

The first day of the exercise included four parallel specialised training tracks facilitated by the District Project Officer of DDMA Nagaon and supported by expert resource persons.

The sessions provided hands-on training on disaster preparedness, inter-agency coordination and community response protocols.

The inaugural day concluded with active participation and enthusiasm from stakeholders, setting a strong tone for the upcoming sessions and reaffirming Nagaon district's commitment to developing a more resilient and disaster-ready administrative framework.

'Agantuk' observes birth anniversary of Dipali Bhatta Baruah

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Dec 8: The 66th birth anniversary of poet, writer and former Rangpur Sahitya Sabha president Dipali Bhattacharya Baruah was observed on Monday by the socio-cultural organisation Agantuk at her residence on Sankar Mandir Road.

Senior academicians Prof Sonaram Baruah, Prof Suresh Saikia, Dr Prakash Kotoky, Prof Monica Saikia, Agantuk president Juga Gogoi, Swarna Borbora Barua, Jeuti Bora Bhuyan, Dipali Swargiari, Tarun Chandra Nath, Hem Barua and Janam Khanikar extended their wishes to the writer, praying for her good health and an active creative life.

Baruah, a literary pensioner and a committed advocate for women's and children's rights, has authored and edited 13 books.

Noted poet Punjan Baruah spoke in detail on her two poetry collections, while Dr Prasanta Kumar Chutia highlighted key aspects of her short stories. Dr Lipi Phukan also addressed the gathering.

Ananda Mela returns to Diphu with 24-Day extravaganza

Festival aims to raise funds for its cultural training institution

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 8: The popular Ananda Mela from Guwahati has returned to Diphu, bringing a vibrant mix of entertainment shows, games, food stalls and shopping options to the Government Boys HS School playground.

Organised by the Diphu-based socio-cultural organisation Samanyai Sanskriti Mancha (SSM), the fair aims to raise funds for its cultural training institution, which imparts lessons in traditional dance, music and songs to children.

The mela, a regular attraction in Diphu that started on December 7 will continue till 31.

SSM president Sashikala Hansapi formally inaugurated the 24-day event on Sunday in the

Motorcyclist killed in road mishap

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 8: A young motorcyclist was killed on the spot in a tragic road accident on the Bishnupur-Bishpani road in Bijni under Chirang district.

The deceased has been identified as Kalicharan Sutradhar, aged 25, a resident of Shilikhaguri village in Bijni.

The accident occurred when the rider of a Yamaha FZS bearing registration number AS 19 T-4568 was travelling from Bishnupur market towards Ulubari.

He reportedly lost control of the motorcycle, leading to a fatal crash.

Police personnel from Panbari Police Station arrived at the site soon after the incident and conducted an assessment of the situation.

Cong approaches CBI for probe into 'irregularities' at Tezpur University

TEZPUR, Dec 8: The Congress Legislature Party in Assam on Monday filed a complaint with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for initiating a probe against Tezpur University Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh for his alleged corruption and other forms of irregularities.

The opposition party's student wing NSUI has also lodged a police complaint in Hailakandi district against Singh, who has been absent from the central university since September 22 after a student-led agitation was initiated against him.

The varsity in Sonitpur district of Assam has been under a complete shutdown since November 29, as a joint forum of all stakeholders has demanded removal of the VC and start of an enquiry against his actions.

"I write this letter in the interest of transparency, public accountability and protection of public funds, with a request that the Anti-Corruption Bureau/CBI conduct an independent enquiry into multiple allegations of financial, administrative and statutory irregularities that have arisen at Tezpur University over the past several years," the Congress said in its letter to CBI's Guwahati head.

These concerns have been widely circulated in public forums, raised formally by students, faculty bodies and staff associations, and some have also emerged through official institutional mechanisms such as replies to Right to Information applications, said the letter signed by Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia and MLAs Nurul Huda and Sibamoni Bora.

"Initiate a thorough, time-bound, impartial inquiry into the alleged financial and administrative irregularities at Tezpur University. Examine procurement records, tender documents, and financial transactions from the past several years," the opposition party urged the CBI.

The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) also requested the central probe agency to verify the RTI-related claim that crucial documents pertaining to the VC's appointment and qualifications are 'not available in the office'.

"Ensure accountability and transparency in accordance with the laws governing public institutions. Given the scale of public funds involved and the importance



of Tezpur University for the region, an independent investigation is essential to restore institutional credibility," it added.

The Congress stressed that the "irregularities" being committed at Tezpur University can be probed under various sections of the law such as undue advantage without consideration, criminal misconduct, habitual offender and organised crime among others.

Meanwhile, the district unit of National Students' Union of India (NSUI) filed a complaint at Hailakandi Police Station alleging criminal breach of trust, cheating, criminal conspiracy and money laundering, among others, against the VC.

"He (Singh) has indulged in systematic, large-scale corruption, misappropriation of public funds running into several crores of rupees, criminal breach of trust of money entrusted to him as a public servant, cheating students by collecting various fees without providing corresponding services, and criminal misconduct by abusing his official position for pecuniary advantage," it claimed.

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

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

The protesters have said that the University will remain closed until a formal communication from the Centre is received regarding removal of the VC.

The picturesque campus witnessed high voltage drama from

Saturday afternoon till wee hours on Sunday, when a top delegation from the Union Ministry of Education, led by Secretary Vineet Joshi, could not leave the premises till around midnight and was stuck inside their vehicles for more than three hours.

The high-level team was allowed to leave post midnight following a hand-written assurance in a blank paper by Department of Higher Education's Joint Secretary Saumya Gupta, who was a part of the delegation.

Students, teachers and non-teaching staff, under the aegis of a joint platform Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF), have been protesting against the beleaguered VC Singh against his alleged corruption and other forms of irregularities, and demanded his removal along with an enquiry against his actions.

The TUUF expressed disappointment that even after 80 consecutive days of peaceful protest, no concrete resolution or actionable assurance had been provided to remove the VC.

All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and the Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their full support to the agitation.

The VC abstained from the campus after the university had witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words between him and students on September 22, leading to a situation where Singh had to nearly flee from the spot.

In a dramatic turn of events at the varsity, the senior-most faculty member, Bhattacharyya, had assumed charge as acting Vice-Chancellor suo-motu on Friday, citing the Tezpur University Act, 1993. (PTI)

State govt to hand over 992 acres to AAI for Silchar greenfield airport

Cabinet approves second Sainik School at Longvaku in Karbi Anglong

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: The Assam government decided to hand over 3,000 bighas (nearly 992 acres) of land at Doloo Tea Estate in Cachar district to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the construction of a greenfield airport.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Sarma said the panel approved an increase of 500 bighas from the earlier decision to allocate 2,500 bighas (826.45 acres) for the proposed airport near Silchar.

"The cabinet approved the transfer of 3,000 bighas at Doloo Tea Estate in Silchar to the AAI for the construction of a greenfield airport," Sarma said, adding that the decision will pave the way for obtaining the Union Cabinet's nod for the project.

The state government had proposed a new airport in Silchar spread over 2,500 bighas as the existing facility at Kumbhirgram is a defence airport and expansion of the facility to accommodate the increasing demands of air traffic

is not possible.

In November 2022, the Assam government had distributed financial assistance to 1,296 families living at Doloo Tea Estate "as a goodwill gesture".

Earlier that year, a controversy had arisen over the state government's efforts to acquire land for setting a greenfield airport with the then Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia claiming that no such proposal was received for the facility from the BJP-led state.

It was later clarified that the land was being acquired at AAI's request.

Because of the confusion, land acquisition at the tea estate for the airport had led to protests by the garden workers, but the government assured that no worker would be evicted from their homes and there would be no job loss.

The state government had previously announced a compensation of ₹ 50 crore for the acquisition of land at Doloo, Lablagh, and Mainagarh tea gardens for setting up the green-

field airport.

In June this year, Sarma had said a public hearing was completed at Doloo Tea Estate. The workers, under the aegis of Asom Mojuri Shramik Union (AMSU), expressed unhappiness and demanded the government to return the acquired land or allot the same amount of land at a different place for growing tea.

Talking about other cabinet decisions, the CM said the government has approved allotment of land to 1,200 families under flagship scheme Mission Basundhara.

The cabinet also approved a joint project to be set up at state-run Assam Engineering College and Dassault Systems India Pvt Ltd.

"The project, to be established over 5,000 sq ft at a cost of ₹ 243 crore, will offer courses related to aerospace and defence, automotive and electric vehicles," Sarma said.

Of the total cost, the Assam government will contribute Rs 43 crore, while Dassault Systems will invest ₹ 200 crore, he added. Sarma further said the cabinet

granted administrative approval for the construction of Assam's second Sainik School at Longvaku in Karbi Anglong district.

"The school will be built at a cost of ₹ 335 crore, of which 80 per cent will be borne by the Ministry of Defence and the remaining 20 per cent by the Assam government," he added.

Besides, the cabinet approved compensation to 884 families for land acquired during the construction of the four-lane National Highway in Dima Hasao district.

Sarma said the cabinet approved the Assam Logistics and Warehousing Policy, 2025, which aims to transform Assam into a major logistics hub.

"The cabinet approved the inclusion of Assam's history and geography as compulsory subjects in classes 6, 7 and 8. This decision was taken on the basis of recommendations made by the high-level committee headed by retired Justice Biplab Kumar Sharma, constituted for the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord," he added. (PTI)

Awareness drive held on scientific maize and vegetable cultivation in Morigaon

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Dec 8: The Morigaon District Administration, in collaboration with the Morigaon District Agriculture Office, on Monday organised an awareness programme at Pavakati village under the Rajamangong ADO circle, aimed at promoting scientific cultivation of maize and rabi vegetables.

The session began with a detailed discussion on scientific maize production, covering agronomic practices, yield potential, market linkages and the benefits of adopting improved varieties and recommended input regimes.

Farmers were briefed on the essential steps required at each stage of the maize cultivation cycle to achieve optimal yield, while also being reminded of the crop's growing importance as both a staple and a cash crop in the region.

The programme then shifted its focus to rabi vegetable cultivation, highlighting the economic advantages of high-value vegetables and exploring available market channels and opportunities for value addition.

Experts also stressed the precautions needed during the growing season, with particular emphasis on the judicious use of pesticides to ensure crop health and consumer safety.

All technical sessions were conducted by Sub-Divisional Agricultural Officer Mehdi Arif Hussain of the DAO Morigaon.

NFR observes 70th Mahaparinarwan Divas



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) on Monday solemnly observed the 70th Mahaparinarwan Divas of Bharat Ratna Dr B R Ambedkar, paying homage to the chief architect of the Indian Constitution.

The main programme was held at the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Sabha Griha at NFR Headquarters, Maligaon, where officers and staff assembled to honour Dr Ambedkar's life and legacy.

The additional general manager of NFR offered floral tributes on the occasion.

A parallel observance was organised by the NFR Construction Organisation at the Concourse Hall of the newly constructed General Manager (Construction) Office Building in Maligaon.

The event featured floral tributes, readings on Dr Ambedkar's contributions and reflections on his efforts toward social justice, equality and empowerment of marginalised communities.

Speakers highlighted Dr Ambedkar's multifaceted legacy as a jurist, economist, social reformer and a visionary leader whose ideas remain crucial to shaping an inclusive and progressive society.

The Northeast Frontier Railway reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the values championed by Dr Ambedkar, urging employees to draw inspiration from his life and principles.



presence of Ananda Mela manager Topon Saha, SSM cultural secretary Namita Devi, assistant secretary Ram Chetia, finance secretary Raju Nath and adviser Robin

Chandra Bezburuah.

In her address, Hansapi said SSM works toward preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of various ethnic tribes and provides

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I've never dropped anyone I believed in.
- Marilyn Monroe

Escalating AI rivalry

A global competition is reshaping technology, geopolitics, and the world economy as Washington and Beijing race to dominate artificial intelligence—with no guarantee of success. In the spring of 2024, executives at a prominent Chinese artificial intelligence company found themselves fielding an extraordinary barrage of phone calls. Ten different government agencies contacted them in a single month, each delivering the same urgent message: China needed homegrown AI models, and it needed them now. The pressure campaign reflected a deeper anxiety gripping Beijing. While OpenAI and Google were racing ahead with generative AI breakthroughs, Chinese firms remained so far behind that many relied on Meta's free, open-source models. American export restrictions on advanced chips threatened to widen the gap even further, raising fears in China's leadership that the nation risked falling permanently behind in the century's most consequential technology race. Nine months later, a little-known Chinese startup called DeepSeek released a problem-solving model that rivalled OpenAI's top offering at a fraction of the cost. The breakthrough electrified China's tech sector and sent shockwaves through Silicon Valley, crystallizing what many observers now describe in Cold War terms: a winner-take-all contest between superpowers that will reshape industry, society, and global power dynamics.

The escalating rivalry evokes comparisons to Cold War-era technological battles, particularly the lesser-known but consequential race to build defense computers that ultimately produced innovations rippling through the global economy. But AI's potential makes even that contest seem modest. If artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence and acquires the ability to improve itself, experts say, it could confer decisive scientific, economic, and military advantages on whichever nation controls it. Short of that sci-fi scenario, AI's capacity to process vast data and automate complex tasks promises to revolutionize everything from cancer diagnosis to missile defense. The competition has already fuelled a worldwide surge in tech spending that has lifted stock markets in both nations and unlocked new sources of economic growth. American investors poured \$104 billion into AI startups in the first half of 2025 alone. Major Chinese tech companies are projected to spend \$361 billion on AI through 2027, according to Bernstein analysts.

The competition has already fuelled a worldwide surge in tech spending that has lifted stock markets in both nations and unlocked new sources of economic growth. American investors poured \$104 billion into AI startups in the first half of 2025 alone. Major Chinese tech companies are projected to spend \$361 billion on AI through 2027, according to Bernstein analysts. The intensity of the race is pushing leaders to sideline concerns about AI dangers, including disinformation and the theoretical risk of superintelligent systems misaligned with human values. "The AI future is not going to be won by hand-wringing about safety," Vice President JD Vance declared in a February speech in Paris. The United States maintains a clear lead in producing the most powerful AI models. It dominates advanced chip manufacturing and enjoys unmatched financial firepower from private investors. But China possesses a massive pool of capable engineers, lower costs, and a state-directed development model that often moves faster than American market-driven approaches.

Both sides are driven as much by fear as ambition. Washington warns that Chinese "authoritarian AI" threatens American tech supremacy. Beijing believes falling behind in AI will enable the United States to curtail China's return as a global power. Both see market share across the developing world as up for grabs—and with it, influence over large swaths of the global population.

SEMICONDUCTOR PROJECT: A new awakening of industrialisation in Assam

In the industrial and economic sphere of Assam, the recently initiated semiconductor project has generated a profound need for discussion regarding its potential and far-reaching impact. For this long-neglected land of the North-East, submerged for decades in the darkness of industrial stagnation, the arrival of such a massive high-technology investment is not merely an economic event; it is the harbinger of a social transformation as well. A glance through the pages of history reveals that Assam's economy has always been nature-dependent. The industrial foundation built on tea leaves, petroleum, and forest resources lacked the strength to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century. Because it could not keep pace with the rapid changes in the global market and the latest technological discoveries, our state gradually fell behind. Yet the semiconductor assembly and testing centre that the Tata Group is going to establish in Jairoad is breaking that inertia and propelling us toward a new momentum. Through this project, there is hope that Assam will secure a respectable place on the world's technology map.

Semiconductors are the driving force of today's modern civilization. From the mobile phone in our hands to the rockets ready to soar into space, these tiny chips are the heart of every electronic device. Until now, India has been entirely dependent on countries like China, Taiwan, and South Korea for this technology. That dependence had created a threat to both the nation's economy and its security. Now, the production of that very technology on our own soil, on the land of Assam, feels like a dream turning into reality. The site in Jairoad that once echoed with the smoke of paper mills and provided livelihood to thousands of workers had fallen silent under the weight of time. After passing through an accursed period filled with the tears and despair of workers, the fact that the world's most expensive and sophisticated technology centre is now rising on that very spot proves that time changes and the arrival of light after darkness is certain. This project is not only reviving a single region; it is rekindling the nearly extinguished self-confidence of all Assamese people.

An examination of the economic aspects of this colossal undertaking reveals effects that are multifaceted and far-reaching. An investment of 27,000 crore rupees is an unimaginable phenomenon for a state like Assam. This money will bring a massive tide into the state's economy. During the construction phase, thousands of local workers, engineers, and contractors will find employment. Local businesses will benefit from the supply of materials such as cement, rods, and sand. Once the plant becomes fully operational, thousands will be directly employed. Even more important is the indirect employment. Around a large industry, numerous ancillary industries spring up. Thousands of jobs will be created in areas such as machine repair, packaging, transportation, security, cleaning, and catering services. When money reaches the hands of these people,

purchasing power in the market will increase, energising the entire economic cycle.

This project can play a decisive role in solving Assam's unemployment problem. For a long time, even after acquiring higher education, our talented youth have been forced to migrate to other states because suitable opportunities were unavailable here. Assamese boys and girls have been demonstrating their skills in cities like Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, and Delhi, working in industries built by others. Now the opportunity has arrived to utilise that talent and skill within our own state. The project will require engineers, science graduates, and technologists of the highest standard. Along with this, a radical change in the state's education system has become necessary. Our universities and technical institutions will have to revise their curricula according to industry needs. The steps already taken by the Tata Group, in collaboration with the government, to establish skill-development centres in various ITIs and polytechnics are highly commendable. As a result, our future generations will not remain confined to bookish knowledge alone but will become practically skilled. This transformation will lay the foundation for a knowledge-based economy in Assam.

The semiconductor project is extremely delicate, time-bound, and precise. Working here demands a highly disciplined and professional mindset. This new work culture will gradually spread into our society as well. The lessons in punctuality, dedication to work, and professional conduct that our

youth will learn from this industry will be reflected in other spheres of society. Of course, we must remain vigilant to ensure that our own culture, traditions, and heritage are not lost in the process of this change. Maintaining a beautiful balance between modernity and tradition will be our real challenge. While marching in step with the world, we must never forget our roots. The geographical location of this project and its political significance are also extremely important. Assam's position as the gateway to South-East Asia had remained confined to words alone for so long. Yet this project has proved that the Government of India's "Act East" policy is not merely a slogan. Among the weapons India possesses to challenge China's dominance in technology, this Assam project is one of the foremost. Until now, the North-East was regarded as a region isolated from the mainland and plagued by problems. Now this region has become a focal point of the country's technological security. Consequently, Assam's importance and respect in the eyes of the central government will increase. Assam's position in national politics will strengthen, and the path to further investment and development will open.

The issue of environment and sustainable development is an inseparable part of this discussion. The world-famous Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is located near Jairoad. It is natural to have some concerns about establishing a large industry close to such a sensitive ecosystem. However, unlike tradi-

tional industries, the semiconductor industry is not polluting. It is a clean and green technology. Nevertheless, proper management of the water and chemicals used is absolutely essential. We can expect a globally leading organisation like the Tata Group to adhere to international standards of environmental protection. In today's era, the emphasis is on harmony rather than conflict between industry and environment. By adopting green energy, water recycling, and state-of-the-art waste disposal methods, it is possible to shape this project into an environment-friendly industry. True progress lies in moving forward on the path of development while keeping Assam's natural beauty intact.

The success of this industry will attract other investors to Assam. Experience shows that once a successful large industry is established in a region, other companies gain the courage to come there. Investors who until now were afraid to come to Assam will now develop confidence. They will realise that the necessary environment, government support, and human resources for industry are available in Assam. Thus, a single project can change the entire industrial climate of the state. As a result, investment will increase in other sectors such as tourism, healthcare, education, and information technology. The impact will be immediately visible in the hospitality sector in particular. High-quality hotels and restaurants will be needed for officers and businesspeople coming from across the country and abroad, giving a new dimension to the tourism industry. The possibility of transforming our rural economy is also linked to this project. Though the industry appears city-centric, its influence will extend to village fields. As an industrial city emerges, thousands of residents will require food items, vegetables, fish, and meat. Local farmers will find a guaranteed and large market for their produce. A relationship between agriculture and industry will be forged. Farmers will be encouraged to adopt modern methods, and their income will rise. Thus, the gap between rural and urban economies will narrow, making balanced development possible.

Generally, heavy industries are dominated by men, but globally the demand for women workers is considerably higher in semiconductor and electronics industries. The patience, concentration, and dexterity of fingers required for this work are natural qualities of women. Therefore, a large number of women are likely to find employment in this project. When a woman becomes economically independent, its positive effect spreads across her entire family. The money earned by women is properly utilised for education, health, and family welfare. This will reduce gender inequality in Assamese society and usher in a new awakening of women's power. By working in this Jairoad industry, our sisters will not only support their families but also contribute to the state's economy. However, we must remain conscious so that amidst this vast transformation we do not lose our fundamental identity. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation sometimes mechanise people and harm human values. Joint families break into nuclear ones, neighbourhood relations weaken,

and an unspoken competition emerges in society. Our senior citizens, litterateurs, and thinkers must play the role of guides so that these negative aspects do not take root in our society. We need development, but not at the cost of values. We want to build a society where there is a laptop in the hand but devotion of the namghar and the joy of Bihu in the heart. Only the harmonious blend of modern technology and eternal Assamese values can give us a unique identity on the world stage.

In keeping with this major industry, research centres will certainly emerge in the future. The government has already announced funding for semiconductor research. Students of our local colleges and universities will benefit from this. They will be inspired to invent new ideas and technologies. Perhaps one day a boy or girl from a small village in Assam will invent a technology that leading global companies will use. The spread of scientific temperament will also help remove superstition and blind beliefs from society. Only a rational and science-minded new generation can lead Assam toward true modernity. Moreover, an extremely swift and efficient transportation system is required to bring raw materials for the semiconductor industry and to send finished products to the world market. This makes the development of roads, airports, and river ports in the state inevitable. Expansion of Borjhar airport and upgradation of highways connecting Morigaon have already begun. The time has come to realise the potential of using the Brahmaputra river as a waterway for goods transportation. This improved connectivity will not only benefit this industry but will also give new momentum to agriculture, tourism, and general travel across the state. A village farmer will be able to bring his produce to market at lower cost and in less time. Patients from remote areas will easily reach cities for better treatment. In other words, the needs of one industry will modernise the entire communication system of the state.

In conclusion, it can be said that the semiconductor project in Jairoad is both a test and an opportunity for Assam. If we can utilise this opportunity properly, Assam will be able to erase forever the label of an economically backward state. For this, we need far-sighted leadership, efficient administration, and an alert civil society. We hope this project will be completed on schedule and its benefits will reach every home in Assam. So that once again the song of progress can be sung on the banks of the Luit—the entire Assamese populace awaits that moment. This emerging semiconductor project is the symbol of Assam's renaissance. It is a beacon of hope for our future generations. Only by discarding negative thinking and moving forward with a constructive mindset can we make proper use of this golden opportunity. A new light is dawning in Assam's sky. May this light dispel the darkness of poverty, superstition, and despair from our society and help build a prosperous and progressive Assam—that is our prayer. Let "Made in Assam" shine in the world of technology, and may the head of every Assamese be held high with pride.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Russia-India Summit: 70 Billion and Counting

By: Satvabrat Borah

In the crisp winter air of early December 2025, as the sun dipped low over New Delhi's bustling streets, Russian President Vladimir Putin's aircraft touched down at Palam Air Force Station on the evening of December 4. It was a moment laden with symbolism, one that transcended the formalities of statecraft to evoke the deep-seated camaraderie between two nations forged in the fires of history. Waiting on the tarmac, defying diplomatic protocol, was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, his presence a rare and deliberate gesture of warmth. The two leaders embraced briefly, their smiles captured in a flurry of camera flashes, before stepping into a chauffeured car bound for Modi's residence. There, over a private dinner of spiced lamb biryani and delicate samosas, they reminisced about past summits and charted the course for a partnership that has weathered sanctions, wars, and shifting global tides. This was no ordinary visit; it was the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, marking 25 years since the declaration of their Strategic Partnership in 2000, and it unfolded against a backdrop of geopolitical turbulence that made every handshake, every agreement, a statement to the world.

Putin's arrival came at a pivotal juncture. For Russia, isolated by Western sanctions following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, India represented more than an ally; it was a lifeline. Moscow's economy, battered by export bans and frozen assets, had found solace in New Delhi's voracious appetite for discounted oil and unwavering support in multilateral forums like the UN and BRICS. Bilateral trade had surged from a modest 8 billion dollars in 2020 to nearly 70 billion by mid-2025, driven largely by energy imports that accounted for over 40 percent of India's crude needs. Putin, traveling with

a high-powered delegation including energy ministers, defense officials, and business tycoons, sought to solidify these gains and diversify beyond hydrocarbons. For India, the visit was a bold assertion of strategic autonomy. With US President Donald Trump's re-election ushering in threats of 25 percent tariffs on Indian goods and secondary sanctions under the CAATSA framework for purchasing Russian arms, Modi's government faced mounting pressure from Washington to distance itself from Moscow. Yet, as Modi had often reiterated, India was not neutral in global conflicts; it stood firmly on the side of peace, dialogue, and mutual benefit. The summit, spanning December 5, would test that resolve, yielding outcomes that rippled far beyond the subcontinent.

The following morning dawned with pageantry at Rashtrapati Bhavan, India's presidential palace, where President Droupadi Murmu extended a ceremonial welcome to Putin. A tri-services guard of honor stood at attention as a 21-gun salute echoed across the manicured lawns, the national anthems of both countries blending in harmonious resonance. Putin, dressed in a sharp navy suit, inspected the troops with measured poise, his expression betraying a quiet satisfaction. From there, the itinerary unfolded with ritualistic precision: a wreath-laying at Raj Ghat, Mahatma Gandhi's memorial, where Putin paused in silent tribute to the apostle of non-violence, a poignant nod to the shared philosophical undercurrents that have long underpinned Indo-Russian ties. Gandhi's legacy of peaceful resistance resonated deeply in a world torn by conflict, and the gesture underscored India's subtle messaging on the Ukraine crisis, where it advocated for negotiated settlements over escalation.

The heart of the visit pulsed in the opulent halls of Hyderabad House, the colonial-era mansion

turned diplomatic enclave, where Modi and Putin held restricted bilateral talks followed by an expanded delegation-level meeting. Flanked by advisors, the leaders delved into an agenda as vast as the Eurasian landmass they straddled. Defense cooperation, the bedrock of their alliance, took center stage. Russia has supplied over 60 percent of India's military hardware for decades, from the Sukhoi fighter jets patrolling Himalayan skies to the BrahMos supersonic missiles deployed along the Line of Actual Control with China. Discussions centered on accelerating deliveries of the S-400 air defense systems, whose first regiment had already bolstered India's aerial shields. Whispers of advanced S-500 systems, capable of intercepting hypersonic threats and even low-orbit satellites, circulated in media briefings, though officials downplayed any anti-satellite ambitions. More concretely, they inked the renewal of the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support pact, or RELOS, granting mutual access to military bases for refueling and repairs. This marked the first such arrangement with a non-Western power, allowing Indian naval vessels to dock at Vladivostok and Russian aircraft to utilize Andaman and Nicobar facilities, enhancing interoperability in the Indo-Pacific.

Energy security emerged as another pillar, with Putin vowing uninterrupted supplies of crude oil and liquefied natural gas, defying US tariffs that had slashed India's imports by 38 percent in recent months. "Russia stands ready to ensure stability for our Indian friends," Putin declared in a joint press briefing, his words a direct riposte to Trump's August 2025 executive order imposing punitive duties on nations buying Russian petroleum. Modi, ever the pragmatist, responded with measured optimism, noting that bilateral energy ties had saved Indian consumers billions while stabilizing global markets. Agreements were signed for



long-term contracts with non-sanctioned Russian firms like Rosneft and Lukoil, alongside explorations into nuclear collaboration. The Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu, a flagship Indo-Russian venture, would expand with six additional reactors, promising clean energy to fuel India's burgeoning industrial heartland. These pacts extended to critical minerals, with India eyeing Russian deposits of lithium and rare earths essential for its electric vehicle ambitions. Trade diversification dominated the economic discourse, as both sides aimed to shatter the oil monopoly that skewed their ledger. The target of 100 billion dollars in annual trade by 2030, once aspirational, now seemed within grasp. Negotiations launched for a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union, encompassing Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, promising Indian exports of pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, and agricultural produce a foothold in Central Asia. To bypass Western financial chokepoints, they expanded rupee-ruble settlement mechanisms, reducing reliance on the US dollar. A novel initiative saw the launch of a Russian mutual fund indexed to India's Nifty 50, inviting Muscovite investors into Mumbai's stock exchange. Cultural and people-to-people exchanges added a softer layer: a 30-day free tourist visa for Russians to explore the Taj Mahal

and Kerala backwaters, and a labor mobility pact channeling skilled Indian workers into Russia's IT and manufacturing sectors, addressing Moscow's acute manpower shortages post-mobilization. Yet, beneath the ink of agreements lay the shadow of global fault lines. The Ukraine war loomed large, with Modi reiterating India's call for an immediate ceasefire and inclusive peace talks, echoing his interventions at the G20 and SCO summits. Putin, in turn, appreciated New Delhi's refusal to join Western condemnations, framing the conflict as a "defensive operation" against NATO expansion. Their joint statement condemned terrorism without ambiguity, referencing the Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow and the Pahal-gam assault in Kashmir, pledging zero tolerance for cross-border financing and radicalization. This was code for solidarity against shared threats, with an unspoken barb at Pakistan's alleged support for militants. On China, the elephant in the room, the leaders affirmed cooperation in the Arctic and Far East, subtly countering Beijing's dominance in Russia's eastern flank. India's border standoffs with China since 2020 had only deepened its reliance on Russian arms, and Putin's visit signaled Moscow's neutrality in that theater, preserving Delhi's leverage.

As evening fell on December 5, the summit culminated in a state banquet at Rashtrapati Bha-

van, where crystal chandeliers illuminated tables groaning under the weight of Kashmiri saffron-infused kebabs and Georgian wines. President Murmu, in a silk sari embroidered with golden threads, proposed a toast to "eternal friendship," while Putin quipped that the Hindi phrase "Saath Chalthe Hue, Saath Badhte Hue" perfectly encapsulated their bond. Gifts exchanged hands with ceremonial flair: Modi presented Putin with an ornate silver tea set from Assam, a marble chessboard inlaid with semi-precious stones, and a Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita, its verses on duty and righteousness a philosophical bridge across cultures. Putin reciprocated with a Fabergé-style egg replica and Siberian amber jewelry, symbols of Russia's imperial artistry.

The outcomes of this two-day sojourn were multifaceted, weaving economic pragmatism with strategic defiance. Over 28 memorandums of understanding were signed, spanning migration, port access, shipping, health standards, and food safety, creating a tapestry of integration that buffered both nations against external shocks. Investment promotion talks accelerated, with directives to finalize a bilateral agreement shielding capital flows from geopolitical whims. In the realm of innovation, collaborations in artificial intelligence, space exploration, and biotechnology promised to propel joint ventures like the Gaganyaan manned mission and Roscosmos-ISRO lunar probes.

Critics, particularly in Western capitals, decried the visit as a setback for global norms. European diplomats whispered of strained Quad dynamics, while US think tanks warned of India's "tilt" toward autocracy. Yet, this narrative overlooked the resilience of Indo-Russian ties, rooted not in ideology but in mutual necessity. For India, with its 1.4 billion mouths to feed and a defense budget swelling to counter regional rivals, Russia's reliability

trumped ideological purity. Putin departed Delhi on December 5, waving from the airstairs as Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar bid farewell, the runway lights stretching into the twilight like a promise unfulfilled.

In the days that followed, the ripples spread. Stock markets in Mumbai and Moscow ticked upward on energy deal announcements, while analysts pored over the fine print for clues to a multipolar future. Social media buzzed with memes of the Modi-Putin embrace juxtaposed against Trump's tariff tweets, capturing the irony of a world where old friendships outlast new animosities. For ordinary Indians, the visit meant steadier fuel prices and job prospects in distant Siberian outposts; for Russians, it was validation that their bear had friends in the Global South. As 2025 drew to a close, Putin's India sojourn stood as a testament to diplomacy's enduring power: not the grand gestures of yesteryear, but the quiet forging of paths through uncertainty.

The true measure of success lay in its subtlety. No dramatic breakthroughs upended alliances, yet the visit recalibrated them. India emerged not as a supplicant to superpowers, but as a fulcrum, balancing East and West with the poise of a yogi. Russia, for its part, gained breathing room to maneuver amid isolation. In an era of fractured globals, where tariffs fly like arrows and sanctions like chains, the Delhi-Moscow axis reminded us that true partnerships are those that endure, adapting like the Ganges to the contours of time. As Putin's plane soared northward, the echoes of their talks lingered in New Delhi's corridors, a blueprint for collaboration in a world remade by choice, not coercion. The outcome was clear: in the grand chessboard of nations, India and Russia had just advanced their pieces, securing not just survival, but sovereignty.

The Illusion of Intelligence in the Age of AI

By: Dipak Kurmi

Artificial intelligence did not transform education through spectacle. There was no single announcement that changed classrooms overnight, no dramatic unveiling that signalled the arrival of a new intellectual era. Instead, AI seeped quietly into the routines of students and teachers, appearing first as late-night helpers that solved stubborn equations, as study apps that explained concepts with more patience than human tutors, and as digital companions that polished essays moments before submission. Over time, these interactions accumulated until AI became a natural part of how students think, work and understand the world. For an entire generation, the boundary between their cognitive processes and the systems assisting them is growing increasingly porous, creating a learning environment unlike anything education has confronted before.

A revealing comment came from a final-year engineering student in Delhi, who said she no longer knows where her own thinking ends and where the AI's suggestion begins. Her reflection was not a confession but an attempt to articulate a new intellectual sensation — a blended cognitive experience in which digital assistance is integrated so deeply that separating one's own reasoning from algorithmic guidance becomes nearly impossible. This sentiment is not isolated; global and Indian data show that AI use in education is expanding at a pace that outstrips institutional adaptation. In the United States, one in four teenagers now uses generative AI for schoolwork, a number that has doubled since 2023. Among adults, more than sixty per cent report using AI several times a week. India's trajectory is even steeper. A national survey found that more than seventy per cent of Indian teachers already rely on AI to design lesson plans, automate administrative tasks or personalise instruction. In universities, over half now formally permit student use of AI tools, and many have begun integrating generative AI into course structures and learning materials, recognising that prohibition is no longer feasible.

The economic momentum behind this shift is equally striking. India's AI-in-education market was valued at around 196 million dollars in



2024 and is expected to cross the 1.1 billion dollar mark by 2030, growing at more than thirty per cent annually. Such growth is a direct reflection of scale: India is home to more than forty million higher-education learners, two hundred and sixty million schoolchildren and over eight and a half million teachers. When a technology touches a population of this magnitude, even quietly, the resulting changes ripple across every classroom, every home and every aspect of the learning ecosystem. Yet numbers only outline the perimeter of change. What is transforming most profoundly is the internal process of learning itself — the mental struggle once assumed to be the central work of education.

For centuries, educational systems operated on a shared assumption: the real labour of learning occurred inside the student. Assignments were merely vehicles for revealing that inner effort. Whether an essay or a problem set, the value lay not in the final product but in the process that produced it — the grappling with uncertainty, the slow wrestling with ideas, the

moments of confusion that eventually crystallised into understanding. This type of thinking was difficult, sometimes frustrating, but it cultivated deep cognitive endurance and intellectual independence. AI disrupts this centuries-old learning structure by producing clean, coherent and remarkably confident answers in an instant. A student does not need to engage in complex reasoning when the machine offers it effortlessly. What once took hours of struggle can now be generated with a single prompt.

Research from leading universities reveals the consequences of this shift. AI-generated essays increasingly match or outperform typical undergraduate writing in coherence, structure and argumentation. Students who use AI to refine their essays often submit more polished work, but when asked to explain the same ideas aloud, their conceptual understanding tends to be noticeably weaker. The surface shines, yet the depth is missing. Students themselves recognise this dissonance. Surveys across India and abroad show growing anxiety about cogni-

tive dependence, with many expressing concern that AI is weakening their ability to think independently. This anxiety is not rooted in laziness but in the psychological temptation of efficiency. When an instant answer appears fluent and authoritative, resisting it becomes difficult, especially under the pressures of academic deadlines.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that AI is not infallible. Large language models continue to produce fabricated information, often referred to as hallucinations, with surprising conviction. Depending on the type of question, error rates can range from a few percentage points to nearly a quarter. Students rarely possess the time or context necessary to verify each detail. When uncertainty is delivered in flawless language, it blends seamlessly into the student's mental schema. In countries like India, where access to trained teachers remains uneven, this vulnerability expands dramatically. UNESCO estimates that hundreds of millions of students worldwide lack regular access to qualified teachers, and India faces a significant shortfall at multiple levels of its education system. In such environments, AI sometimes functions as the primary instructor rather than a supplementary tool.

This dynamic is double-edged. On the one hand, AI can serve as a powerful equaliser, providing personalised explanations in multiple languages, adapting to individual learning speeds and offering support at all hours. For students in remote or under-resourced regions, AI can be the difference between stagnation and opportunity. On the other hand, without a strong conceptual foundation, students struggle to evaluate the accuracy of AI-generated responses. They may absorb incorrect or incomplete explanations that weaken their long-term understanding. This creates a new form of inequality — not of access to technology but of the ability to question it. In elite institutions, students tend to use AI as a creative partner, testing ideas, refining drafts and comparing multiple approaches. In under-resourced settings, students often rely on AI as a substitute for human teaching. The difference lies in epistemic resilience, the cognitive skill of interrogating information rather than accepting it passively.

Universities worldwide are facing the consequences of this transition and struggling to respond. Early attempts to ban AI largely failed because detection tools remain unreliable and risk unfairly penalising honest students. Other institutions embraced AI but failed to redesign assessments to reflect the new reality. Traditional assignments such as essays, take-home tests and problem sets no longer reliably measure reasoning or understanding because they can be generated quickly by machines. International organisations have issued warnings that without urgent assessment reform, countries could experience declines in deep literacy, critical reasoning and independent thinking. These warnings carry particular weight in India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before academia fully adapts.

A central priority must be assessment redesign. To preserve intellectual growth, educators need to shift from testing outputs to evaluating reasoning. Oral examinations, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments that require iterative reflection and reasoning journals can help restore visibility into the cognitive process. Such approaches do not eliminate AI usage, but they make it much harder for AI to replace thinking altogether. They compel students to articulate how they reached an answer rather than merely present one. They also help teachers detect whether conceptual understanding is intact or hollowed out by over-reliance on automation.

The question confronting India and the world is not whether AI will shape education but how learning will evolve when thinking becomes a collaborative process between humans and machines. The future of education must ensure that AI enhances cognition rather than substitutes for it. If designed thoughtfully, AI can strengthen access, support teachers, personalise learning and elevate intellectual ambition. But if allowed to replace the slow and essential struggle of grappling with ideas, it risks eroding the very foundations of thought. The boundary between student reasoning and machine suggestion may be fading, but the responsibility to cultivate independent thinking remains more urgent than ever. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Japan's liberal Democratic Party faces an identity crisis in the new century

By: Kenji Hasegawa

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is easily the most successful political party in the developed capitalist world. While other long-standing parties of government have gone into crisis and decline, from the Italian Christian Democrats to Ireland's Fianna Fáil, the LDP has retained its position at the head of the Japanese state through all the transformations that its society has undergone over the past seven decades.

The LDP was established in November 1955, shortly after the reunification of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) the previous month. One of the senior architects of the conservative merger commented that the new party, with its diverse and conflicting factions, would be lucky to survive ten years. Instead, the LDP went on to become the dominant ruling party throughout the Cold War and beyond.

After retaining its mantle as the ruling party for thirty-eight continuous years, the LDP was ousted from power in 1993 and again in 2009. After both electoral defeats, commentators proclaimed the long-awaited demise of an anachronistic and corrupt party. Such pronouncements proved to be premature.

Thanks to successful adaptations by the LDP itself and the failure of rival parties to capitalize on their own political mandates, the LDP reemerged as dominant as ever. However, recent scandals have led to another decline in LDP support. The party is now a minority force in both houses of parliament after electoral setbacks during the past two years.

The LDP's name is misleading. It is neither particularly "liberal" nor "democratic" in nature, nor is it a typical "party" with a coherent leadership structure. It started as a conservative alliance against socialism and communism, uniting around the Cold War rallying cry of "freedom and democracy."

The LDP was, first and foremost, a pro-big business coalition to stem the rise of the union-backed JSP. However, it avoided defining itself as such and stressed that it would be a "national party" that would promote the welfare of the entire nation, unlike its leftist rivals promoting parochial class interests.

The LDP's emphasis on its "national" position reflected a weakness of the conservative camp at the time of its founding. Its support for Japan's alliance with the United States invited nationalist criticisms over "subordinate independence" that allowed the continued presence of US troops on Japanese land. Throughout the 1950s, the LDP remained vulnerable to such criticisms from the nationalist left.

The LDP's "national" stance also stemmed from the fact that, while big business could provide financial support, it could not deliver votes in the same way as the unions. The LDP sought to expand its support base to encompass all nonunionized Japanese voters.

Despite its emphasis on becoming a broad-based national party, the LDP could not conceal its reactionary agenda during the first five years after

its establishment. The party sought to undo the reforms intended to demilitarize and democratize Japan that had been carried out under US occupation by revising the US-Japan Security Treaty and the postwar constitution.

Kishi Nobusuke, the former class-A war criminal who became prime minister in 1957, led the effort to revise the Security Treaty. However, his initiative unleashed a massive wave of popular protests. The revised treaty was ratified, but Dwight Eisenhower's celebratory visit to Tokyo was cancelled. Kishi had to resign, and the LDP shelved its goal of revising the constitution.

After Kishi's resignation, Ikeda Hayato became prime minister and announced his "income-doubling plan." A former bureaucrat with a reputation for arrogance and politically insensitive remarks, Ikeda remade his public image by adopting a softer fashion style and abstaining from golf and geisha parties. His transformation embodied the LDP's full embrace of its identity as a broad-based national party. The Kishi-Ikeda transition was the

pledging to combat the urban problems that the LDP's rapid economic growth policies had precipitated. His electoral victory was followed by victories by other progressive mayors in other big cities, leading to an era of "progressive local governments."

The LDP leader in charge of its committee on urban policy at this time was Tanaka Kakuei, a self-made politician from a rural background with construction industry roots who was known as the "computerized bulldozer." He responded to Minobe's electoral victory by vowing to build a new LDP that would win over the increasingly important urban voters.

Tanaka stressed that the LDP needed to promote a more balanced developmental model that would simultaneously alleviate urban and rural problems. In 1972, shortly before he became prime minister, he published a best-selling book promoting such a vision. He called for massive investments in rapid railway and highway construction, along with the repositioning of industrial facilities out of cities and into

The first general election under Ikeda took place in November 1960, after Ikeda's pledge to double the national income in ten years succeeded in capturing the national imagination. Unable to oppose the consensual goal of greater affluence, the JSP attempted to counter the LDP by aiming for even higher income levels. It also criticized the LDP's proposal for offering inadequate support measures to protect farmers who would be left behind

first of many shifts whereby the LDP would replace an unpopular prime minister with a fresh face representing change. This chameleon-like ability to change its look and adapt to new circumstances has been a key factor behind the LDP's longevity as the dominant ruling party.

The first general election under Ikeda took place in November 1960, after Ikeda's pledge to double the national income in ten years succeeded in capturing the national imagination. Unable to oppose the consensual goal of greater affluence, the JSP attempted to counter the LDP by aiming for even higher income levels. It also criticized the LDP's proposal for offering inadequate support measures to protect farmers who would be left behind.

Rapid economic growth enabled LDP dominance. It also set in motion social changes that would undermine it. The LDP's share of votes in general elections continually declined and dipped below 50 per cent for the first time in 1967.

A major factor behind this trend was the rapid shift from primary to secondary and tertiary industries, and the attendant demographic shift into cities. While the radicalized JSP largely failed to capitalize on this, a new party, Kōmeitō, won twenty-five seats with more than 5 per cent of the vote in the 1967 election. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) received almost as many votes as Kōmeitō, although it only won five seats.

The most notable progressive victories were on the regional level. In April 1967, Minobe Ryōkichi won the Tokyo gubernatorial election with the support of the JSP and JCP. Minobe succeeded in becoming a progressive champion,

rural areas.

Drawing from the progressive policies that were being implemented by municipal governments, Tanaka's book also advocated stronger regulation to combat pollution. Reactive adoption of progressive policies was an LDP pattern during the latter part of the period of rapid economic growth and after it ended. Examples ranged from the Satō administration's antipollution legislation to the Tanaka administration's progressive pension reform and provision of free medical care for the elderly. The LDP's ability to accommodate and co-opt progressive demands was another key aspect of its ability to maintain its hold on power as a national party.

The LDP sought to become more like its progressive adversaries not only in terms of the policies it adopted, but also in the way it structured itself as a party organization. The loose, ad hoc manner in which the LDP coordinated between its disparate factions had been a concern for party leaders since the time of its founding. With electoral support trending ever downward, the party leadership once again considered how it could effectively reorganize itself to become a real party with a coherent leadership structure.

LDP leaders saw the multiple-seat constituency system as a major cause of the deep-rooted factional divisions that plagued the party. In a system where fellow LDP politicians had to compete against each other in parliamentary districts, the party headquarters had a diminished role, and LDP candidates needed to rely on its factions for support.

When the LDP attempted to pass legislation that would establish single-seat constituencies in 1956, the JSP pushed



back, denouncing the proposed system as a "conspiracy to revise the constitution and maintain conservative rule." Indeed, the winner-takes-all model was expected to deliver major electoral gains for the LDP, expanding its majority beyond the two-thirds level needed to revise the constitution.

The 1956 attempt at electoral reform ultimately failed in the face of a public outcry at the exposure of gerrymandering tactics. Even business organizations that supported the new system asked the administration to revise its blatantly partisan plan. Minority factions within the LDP also came out in opposition to the reform, which they thought would strengthen central authority in the party and have a silencing effect on dissenting voices.

The DPJ appeared to have emerged as a full-fledged national party that would end LDP dominance. However, its short years in power were marked by a series of failures and crises, some of its own making, others resulting from events beyond its control.

Most notably, the DPJ was unable to effectively respond to the catastrophic nuclear meltdown in Fukushima caused by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. While the LDP response might not have been much better, public disenchantment over a seemingly incompetent DPJ leadership resulted. After Abe Shinzō returned to power in 2012, he frequently invoked the "nightmarish" past of DPJ misrule.

During his first administration, Abe's conservative message to "take back Japan" largely fell flat. In his second administration, he led with his "Abenomics," centered around an aggressive approach to monetary and fiscal policy and pro-growth reforms. With the public generally won over by Abe-

nomics, Abe pushed ahead with his political agenda, passing controversial legislation expanding the ability of Japan's Self-Defense Forces to operate overseas. While Abe's bill triggered protests outside the Diet, his approval ratings remained stable.

Public support for the Abe administration declined in 2017 after a series of corruption scandals. Even so, there was a group of "bedrock conservatives" that continued to support the Abe administration. These conservatives were not the rural groups that had formed the LDP's political support base during the period of rapid economic growth. Rather, they were the right-wing cultural conservatives that the LDP had relied upon to stage its political comeback from its brief years out of power from 2009.

The DPJ opposition, meanwhile, was plagued by divisions over Abe's security law and cooperation with the JCP. It underwent successive splits that left it significantly weakened and has now been rebranded as the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP).

Since Abe stepped down in 2020, there have been two major revelations that damaged support for the LDP. The first concerned the LDP's close ties with the Unification Church, which came to light after Abe was assassinated by a man whose family had been victimized by the church. The LDP refused to conduct a substantive investigation into the issue and pushed ahead with a controversial state funeral for Abe, which led to a decline in support for the administration.

The second was yet another money scandal. In late November 2022, the JCP newspaper Akahata reported on the Abe faction's illegal political fundraising practices. About a year elapsed before the problem developed into a full-blown scandal that received the full attention of the mainstream media. When it did, the public was aghast to learn that the political reforms after the Recruit scandal had done little to root out systemic corruption in the LDP.

The LDP attempted to salvage the situation with another change in leadership. Ishiba Shigeru, an LDP leader

who had been an increasingly isolated figure within the party for his refusal to fall in line with Abe's policies, was chosen to lead it out of its hole. He proved unable to do so, with voters increasingly frustrated by government inaction in the face of surging inflation. Successive electoral defeats in 2024 and 2025 left the LDP as a minority party in both houses.

It was notable that the LDP's most recent electoral defeat was not a victory for the liberal opposition. The CDP struggled, as did the JCP, while two new right-wing populist parties emerged as the biggest winners. The Democratic Party for the People gained support from working-age voters with its specific pledge to "increase net income." The hard-right party Sanseitō surged, increasing its number of seats from two to fifteen, successfully pitching its "Japanese First" message to a swelling group of voters who feel abandoned by an out-of-touch ruling establishment.

Following customary practice, Ishiba announced his resignation after his two electoral defeats — but only after resisting and delaying for over a month. While he could be faulted for his lack of decisiveness, it was clear that Ishiba was not the main culprit for the LDP's declining fortunes. When Abe-faction politicians and other party bosses began pressuring Ishiba to quickly step aside after the upper house election, it appeared to party outsiders that a relatively clean and trustworthy leader was being unfairly blamed.

Poll numbers showed public support for the Ishiba administration rising in the wake of the 2025 election. There were even demonstrators, many of them non-LDP supporters, who gathered outside the Diet to "encourage" Ishiba to not quit. A common sentiment shared by the demonstrators was that a post-Ishiba LDP would veer back to the right to regain the support of the "bedrock conservatives" it had lost under Ishiba. With opposition parties positioned to the right of the LDP gaining momentum, as "foreigners" become the main target for populist agitators, this is no idle concern. (IPA Service)

China positive on Putin's India visit; calls for stronger trilateral cooperation

BELJING, Dec 8: China on Monday reacted positively to Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, framing the three countries as an important part of the Global South and said sound trilateral ties are conducive to regional and global peace and stability, besides their own national interests.

"China, Russia and India are emerging economies and important members of the Global South," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here, reacting for the first time to Putin's high-profile visit to New Delhi last week and his interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Guo said that the three countries maintaining sound relations are not only in line with their own interests but also conducive to regional and global peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Putin's visit was watched here closely, considering Beijing's close and strong ties with Moscow.

Responding to a question about Putin's comments about New Delhi and Beijing ahead of his



visit, Guo said that China stands ready to work with Russia and India to continue promoting the development of bilateral relations.

In an interview ahead of his visit, Putin had said, "India and China are our closest friends - we treasure that relationship deeply."

On India-China relations -- currently on a path of normalisation after the Eastern Ladakh confrontation which resulted in a freeze in ties from 2020 until last year -- Guo said China wants to

promote sustained and strong ties with New Delhi with a long-term perspective.

China stands ready to work with India to view and handle bilateral relations from a strategic height and a long-term perspective, promote sustained, strong and steady development of ties to benefit the two countries and their peoples, and make a due contribution to peace and prosperity in Asia and beyond, he said.

Besides terming New Delhi and

Beijing as close friends of Moscow, Putin, in the interview with an Indian news channel, also expressed confidence that the leaderships of India and China are committed to finding solutions to their issues, and Russia has "no right" to interfere in their bilateral affairs.

Chinese official media highlighted Putin's comments on India-China relations.

The state-run Xinhua news agency carried his remarks refuting US accusations over India's purchases of Russian oil.

For its part, China tops the list of countries purchasing Russian oil and gas, and rejected US calls to halt the imports to penalise Moscow for continuing its war on Ukraine. Putin visited India from December 4-5. This was his first visit to India since 2021.

During his visit, a host of agreements were signed to boost trade and economic ties between the two countries. Both sides also worked out an Economic Cooperation Programme to increase trade volume to USD 100 billion by 2030. (PTT)

India free to buy oil from sources it considers beneficial: Kremlin

MOSCOW, Dec 8: India, a sovereign nation, is free to buy oil from sources it considers beneficial, the Kremlin said on Monday, while expressing confidence that New Delhi will stick to the policy of ensuring its economic interests.

On August 6, the US imposed additional 25 per cent tariffs on India for its purchase of oil and petroleum products from Russia. At the end of August, US tariffs on imports of Indian goods and services were increased to 50 per cent.

"India, being and remaining a sovereign nation, carries out foreign trade operations and purchases energy resources where it is beneficial for itself," the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters in the wake of last Friday's Summit talks between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

Speaking after his talks with Prime Minister Modi, the Russian leader assured that Moscow will remain India's reliable energy supplier.

"And, as far as we understand, our Indian partners will continue this line to ensure their economic interests," Peskov said when asked whether New Delhi will continue purchasing fuel from Moscow.

India became one of the largest buyers of Russian oil after the Ukrainian conflict began in 2022.

According to reports, India is scaling down its share of Russian crude in its oil imports under pressure from the West.

"Moscow has a long experience of evading sanctions, and if India is willing, we will find ways to supply crude," the Kremlin economic aide Maxim Oreshkin said while talking to national broadcaster Channel 1. (PTT)

Second flight of Iranian deportees, carrying 55, has left US, Iran says

TEHRAN, Dec 8: A second flight carrying Iranians deported from the United States has left America, Iranian officials said, as Washington reportedly planned to send hundreds of prisoners back to the Islamic Republic.

The deportations come as tensions remain high between Iran and the US after America bombed Iranian nuclear sites during Tehran's 12-day war with Israel in June.

Activists abroad also have expressed concern about deportees returning to Iran, whose theocracy has been cracking down on intellectuals and executing prisoners at a rate unseen in decades.

A report published Monday by the Mizan news agency, the official mouthpiece of the Iran's judiciary, quoted Iranian Foreign Ministry official Mojtaba Shasti Karimi acknowledging the deportation of 55 Iranians.

"These individuals announced their willingness to return following continuation of anti-immigration and discriminative policy against foreign nationals particularly Iranians by the United States," Karimi reportedly said.

Iranian Foreign Ministry

spokesperson Esmail Baghaei also said Sunday there were plans for 55 Iranians to return to the Islamic Republic. Based on the US claims, "the Iranians were repatriated because of legal reasons and breach of immigration regulations," Baghaei said.

The US government did not immediately acknowledge the deportation flight and it wasn't clear whether the plane had arrived yet in Tehran. The US Department of Homeland Security and State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press early Monday. The deportations represent a collision of a top priority of President Donald Trump -- targeting illegal immigration -- against a decades-long practice by the US of welcoming Iranian dissidents, exiles and others since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In September, Iranian officials acknowledged as many as 400 Iranians could be returned under the Trump administration policy. That month, the first such flight arrived in Tehran.

In the lead up to and after the 1979 revolution, a large number of Iranians fled to the US. (AP)

WHO says 114 people were killed, including 63 children, in last week's drone strikes in Sudan

CAIRO, Dec 8: The head of the World Health Organisation said on Monday that the death toll from drone strikes on a kindergarten and other sites in Sudan's Kordofan state last week is now at 114 people killed, including 63 children.

WHO said there were three separate drone strikes on Kagoli last Thursday. The first targeted the kindergarten, and the subsequent strikes targeted paramedics as they were transporting the survivors to a hospital. The death toll was not immediately clear at the time, in part due to communications outages. Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, the director of the WHO, said on X that the organisation "deplores these senseless attacks on civilians and health facilities, and calls again for an end to the violence, and increased access to humanitarian aid, including health."

The Sudan Doctors' Network and Emergency Lawyers, groups that track violence against civilians in Sudan, blamed the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary, also known as the RSF, for the strikes.

In a statement Saturday, Emergency Lawyers called the attack "a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, including the

Zelensky heads to London for talks with European allies on peace plan, security

LONDON, Dec 8: President Volodymyr Zelensky was meeting the French, German and British leaders in London on Monday as Kyiv's European allies try to strengthen Ukraine's hand in thorny talks on a US-backed plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer was due to gather with Zelensky, President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Friedrich Merz at the British leader's 10 Downing St. residence. Zelensky said late Sunday that his talks with European leaders this week in London and Brussels will focus on security, air defence and long-term funding for Ukraine's war effort. The leaders are working to ensure that any ceasefire is backed by solid security guarantees, both from Europe and the US, to deter Russia from attacking again.

US and Ukrainian negotiators completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's peace proposal.

Zelensky said in a post on Telegram that talks had been "substantive" and that National Security and Defence Council Secretary Rustem Umerov and Chief of the General Staff Andriy Hnatov were travelling back to Europe to brief him.

A major sticking point in the proposal is the suggestion that Ukraine must cede control of its eastern Donbas region to Russia, which illegally occupies most but not all of the territory. Ukraine and its European allies have balked at the idea of handing over land. Starmer said he "won't be putting pressure" on Zelensky to accept a peace settlement.

"The most important thing is to ensure that if there is a cessation of hostilities, and I hope there is, it has to be just and it has to be lasting, which is what we will be focused on this afternoon," he told broadcaster ITV. In an exchange with reporters on Sunday night, US President Donald Trump appeared frustrated with Zelensky, claiming the Ukrainian leader "hasn't yet read the proposal."

"Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelensky's fine with it," Trump said before taking part in the Kennedy Centre Honours in Washington. "His people love it, but he hasn't read it."

Trump has had a hot-and-cold relationship with Zelensky since riding into a second White House term, insisting that the war was a waste of US taxpayers' money. Trump has also repeatedly urged the Ukrainians to cede land to Russia to bring an end to the nearly four-year conflict.

The European talks follow the publication of a new US national security strategy that alarmed European leaders and was welcomed by Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the document, which spells out the administration's core foreign policy interests, was largely in line with Moscow's vision.

Speaking with journalists on Monday, Peskov said



that the Kremlin welcomed the document's focus on developing constructive relations with Russia.

"The nuances that we see in the new concept certainly look appealing to us," he told reporters. "It mentions the need for dialogue and building constructive, friendly relations. This cannot help but appeal to us, and it absolutely corresponds to our vision. We understand that by eliminating the irritants that currently exist in bilateral relations, a prospect may open for us to truly restore our relations and bring them out of the rather deep crisis."

The document released Friday by the White House said the US wants to improve its relationship with Russia after years of Moscow being treated as a global pariah and that ending the war is a core US interest to "reestablish strategic stability with Russia."

The document also says NATO must not be "a perpetually expanding alliance," echoing another complaint of Russia's. It was scathing about the migration and free speech policies of longstanding US allies in Europe, suggesting they face the "prospect of civilizational erasure" due to migration. Starmer's government has declined to comment on the American document, saying it is a matter for the US government.

Aerial attacks continue

Russian forces continued to attack Ukraine on Monday as diplomatic efforts continued.

Russian drones struck a residential high-rise in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Okhryvka overnight, injuring seven people, the head of the regional administration, Oleh Hryhorov, wrote on Telegram. He said that the building suffered extensive damage.

Elsewhere, in the northern city of Chernihiv, a Russian drone injured three people when it exploded outside a residential building, regional head Viacheslav Chaus said. The attack also damaged a kindergarten, domestic gas pipes and cars. Ukraine's Air Force said Monday that Russia fired a total of 149 drones across the country overnight, of which 131 were neutralised and 16 more struck their targets. (AP)

No one would be allowed to test Pak's sovereignty: CDF Munir

ISLAMABAD, Dec 8: Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir on Monday said Pakistan is a peaceful nation but warned that no one would be allowed to test Islamabad's territorial integrity or sovereignty. Addressing the officers of the armed forces following a guard of honour at the GHQ to honour him on being appointed as the country's first CDF, Munir also said that Pakistan's response will be "much more swift and severe" in case of any aggression. India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians. The strikes triggered four days of intense clashes that ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions on May 10.

Munir reiterated that Pakistan is a peace-loving country, but warned that no one will be allowed to threaten the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, or test its resolve. Speaking on Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions, Munir said that a clear message had been given to the Afghan Taliban regime in Kabul. (PTI)



protection of civilians, especially children, and vital civilian infrastructure." The strikes come amid a two-year war between the RSF and the Sudanese military. More than 40,000 people have been killed to date, according to the World Health Organisation, and 12 million displaced. However, aid groups warn that the true death toll is likely far higher.

The battle is now concentrating on the oil-rich Kordofan region, after the RSF took over the last military stronghold, el-Fasher, in Darfur, in western Sudan.

The takeover of el-Fasher by the RSF has been marred by violence. There have been reports of execu-

tions of civilians, rapes and sexual assaults, and other atrocities. Over 100,000 people have fled since the takeover, according to the UN Migration agency.

The UN human rights chief, Volker Turk, warned last week that Kordofan could face new atrocities like those in el-Fasher.

The humanitarian situation in the Kordofan region is worsening as famine is also spreading after more than two years of the devastating war. Famine was declared last month in the capital of South Kordofan, Kadugli. Dilling, also in South Kordofan, has reportedly experienced the same hunger conditions as Kadugli. (AP)

Thailand launches airstrikes along border with Cambodia as tensions reignite

BANGKOK, Dec 8: Thailand launched airstrikes along the disputed border with Cambodia on Monday as both sides accused the other of breaking a ceasefire that halted fighting earlier this year.

Longstanding border disputes erupted into five days of combat in July that killed dozens of soldiers and civilians. US President Donald Trump pushed the Southeast Asian neighbours to sign a truce agreement in October, but tensions have continued to simmer.

The Thai army said that more than 50,000 people have left areas near the border for shelters, while Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said that residents of several villages near the border have been evacuated.

The latest round of clashes has killed at least one Thai soldier and four Cambodian civilians, officials said.

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said in a televised speech that military operations would be carried out as necessary to defend the country and protect public safety.

"Thailand has never wished for violence. I'd like to reiterate that Thailand has never initiated a fight or an invasion, but will never tolerate a violation of its sovereignty," he said.

Fighting followed the exchange of fire on Sunday.

The ceasefire was strained in early November after Thai troops were injured by land mines, leading Thailand to announce



that it would indefinitely suspend implementation of the agreement. Both sides continue to trade accusations over responsibility, even as they are supposed to be cooperating in getting rid of the mines.

Trump said in mid-November that he'd intervened to preserve the ceasefire as tensions simmered between the two countries.

But another brief episode of fighting took place along the border Sunday, after which both sides said the other fired first. The Thai army said Cambodian fire injured two Thai soldiers, and Thai troops retaliated, resulting in an exchange of fire that lasted around 20 minutes. Cambodia said that the Thai side fired first and that its own troops did not re-

taliate. On Monday, Thai army spokesperson Maj. Gen. Winthai Suvaee said the Cambodian troops fired first into Thai territory in multiple areas. He said at least one Thai soldier was killed and about eight other soldiers were wounded, and civilians were being evacuated from the affected areas.

Thailand used aircraft "to strike military targets in several areas to suppress Cambodian supporting fire attacks," he said.

The Thai army said artillery rounds landed near residential areas on the Thai side, but reported no civilian casualties so far. Cambodian Defence Ministry spokesperson Maly Socheata said the Thai military attacked the Cambodian troops first

on Monday, and that Cambodia did not retaliate during the initial attacks.

"Cambodia urges that Thailand immediately stop all hostile activities that threaten peace and stability in the region," she said.

Neth Pheaktra, the Cambodian Minister of Information, said fire from Thai forces killed four Cambodian civilians and injured about nine others.

The prime minister of regional neighbour Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, called for restraint in a statement posted to social media and said that his country is ready to support efforts to avert further fighting.

"Our region cannot afford to see longstanding disputes slip into cycles of confrontation," he wrote.

Centuries of rivalry lie beneath the territorial dispute.

Thailand and Cambodia have a history of enmity going back centuries, when they were warring empires.

Their modern territorial claims stem largely from a 1907 map drawn when Cambodia was under French colonial rule, which Thailand has argued is inaccurate.

The International Court of Justice in 1962 awarded sovereignty to Cambodia over an area that included the 1,000-year-old Preah Vihear temple, which still rankles many Thais.

The ceasefire does not spell out a path to resolve the underlying basis of the dispute, the longstanding differences over where the border should run. (AP)

US defence policy bill stresses broadening engagement with India, including via Quad

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Dec 8: The annual defence policy bill of the US has highlighted broadening America's engagement with India, including through the Quad, to advance the shared objective of a free and open Indo-Pacific region and address the challenge posed by China.

The National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, released by Congressional leaders Sunday, outlines the "sense of Congress on Defence Alliances and Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region".

It states that the Secretary of Defence should continue efforts that strengthen US defence alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region to further the "comparative advantage of the US in strategic competition" with China.

Among other things, these efforts comprise "broadening US engagement with India, including through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to advance the shared objective of a free and open Indo-Pacific region through bilateral and multilateral engagements and participation in military exercises, expanded defence trade, and collaboration on humanitarian aid

and disaster response".

It also includes enabling greater cooperation on maritime security with New Delhi.

The Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprising India, the US, Japan and Australia, was set up in 2017 to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region.

The defence policy bill also states that the Secretary of Defence, in coordination with the Secretary of State, shall establish and maintain a security initiative to strengthen cooperation among the defence industrial bases of the US and allied and partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

This, it said, would strengthen the collective defence industrial base by expanding capability, capacity, and workforce, including enhanced supply chain security, interoperability, and resilience among participating countries.

The two Secretaries shall establish a process to determine which allies and partners of the US (including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, the Philippines, and New Zealand) shall be invited to participate as member countries of the security initiative, it said. (PTI)

Itanagar district magistrate declares today's bandh illegal

'Threat to public order and ongoing elections'

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 8: The Itanagar District Administration has declared the proposed 12-hour bandh on December 9 as illegal and unlawful, issuing a detailed order prohibiting its enforcement.

The bandh had been called by the Indigenous Youth Force of Arunachal (IYFA), the Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organization (APIYO) and the All Naharlagun Youth Organization (ANYO), prompting the district authorities to intervene on grounds of public safety, constitutional rights and the ongoing election process in the capital region.

In an official order issued by District Magistrate Toko Babu, APCS, the administration stated that the bandh call, widely circulated on social media, posed a direct threat to normal life and had the potential to cause severe hardship to common citizens, including daily wage earners, patients and the business community.

The order noted that previous bandh calls in the capital region had resulted in law-and-order disturbances, loss of property, injuries and significant economic damage.

The DM emphasised that such coercive shutdowns violate the fundamental right to livelihood guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The order referred to the Supreme Court's 1997 judgment in CPI(M) vs Bharat Kumar, which held that bandhs called by political parties, groups or organisations are unconstitutional and illegal as they infringe upon the rights of citizens and hinder freedom of movement.

The administration pointed out that coercion, intimidation or forced closure of shops and roads during a bandh directly contravenes established legal principles and the Arunachal Pradesh Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2014, which has been in

effect since January 2015.

A major concern highlighted by the District Magistrate is the ongoing electoral process.

Following the notification issued by the State Election Commission for elections to rural and urban local bodies, the Model Code of Conduct is already in force.

The election process for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation, the Baat-Ganga and the Borum Panchayat is underway, and the administration apprehended that any bandh-related disruption could obstruct the smooth conduct of polls and interfere with democratic procedures.

The order declared the bandh as illegal and directed the three organisations to refrain from enforcing it and to call it off immediately.

It warned that any violation of this directive would be dealt with seriously, and penal action would be taken as per law.

The Superintendent of Police of Itanagar and Naharlagun has been instructed to ensure strict enforcement of the order and prevent any attempt to impose the bandh on the public.

The administration's firm stance reflects growing concern over the recurring impact of bandh culture in the capital region.

Residents have frequently voiced frustration over forced shutdowns, citing recurring disruptions to essential services, education, healthcare and economic activity.

With elections approaching, the authorities appear determined to maintain peace, ensure uninterrupted public movement and safeguard democratic institutions from any disturbance.

The order makes clear that the district administration will not tolerate any coercive or unlawful attempts to enforce the bandh and reaffirms its commitment to upholding the rule of law, protecting citizens' rights and ensuring the smooth conduct of the election process in the Itanagar Capital Region.



District Police Pakke Kessang conducts awareness programme

HT Correspondent

PAKKE KESSANG, Dec 8: In a major initiative aimed at building a safer, better-informed and socially responsible community, the District Police Pakke Kessang on Monday organised a comprehensive awareness programme at Government Higher Secondary School (GHSS) Pakke Kessang.

The programme forms a crucial part of the district police's newly launched Mission Comprehensive Community Outreach Program, designed to address multiple social issues while strengthening police-public cooperation.

The event witnessed the participation of SP Pakke Kessang Tasi Darang, GHSS Pakke Kessang Principal Mapu T. Perme, OC PS Lemmi SI Tage Kapa, SI Pato Gami, Hct Pagge Taluk, school authorities, teachers and police personnel.

Over 150 students from GHSS Pakke Kessang, PVM School, Redeemer School and Calvary School attended the programme, making it one of the most extensive school-level awareness drives in the district in recent times.

The programme opened with the formal launch of the Mission Comprehensive Community Outreach Program.

Addressing the gathering, SP Tasi Darang said the initiative has been conceived to empower communities with essential legal knowledge, promote responsible behaviour among youth, and build a collaborative environment where police and citizens work together to prevent crime and social unrest.

He emphasised that informed citizens, especially students, form the strongest line of defence against emerging challenges such as cybercrime, drug abuse and crimes against children.

A series of detailed awareness sessions followed, delivered through engaging audio-visual content to help students grasp the importance and real-world implications of various legal provisions.

SI Pato Gami presented a comprehensive session on the Information Technology Act, cyber offences, identity theft, phishing and cyberstalking.

He explained how seemingly simple online mistakes — such as weak passwords, careless social media usage or responding to suspicious links — can lead to serious consequences.

Advising students to stay alert online, he stressed the importance of securing personal data and immediately reporting cyber frauds.

SI Tage Kapa conducted an informative session on the NDPS Act, explaining its stringent legal penalties and the far-reaching consequences of drug abuse on individuals, families and society.

He urged the students to remain vigilant, stay away from illicit substances and report suspicious activities that may indicate drug trafficking or addiction within the community.

Hct Pagge Taluk took the stage to speak on road safety and the Motor Vehicles Act.

Through demonstrations and examples, he highlighted common causes of road accidents, significance of traffic signals and safety gear, and the legal

penalties for violations.

He reminded the students that most road accidents involving youths are preventable if basic safety measures and responsible driving behaviours are followed.

In a powerful and insightful address, SP Tasi Darang explained the provisions of the POCSO Act, focusing on its penal sections, the concepts of safe and unsafe touch, and laws designed to protect children and women.

Emphasising the need for early awareness, he said that students must feel empowered to speak up, seek help and recognise risky situations.

He also urged teachers to strictly avoid corporal punishment, as mandated under the JJ Act and the RTE Act, encouraging them instead to adopt compassionate and constructive disciplinary practices.

Principal Mapu T Perme expressed her deep appreciation to the District Police Pakke Kessang for organising such a well-rounded and informative programme. She noted that the initiative would significantly benefit students by equipping them with knowledge that is essential in today's rapidly changing social environment.

The programme concluded with an interactive session where students asked questions and shared their concerns, marking a successful step in strengthening the bond between the police and the community.

The District Police Pakke Kessang reaffirmed its commitment to conducting more such outreach initiatives in the coming months, with an aim to build a safer, law-abiding and informed society.

English novel on WWII-era 'hump operation' released by Arunachal's DIPR



HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Dec 8: The Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) on Monday announced the official release of the English fiction novel Posthumous Nirvana of Tojo's Father, subtitled French Lady, authored by Dr Soyum Potom.

The book has drawn interest for reviving lesser-known chapters of the Second World War, particularly the historic "Hump Operation" and the "Silwell Road" in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre.

The release ceremony was held at the office chamber of the Director of IPR in Naharlagun, where Director Gijum Tali and Deputy Director Denga Bengia formally unveiled the book in the presence of DIPR officials and media representatives.

Welcoming Dr Potom, Director Tali praised the author's dedication to literature despite his demanding profession as a doctor.

He said that Dr Potom's

commitment to writing would inspire the younger generation to pursue creative expression and share their stories.

He also lauded the novel's focus on overlooked historical narratives and encouraged the author to participate in the Arunachal Literary Festival and to play a role in district-level activities of the Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society (APLS), a suggestion he said he would convey to the APLS president.

In his remarks, Dr Potom expressed gratitude to the DIPR for providing a meaningful platform for the release.

He explained that he had woven elements of Galo language and culture into the novel through proverbs, idioms and phrases to give the story a strong regional identity.

He noted that the novel also highlights forgotten figures such as social worker Tamik Dabi, reflecting its deep grounding in local heritage.

Urging readers to engage with the work, he said, "The

story is for all to read."

The novel spans across centuries — beginning with a 170-year-old letter written by a French anthropologist during his visit to the Siang frontier in 1855, moving through the 1940s and into contemporary Arunachal Pradesh.

Blending humour, mysticism, adventure and wisdom, it offers a layered narrative that connects historical events with local culture.

Dr Soyum Potom, the sixth child of the late Biso Potom and Miksen Bogo Potom, serves in the state health service.

He grew up in the remote Darak Circle of West Siang district, where he developed a deep appreciation for traditional culture amid changing times — an experience that shaped this debut work.

Posthumous Nirvana of Tojo's Father is now available worldwide on major online platforms. The author can be contacted at soyumpotom72@gmail.com.

Anti-drugs awareness programme

HT Correspondent

JENGGING, Dec 8: In an effort to curb rising drug abuse, the Upper Siang District Police, PS Jengging, organised an Anti-Drugs Awareness Programme at Government Higher Secondary School, Jengging.

More than 150 participants attended the event, including members of the APWWS Jengging Unit, teachers and students from GHSS Jengging and Royal Siang School.

SI Kipa Robin, who served as the resource person, delivered an audio-visual presentation detailing the harmful effects of drug abuse.

He emphasised the importance of collective responsibility in building a drug-free society and urged the youth to stay away from substance abuse for a healthier and safer future.

The programme aimed to strengthen community awareness and reinforce preventive measures against drug-related issues in the district.

11 Para SF becomes first team to summit Mount Kangto; Governor hails historic feat

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 8: In a landmark achievement for Arunachal Pradesh and the Indian Army, an 11 Para Special Forces team under the aegis of 4 Corps has become the first mountaineering team to successfully reach the summit of Mount Kangto, the highest peak in the state. Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd), congratulated the expedition team during an interaction at Lok Bhavan on Monday.

He praised the climbers for their unwavering determination and pioneering spirit, noting that the team had not only conquered the formidable peak but also mapped a route that future expeditions can follow. He described the accomplishment as a proud moment for both the Indian Army and Arunachal Pradesh. The Governor said the success of the Mount Kangto expedition opens new possibilities for the state. He observed that Arunachal Pradesh could now consider opening select mountaineering routes to international

climbers as part of broader tourism promotion initiatives.

Such a move, he said, would significantly boost adventure tourism, strengthen the local economy and generate new livelihood opportunities for the youth. The expedition's triumph was marked on 26 November 2025, when the Tricolour was unfurled atop Mount Kangto for the first time.

The Governor said this moment will remain etched in the collective memory of the state, standing as a testament to the team's courage, professionalism and resilience. The 18-member contingent undertook the mission during peak winter conditions, negotiating treacherous ice walls, deep crevasses, sub-zero blizzards and the tactical sensitivities of operating along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Over weeks of ascent, they established multiple high-altitude camps, fixed ropes and traversed unforgiving terrain.

APSCS&T marks strong presence at India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025 in Chandigarh



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 9: The Arunachal Pradesh State Council for Science & Technology (APSCS&T) made a significant and impactful participation at the India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025, one of the country's largest science outreach events, held from December 6 to 9 at Chandigarh.

This year's IISF, themed around Science-Technology-Defence-Space, brought together scientists, innovators, technologists, policymakers, research institutions and thousands of students from across India, offering a dynamic platform to showcase achievements and exchange ideas.

Representing the state at this national forum, APSCS&T set up an exhibition stall highlighting the Council's wide-ranging scientific initiatives, indigenous innovations and community-driven research programmes.

The stall featured an impressive display of products developed under bioresource-based research, prototypes emerging from ongoing R&D, and detailed documentation of technology transfer, training and outreach efforts being implemented across Arunachal Pradesh.

The APSCS&T team was led by Joint Director (Admin) Sangrakpa Khochey and Scientist-C Sourav Kumar Pathak from the DBT-APSCS&T Centre of Excellence

(CoE) for Bioresources and Sustainable Development, Kimin.

They were accompanied by three officials representing APSCS&T and the CoE.

Throughout the festival, the team engaged with a wide spectrum of visitors, including students, young researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs and representatives from science-based industries.

Visitors showed particular interest in the Council's work on bioresource conservation, the development of value-added bioresource products, traditional knowledge-based innovations, biotechnology research, modern honey processing and beekeeping technology, and R&D projects supported by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

The stall also highlighted APSCS&T's ongoing community-oriented programmes such as skill development for rural youth, scientific awareness camps, field-based research training and technology induction in remote districts.

A major highlight of the state's participation was the involvement of Sumedha, IAS, Secretary of the Department of Science & Technology, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

She attended the prestigious Thought

Leaders' Roundtable session, where senior policymakers, innovators and researchers deliberated on strengthening India's scientific ecosystem.

Her presence underscored Arunachal Pradesh's commitment to integrating scientific research with sustainable development, fostering innovation-led governance and creating opportunities for youth in frontier scientific fields.

Officials said that IISF 2025 provided APSCS&T an invaluable opportunity to showcase the scientific potential of Arunachal Pradesh to a national audience.

It also enabled meaningful interactions with leading scientific institutions, start-ups, biotech firms and technology developers, paving the way for future collaborations in areas such as bioresource utilisation, climate resilience, biotechnology, rural technology and science-based entrepreneurship.

The Council emphasised that it remains committed to promoting scientific temper, nurturing innovation, and strengthening research capacity across the state.

Participation in national platforms like IISF not only enhances visibility but also helps bring new ideas, partnerships and opportunities to Arunachal Pradesh, supporting its long-term vision of science-driven development.

PM Modi slams Congress for overruling Mahatma's wishes on Vande Matram

'History is a testament to the fact that Congress knelt before the Muslim League and did this under pressure'

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused the Congress of breaking into pieces national song Vande Mataram under the guise of social harmony, and said it was still following the politics of appeasement.

He also targeted former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru for agreeing with the suggestion that Vande Mataram could antagonise Muslims.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha during a discussion on Vande Mataram, Modi cited a letter written by Nehru to Subhash Chandra Bose claiming that the background of Vande Mataram could antagonise Muslims.

He said the letter was written following a protest by Mohammad Ali Jinnah in Lucknow.

Quoting the letter, Modi said, Nehru had written that he had read the background of the song and it could spark anger amongst Muslims.

Modi said later Congress convened a session in "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Bengal" to review the use of Vande Mataram.

"But, on October 26, Congress compromised on Vande Mataram. They broke it into pieces under the mask of social harmony, but history is witness... This was Congress' attempt at politics of appeasement. Under pressure of politics of appeasement, Congress



agreed to divide Vande Mataram... this is the reason Congress also bowed to the demand for partition..." Modi alleged.

The prime minister said history is a testament to the fact that Congress knelt before the Muslim League and did this under pressure.

"This is an instance of the politics of appeasement of the Congress. Because it bowed to the division of Vande Mataram, it bowed to the division of India later on.

"Congress has maintained the same politics of appeasement even today," he asserted amid thumping of desks by treasury benches.

The prime minister recalled that Mahatma Gandhi wrote in 1905 that Vande Mataram has become so popular that it has emerged as national anthem and wondered that why was injustice meted out to it.

"If Vande Mataram was so popular, why was injustice meted out to it, why was it betrayed in the last century. What were those forces that were so powerful to overrule the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi on Vande Mataram," he said.

Modi lamented that the Constitution was "throttled" and the nation chained by the Emergency when national song Vande Mataram completed 100 years.

The prime minister also noted that Vande Mataram stood like a rock and inspired unity despite British oppression.

"When Vande Mataram completed 100 years, the nation was chained by the Emergency. At that time, the Constitution was throttled and those who lived and died for patriotism were pushed behind bars," he said.

"The Emergency was a dark

chapter in our history. Now we have the opportunity to restore the greatness of Vande Mataram. And I believe this opportunity should not be allowed to pass," Modi said.

Modi noted that the mantra of Vande Mataram gave power and inspiration to the entire country during freedom struggle.

"The mantra energised and inspired India's freedom movement and showed the path of courage and determination. Remembering that sacred Vande Mataram today is a great privilege for all of us in this House.

"It is a matter of pride for us that we are witnessing the historic occasion of Vande Mataram completing 150 years," he said.

The prime minister recalled that the British were forced to ban Vande Mataram even though they brought in laws to prevent printing and propagation of the poem.

"Vande Mataram was written at a time when, after the uprising of 1857, the British government was alarmed and unleashing various forms of oppression. A campaign was underway to push the British national anthem 'God Save the Queen' into every household.

"Through Vande Mataram, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay responded to this challenge with great strength and resolve. British divided Bengal in 1905, but Vande Mataram stood like a rock and inspired unity," he said. (PTI)

Muslims have right to build Babri Masjid: JD(U) MP

NALANDA (BIHAR), Dec 8: JD(U) MP Kaushalendra Kumar on Monday defended Humayun Kabir, the West Bengal MLA who was suspended from his party, the Trinamool Congress, for laying foundation stone of "Babri Masjid" in Murshidabad district of the neighbouring state.

The JD(U) leader shared his views while talking to journalists in his parliamentary constituency of Nalanda, which, incidentally, is the home turf of party supremo and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

"The Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to practice and propagate their religion. If building such a mosque is in line with Muslim sentiments, nobody should have a problem with it," said the Nalanda MP.

The JD(U) MP, whose party is a

BJP ally at the Centre as well as in Bihar, also distanced himself from the saffron party's stand that construction of a mosque in the memory of Babur was tantamount to honouring an "invader", who eventually settled in India and founded the powerful Mughal empire.

"I have not seen Babur and do not have much idea of what he stood for. But we have been following the Constitution since independence which guarantees right to freedom of religion," said Kaushalendra Kumar.

When it was pointed out to him that BJP has stridently opposed the construction of the proposed mosque in West Bengal, where the saffron party takes on the TMC in the assembly polls due in a few months, the JD(U) MP came up with an intriguing response.

"Things are not the way as you

are trying to suggest. In fact, it is (West Bengal CM) Mamata Banerjee who has cracked down on a Muslim leader for voicing his religious sentiments," said the JD(U) leader.

Kabir, who represents Bharatpur assembly segment of the Muslim-majority district of Murshidabad, laid the foundation stone of a mosque modelled on the Babri Masjid of Ayodhya on December 6. On the previous day, the Calcutta High Court refused to intervene in the construction of the mosque proposed by Kabir.

Babri Masjid, a 16th-century monument situated at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, was razed by a mob on December 6, 1992, and a Ram temple has been constructed at the site following a Supreme Court order which decided the title suit in favour of Hindus. (PTI)

Satellites missing most farm fires in Punjab, Haryana; impact on Delhi highly underestimated: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: More than 90 per cent of large farm fires in Punjab and Haryana are now going undetected by the official monitoring systems as farmers are shifting stubble-burning activities to late afternoons, according to a new analysis published on Monday.

The Stubble Burning Status Report 2025 by the International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST) said this led to major underestimation of the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's air pollution this year.

iFOREST said the government's current monitoring protocol, run by the Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modeling from Space (CREAMS) of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, is unable to detect most farm fires as it relies mainly on polar-orbiting satellites that observe India only between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm.

This narrow time window no longer matches farmers' burning practices, it said.

At the same time, the report finds real progress on the ground, with burnt areas in Punjab and



Haryana falling by 25-35 per cent over recent years.

iFOREST said burnt-area mapping provides a more accurate picture than active fire counts, which currently suggest a much larger decline.

Chandra Bhushan, CEO of iFOREST, said, "Our analysis provides incontrovertible evidence that India's current stubble-burning monitoring system is structurally misaligned with ground realities.

"Farmers have shifted burning to the late af-

ternoon, while our monitoring relies on satellites that capture active fires only during a narrow time window (10:30 am to 1:30 pm).

"The result is a massive underestimation of fires, emissions and their contribution to air pollution in Delhi. We urgently need to overhaul the system."

The report uses India's first multi-satellite and multi-sensor assessment, combining MODIS and VIIRS data with high-resolution Sentinel-2 burnt-area mapping and 15-minute geostationary observations from the SEVIRI instrument on Meteosat-8 and 9.

SEVIRI data show the scale of undercounting. According to the analysis, in Punjab, more than 90 per cent of large farm fires in 2024 and 2025 occurred after 3 pm. In 2021, only 3 per cent of such fires took place after this time.

In Haryana, most large fires have occurred after 3:00 pm since 2019.

iFOREST warned that missing fires during the late afternoon and evening lead to major errors in estimating emissions and in air-quality forecasting for Delhi-NCR. (PTI)

PM tried to rewrite history in 'Vande Mataram' debate, BJP can't blot Nehru's legacy: Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: The Congress on Monday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of attempting to "rewrite history" and giving a "political colour" to the "Vande Mataram" debate, and asserted that no matter how much the BJP tries, it will not be able to put a single blot on the contribution of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The opposition party also said it was the Congress that gave "Vande Mataram" the importance it deserved and the status of national song.

Speaking during the day-long discussion on the 150 years of "Vande Mataram" in the Lok Sabha, Congress deputy leader in the House Gaurav Gogoi alleged that it is the prime minister's habit to keep referring to India's first prime minister Nehru and the Congress whenever he speaks on any issue.

"He took Nehru ji's name 14 times and that of the Congress 50 times during the debate on Operation Sindoor. When there was a discussion on the 75th anniversary of the Constitution, Nehru's name was taken 10 times and that of the Congress 26 times," he said.

"During the discussion on the President's Address in 2022, he (Modi) took Pandit Nehru ji's name 15 times. The PM, during the discussion on the President's Address in 2020, took Pandit Nehru ji's name 20 times. I want to say with utmost humility to Narendra Modi ji and his entire system, no matter how hard you try, you won't be able to put even a single blot on Pandit Nehru ji's contributions," Gogoi said.

Gogoi's attack came after Modi accused the Congress of breaking "Vande Mataram" into pieces under the guise of social harmony, and said it was still following the politics of appeasement. The PM also targeted Nehru for agreeing with the suggestion that "Vande Mataram" could antagonise Muslims.

In his remarks, Gogoi asserted that if any political party gave "Vande Mataram" the importance it deserved, it was the Congress. He said his party ensured that it is not just looked upon as a political slogan but was given the status of national song.

It was in the 1896 Calcutta session of the Congress that Rabindranath Tagore first sang "Vande Mataram", he said.

Gogoi further said that in the 1905 Banaras session of the Congress, Sarala Devi sang "Vande Mataram".

"An important amendment was made in this song which was that of population. The original song mentioned 7 crore, but during the Banaras session in 1905, Sarla Devi made it 30 crore and turned the focus of the entire country to Vande Mataram," Gogoi said.

He said the PM's speech had two objectives -- to rewrite history and give a political colour to this debate.

"It seemed that your political ancestors participated in various movements against the British. So I saw the intention in the PM's speech to rewrite and revise history. The second objective was to give a political colour to this debate," he added.

The prime minister also referred to the Congress Working Committee and Nehru.

Gogoi pointed out that it was the Muslim League that wanted to say that the whole "Vande Mataram" must be boycotted.

"Congress' Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said, 'I have no problems with Vande Mataram.' That was the difference between the Congress and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Despite the League putting pressure, a decision was taken in the 1937 session of the Congress



that the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram will be sung at national gatherings," he said.

The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha protested the Congress' decision but the party did not act on their diktat but went by the sentiments of the people.

The slogan of "Vande Mataram" was raised in opposition to the British Raj to instil fear in the heart of the British Raj, he said.

"I want to ask -- When did your political ancestors fulfil this intent of 'Vande Mataram'? When did your political ancestors oppose the British Raj?" Gogoi said.

"I want to ask -- When the 'Quit India Movement' was taking place, where were the political ancestors of the BJP? It is recorded in history that the political ancestors of the BJP had said that one should not participate in the Quit India Movement," he said.

He alleged that the BJP has never even tried to understand the nation.

There are many languages and states in India, but only one national scripture and that is the Constitution, the Congress leader said.

"We are still protecting this very Constitution today," Gogoi said.

Gogoi alleged the Modi government wants to strip away all the rights of the country's citizens such as the right to vote, the right to independent thought, the right to love someone and the right to criticise the government.

Today, there is no British rule in the country, but political forces that follow their divide and rule policy still remain, he claimed.

In a swipe at the BJP-RSS, Gogoi said that when the entire country accepted 'Jana Gana Mana' as the national anthem, "your political ancestors neither hoisted the tricolour nor sang the national anthem in their branches for 52 years".

Today, the people of the country are raising many issues, but the prime minister's speech did not address those matters.

"A bomb explosion occurred in the country's capital, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not mention it even once. We are celebrating the 150th anniversary of 'Vande Mataram,' but are we able to provide security to the present-day India? Have we provided security to the people of Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir?" he said. (PTI)

JU teachers' association warns of protest over fears of delayed pension, salary

KOLKATA, Dec 8: The Jadavpur University Teachers' Association (JUTA) on Monday threatened to launch a protest, alleging that the West Bengal Higher Education Department is likely to withhold two months' pension and one month's salary of the institute's employees.

A senior official of the department, however, dismissed the apprehension, saying there was "no question" of withholding pensions, retirement benefits or delaying salaries. In a statement, JUTA general secretary Partha Pratim Roy said the association had learnt that pensions for October and November and other retirement dues had been held back.

"At the same time, the salary for November has also been withheld by the department. It appears the university's corpus fund is on the verge of being exhausted due to payment of salaries, pensions and retirement benefits," Roy alleged in an open letter to teachers.

"You may already be aware that the Higher Education Department has issued an order taking away the authority of the university to approve pensions and directing that this responsibility be handed over to the Directorate of Pension, Provident Fund & Group Insurance (DPPG). Many of us know that the way universities maintain personal files is in no way comparable to how government offices maintain them. As a result, it is only natural that the transfer of these files may lead to delays in pension processing," he said. Claiming that teachers are unsure whether they will receive their pensions next month, JUTA alleged that the introduction of HRMS—an integrated software system for HR functions—was also aimed at taking over salary approval from the university. (PTI)

Goa govt constitutes four-member panel to probe nightclub fire

PANAJI, Dec 8: The Goa government on Monday constituted a four-member magisterial inquiry committee to ascertain the facts and circumstances that led up to the massive fire that gutted a nightclub, killing 25 people.

According to officials, fireworks have emerged as the likely cause of the blaze at 'Birch by Romeo Lane', a popular party venue in Arpora village, 25 km from Panaji.

As many as 20 nightclub employees and five tourists died in the incident late on Saturday night.

Under Secretary (Home) Manthan Manoj Naik issued the order constituting the inquiry committee with North Goa District Collector Ankit Yadav as chairperson.

The committee members include South Goa Superintendent of Police Tikam Singh Verma, Director of Forensic Sciences Ashutosh Apte and Rajendra Halarnkar, deputy director, Fire and Emergency Services.

The committee will examine the sequence of events leading to the fire, verify the compliance of all statutory licences and determine the lapses.

It will also fix accountability on agencies or departments responsible and recommend preventive and corrective measures, the order stated.

"The committee shall have authority to call for records, documents, etc, from concerned departments. Also, they shall have powers to summon the individual concerned," it stated.

The police have so far arrested the nightclub's chief general manager, Rajiv Modak, general manager Vivek Singh, bar manager Rajiv Singhania and gate manager Riyanshu Thakur, while owners Saurabh Luthra and Gaurav Luthra are to be arrested. (PTI)

Bengaluru, Hyderabad can support each other to build better India: D K Shivakumar

HYDERABAD, Dec 8: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Monday said Bengaluru and Hyderabad, major technology hubs in the country, are not competitors, but they can support each other to build a better India.

Shivakumar, who spoke at the two-day Telangana Rising Global Summit organised by the state government here, also said the country would rise further when the southern states make rapid progress.

He said that he thought Telangana is competing with Bengaluru and Karnataka, but it is not so. The state is competing "globally".

Shivakumar, who congratulated Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for completing two years in office, said the entire south stands with him for the progress of the country "to match the world".

"Today, I am not here only as Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka, but as a proud voice for bidding the south... I could see the vision you (Telangana) have. It is a global vision. I know Telangana is a small state, not like Karnataka," he said. (PTI)

Tata Advanced Systems breaks ground on new MRO supporting Lockheed Martin's C-130J operations in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Defence major Tata Advanced Systems on Monday kick-started the setting up of a defence maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility in India to support Lockheed Martin's C-130J Super Hercules heavy-lift military transport aircraft.

The groundbreaking of the facility in Bengaluru came as Tata Advanced Systems and Lockheed Martin are partnering to pitch the C-130J Super Hercules as the best aircraft in the race to win a mega deal to supply around 80 heavy-lift transport aircraft to the Indian Air Force (IAF).

The IAF currently operates 12 C-130Js. It is a leading tactical airlift, serving 28 operators in 23 nations. To date, more than 560 C-130Js have been delivered and certified by over 20 airworthiness authorities, with the Super Hercules global fleet surpassing three million flight hours.

The groundbreaking ceremony brought together senior officials from the Indian Air Force (IAF), government dignitaries, industry leaders and senior executives from Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems. The construction of the MRO is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, and it is set to receive the first C-130 for MRO operations in early 2027, officials said.

"Today's groundbreaking reflects how far our collaboration with Tata Advanced Systems and India has come, and where we're headed together," said Lockheed Martin's Chief Operating Officer Frank St. John.

"For more than seven decades, we've grown alongside India's expanding aerospace and defence indus-

trial base. This new C-130 MRO facility strengthens that foundation," he said.

John said the facility will bring world-class sustainment capability into India, improve readiness for the Indian Air Force and create opportunities that will support regional and global C-130 operators.

"We remain committed to building capability for India and from India for decades to come."

Sukarn Singh, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Tata Advanced Systems, said that the milestone represents India's growing confidence and capability in shaping its own defence future.

"The MRO venture strengthens our aerospace ecosystem, creating a foundation for innovation, skill development and global competitiveness."

The state-of-the-art C-130 MRO facility will provide heavy maintenance, component repair, overhaul and structural checks and testing of the C-130 J fleet.

It will also facilitate structural restoration and avionics upgrades, expanded training for Indian engineers and maintainers and bring in new opportunities for Indian suppliers across the C-130 supply chain.

Tata Advanced Systems, Lockheed Martin's long-standing partner in manufacturing C-130 empennages and other aerostructure assemblies in India, will play a central role in operating the new facility, the two companies said.

Last week, Tata Lockheed Martin Aerostructures Limited (TLMAL) celebrated the delivery of its 250th C-130J tail, marking another milestone in the US-India relationship and decades-long investment com-



mitment, they said.

The Defence MRO facility will join the existing global network of Lockheed Martin Certified Service Centers and will be strategically located to service the C-130J Super Hercules, KC-130J and C-130 B-H legacy aircraft in the future.

"The C-130J Super Hercules is a proven workhorse for India's military and humanitarian missions," said Rod McLean, vice president and general manager, Lockheed Martin Air Mobility and Maritime Missions.

"This defence MRO facility will bolster response time and security in the Pacific, ensure world-class sustainment capability within India, aligning with the country's ambitions while advancing sustainment capability for the C-130J fleet across the globe," he said.

McLean said the C-130J and India have repeatedly achieved firsts together

"The C-130 completed a world-record-breaking and

unprecedented high-altitude landing at Daulat Beg Oldi. More recently, it touched down at Nyoma Air Base in eastern Ladakh, marking the inauguration of the world's highest operational fighter base."

"This new MRO represents another historic first and a unique opportunity to lay the groundwork for a generational partnership between the C-130 platform and India," he said.

With a presence that spans more than three decades, Lockheed Martin has been a trusted partner to India's defence and aerospace ecosystem, accelerating its manufacturing, skilling and technical capabilities while demonstrating existing support of "Make in India" initiatives and the vision of the Indian government, Lockheed said in a statement.

It said the C-130J delivers unmatched interoperability with global air forces, and it has "verified" low lifecycle costs with significant fuel savings resulting in a reduced carbon footprint compared to other medium-sized jet airlifters.

Since the arrival of India's first C-130J-30 in 2011, IAF crews have demonstrated the capabilities found only on a Super Hercules -- from landing at the world's highest airfield to daring night operations in inclement weather, it said.

"The C-130J Super Hercules delivers unparalleled air mobility in some of the world's most demanding environments, from high-altitude operations in the Himalayas to the highest airstrips in the world at India's newly established Nyoma Air Base in eastern Ladakh," the statement said. (PTI)

Northeast central to India's growth story: Union Minister Sekhar

KOHIMA, Dec 8: Union Minister Pemasani Chandra Sekhar on Monday underscored the transformative role of culture, connectivity and water conservation in shaping the country's future.

Addressing the Nagaland State-Level Launching Programme of Watershed Mahotsav 2025 at Naga Solidarity Park, here, Sekhar highlighted the Centre's renewed focus on the Northeast, stating that before the Modi government, the region was largely viewed as a frontier.

"Modiji brought the Northeast to the centre of India's growth story," he said, citing rapid improvements in railways, highways and digital connectivity that are opening new opportunities in agriculture, tourism and employment.

Pointing to Nagaland's natural resources—cobalt, crude oil, spices—and its English-language advantage, the Union minister of state for communications and rural development said identifying such strengths became possible due to Modi's vision.

He added that his remarks were heartfelt and not political rhetoric, noting that he serves in the NDA as a minister from the Telugu Desam Party.

Sekhar stressed that water security is now national security, warning that India's declining per capita water availability places it in the "water-stressed" category.

He highlighted the outcomes of watershed development under PM Krishi Sanchayi Vajra (PMKSY), noting six-fold economic returns, a 70 per cent rise in farmers' income, 40 per cent



increase in milk production and a threefold rise in groundwater levels in project areas.

The minister emphasised the Centre's preferential funding pattern for the Northeast, where 90 per cent of project costs are borne by the government of India, compared to 60 per cent in other states. He urged the state government and communities to make optimal use of this support. Commending Nagaland's progress, he said 14 watershed projects worth Rs 140 crore have been approved for the state, with Rs 80 crore already released.

He praised the renovation of 555 water harvesting structures, benefiting 6,500 farmers, and the restoration of 120 natural springs.

Having visited the Hornbill Festival on Sun-

day, Sekhar described it as "the heartbeat of Nagaland" and a powerful symbol of India's unity in diversity.

The gathering of Naga tribes, he said, reflects "unity without uniformity".

He added that as traditional practices fade nationwide, Hornbill continues to stand as a torch-bearer of heritage while embracing a modern future, with Naga youth gaining growing global recognition.

Nagaland advisor for land resources and MLA G. Ikuto Zhimomi said Watershed Mahotsav 2025 aims to reinforce collaborative efforts among government agencies, local communities and stakeholders towards natural resource conservation and climate-resilient livelihoods. (PTI)

CorCom announces total Manipur during Prez visit

IMPHAL, Dec 8: The Coordination Committee (CorCom), a coalition of six banned underground groups in Manipur, has announced a total shutdown across the state from the afternoon of December 11 till December 12, coinciding with the likely two-day visit of President Droupadi Murmu.

In a statement issued by M Shak-Hen, media coordinator of CorCom, the group said the shutdown would be enforced from 1 pm of December 11, the day of the President's scheduled arrival until her departure from Manipur. The statement condemned the President's visit, terming it "unacceptable," and accused the Indian government of carrying out "proxy war and repressive measures" in the state.

The CorCom alleged that the President's participation in the Nupi Lal day (Women's War Day) commemoration would be "an attempt to legitimize Indian authority over Manipur."

According to official sources, President Droupadi Murmu is likely to visit Manipur for two days, during which she is expected to attend official events in Imphal and Senapati district.

Security preparations for the VVIP visit have reportedly begun, with heightened deployment in sensitive areas. A senior police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "We have not yet received an official confirmation of the President's itinerary, but instructions have been given to make security arrangements for a likely two-day visit."

The Nupi Lal movement, commemorated annually on December 12, marks two historic uprisings by Manipuri women against the British colonial administration protesting forced labour and economic exploitation, particularly the export of rice from Manipur.

The CorCom alliance comprises six valley-based proscribed outfits - Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and its Progressive faction (PREPAK-Pro), Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) the political wing of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF).

It may be recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also visited Manipur in September this year amid tight security. (NNN)

KSU pays tribute to Bull Lyngdoh

SHILLONG, Dec 8: The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) paid rich tribute to late leader Bull Lyngdoh on his 31st death anniversary on Monday, hailing his selfless contribution to the indigenous community. "Today reminds us of the sacrifice made for serving the indigenous community. We remember Bull Lyngdoh's selfless contribution to the indigenous community through the Khasi Students Union," KSU president Lambokstarwell Marmgar said.

Marmgar recalled Lyngdoh's efforts in fighting against unabated influx into the region, despite facing criticism. "There were those who strongly criticised the steps taken by Bull Lyngdoh during that time. However, when he is no longer here, people realised a leader like him is difficult to find," he said.

Urging KSU members to continue fighting for the safety and security of the indigenous community, Marmgar said, "When we take up issues, there will always be those who would criticize us, but we should never pay heed to such things as our duty is to continue fighting."

He also highlighted the need for effective laws to protect the indigenous community, stating, "The government is saying not to take law into our hands, but we want to say this: Our efforts may be considered as illegal by the state government, but for the indigenous community, it is law that will protect and ensure safety and security." (NNN)

Tripura CM to inaugurate Saras Mela on Dec 13

AGARTALA, Dec 8: Chief Minister Manik Saha will inaugurate the two-week-long Saras Mela at Hapania International Fair Ground in West Tripura on December 13, officials said on Monday.

The Saras Mela is an annual event where self-help groups (SHGs) from across the country display and sell their products.

"Saha will inaugurate the event in the presence of dignitaries," the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM) said in a statement.

It said thousands of SHG members, referred to as didis, will participate in the fair, where 400 stalls are being set up this year with participation from multiple states.

A TRLM team headed by Chief Executive Officer Tarit Kanti Chakma visited the venue to oversee the preparations.

Currently, over 4.68 lakh households are associated with 54,263 SHGs in Tripura, of whom nearly 1.08 lakh women have already become 'lakhpati didis', according to TRLM. (PTI)

Security forces arrest 3 militants in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 8: Security forces arrested three militants and also seized a cache of arms and ammunition in separate operations in Manipur, a police statement said on Monday.

One militant of the banned PREPAK involved in extortion was arrested from Ngaikhong Khullen area in Bishnupur district on Sunday. Two guns, 13 cartridges, one hand grenade, and two walkie-talkie sets were seized from his possession, it said.

One active cadre of the banned United National Liberation Front (Koireng), also involved in extortion activity, was arrested from Kadangband in Imphal West district on Sunday.

A militant of the banned KYKL was also arrested from Kharason in Imphal East district on Sunday, it said.

Police said security forces conducted search operations and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable areas across districts, resulting in the recovery of arms and ammunition.

During an operation at IVR of Tharoijam Awang Leikai in Imphal West district on Sunday, two single barrel guns, five pistols along with one magazine, one air pistol, eleven magazines, three grenades, six detonators, and 50 ammunition of different types were seized. (PTI)

67 acres of illicit poppy cultivation destroyed in Manipur's Kangpokpi

IMPHAL, Dec 8: Security forces destroyed 67 acres of illicit poppy cultivation in the hill ranges of Manipur's Kangpokpi district, a police statement said on Monday.

The drive was carried out on Friday and Saturday by a joint team of security forces, NCB and the Forest department.

"Sixty-seven acres of illicit poppy cultivation were destroyed in the hill ranges of Makui Ashang, Laloi, Wakotphai, Chaljang and surrounding areas in Kangpokpi district," the police statement said.

Meanwhile, former chief minister N Biren Singh has lauded the decision taken by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and the state government in destroying poppy cultivation in various hill ranges of the state.

He said the initiative aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of a 'Nasha Mukta Bharat'.

In a post on X, Singh said, "I appreciate the swift and decisive action taken by the Government and Hon'ble Governor Shri Ajay Bhalla in destroying poppy cultivation in various hill ranges."

"This initiative aligns with the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of a Nasha Mukta Bharat, and it is encouraging to see Manipur actively contributing to this national mission. I urge the authorities to continue these operations across all vulnerable regions of the state so that no area remains a safe haven for narcotics activities." Singh added. (PTI)

NU researchers turn pineapple peels into high-quality vinegar

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Dec 8: In a new study, Nagaland University researchers have converted pineapple peels into high-quality vinegar with practical and sustainable methods that can support rural livelihoods while reducing the environmental burden of fruit waste.

Showing how pineapple processing waste can be converted into value-added products, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen sustainable pineapple production, improve value addition and bolstering rural livelihoods in Nagaland.

The cutting-edge finding demonstrates the potential to replace the highly expensive apple-based vinegar, thereby paving the way for sustainable waste utilisation and enhanced revenue generation in the commercial pineapple-growing belt, a varsity release said on Monday.

The findings of this research by Dr Sentinaro Walling, Prof. Akali Sema, Prof. CS Maiti, Dr Animesh Sarkar, Prof. SP Kanaujia and Alemla Imchen from Nagaland University's horticulture department.

Nagaland is a notable pineapple-growing region in the country, known for fruit that is exceptionally sweet, rich in juice and low in fibre. The 'Kew' variety is widely cultivated, with the 'Queen' variety grown in smaller pockets in the state.

Districts such as Chumoukedima, Niuland, Dimapur, Kiphire, and Mokokchung are the key production areas of pineapple. Nagaland's conducive geo-ecological conditions ensure excellent fruit quality, reflected in its blended sweetness and other desirable biochemical attributes

However, the same waste materials can serve as suitable substrates for fermentation and other value-added applications.

Vinegar production is one such avenue, as the sugar-rich residues provide an ideal base for alcoholic and acetic fermentation.

It found that these by-products, although often treated as waste, are rich in fibre, proteins, pectin, vitamins and minerals, and when left unmanaged, they contribute to landfill accumulation, contamination and higher disposal costs.

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veloped core-based candy, fibre extraction and improved cultivation practices to support farmers.

The research paper was co-authored by Dr Sentinaro Walling, Prof. Akali Sema, Prof. CS Maiti, Dr Animesh Sarkar, Prof. SP Kanaujia and Alemla Imchen from Nagaland University's horticulture department.

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In a first, Meitei MLA visits Kuki relief camp in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 8: In a first since ethnic violence broke out in Manipur in 2023, a Meitei MLA on Monday visited a relief camp set up for the Kuki community in Ukhrul district.

BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand Singh, who represents the Singjamei constituency in Imphal West, visited a camp at Litan Sareikhong and interacted with Kuki inmates who fled their homes during the violence.

"With Christmas approaching, we all should pray for the return of peace in the state," he told the inmates.

"There are conflicts almost everywhere in the world. But we should learn to live in harmony despite the existing differences. There should not be any hindrance in visiting each other's villages," he added.

Singh said this conflict should not be allowed to affect the future of children.

"We, the elders, both in the Hills and the Valley, may have differences, but we should think about our children's future," he said.

State BJP vice president H Shimray, who belongs to the Naga community, said Singh's visit is part of efforts to restore peace in the state and bring back the "previous love that existed between communities". "We have been talking with



Yumnam on how to start an interaction. He said there had to be a beginning," Shimray added.

Speaking to reporters, an inmate of the camp urged the government to allow them to return to their homes.

Over 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in the clashes between the Kuki and Meitei communities, which have deeply divided the state on ethnic lines.

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

GOVT. OF ASSAM

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KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT
DIPHU-782460

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No. KA/Esstt/H&FW/Post/Advt./2025-26/1809

Dated, Diphu the 08/12/2025

CORRIGENDUM/ADDENDUM

Viva-Voce Interview for the post of Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical)

It is hereby informed to all concerned candidates that the written examination result of different category of Grade-III (Technical and Non-Technical) posts under the Joint Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong which was conducted on 23-11-2025 and 24-11-2025 is hereby declared. The Roll No. of eligible candidates of Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical) for Viva-Voce Interview are given below:-

Sl. No.	Name of post	Roll Nos.
1	Health Educator	02, 05, 16, 18, 19, 22, 27, 34, 35, 40, 48, 58, 59, 63, 64, 88, 112, 128, 133, 152, 153, 162, 180, 183, 192
2	Pharmacist	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23
3	A.N.M.	02, 04, 05, 06, 07
4	Surveillance Worker	02, 10, 12, 27, 28, 33, 38, 40, 47, 51, 57, 63, 68, 82, 83, 87, 116, 169, 172, 179, 182, 190, 199, 211, 257, 266, 267, 268, 277, 319, 334, 357, 364, 393, 394, 397, 398, 402, 405, 433, 443, 460, 489, 490, 492, 498, 500, 503, 505, 506, 508, 509, 512, 513, 515.
5	Vaccinator	06, 09, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32, 34, 35, 37, 41, 44, 50, 53, 56, 59, 63, 69, 76, 79, 88, 90, 106, 113, 139, 159, 163, 168, 173, 179, 184, 187, 221, 266, 275, 277, 280, 281, 287, 297, 306, 311, 329, 367, 396, 397, 398, 401, 403, 419, 431, 433, 444, 452, 471, 494, 505, 508, 513, 515, 516.
6	Dresser	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12

All the candidates of above-mentioned Roll No. are directed to appear for Viva-Voce interview on 15-12-2025 at 10:00 am at the office of the Joint Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

No separate calling letter will be sent to candidates. Candidates are directed to bring all original testimonials/certificates etc. while appearing the interview.

Sd/-

Jt. Director of Health Services,
Karbi Anglong District, Diphu.

Dated, Diphu the 08/12/2025

Memo No. KA/Jt.DHS/Esstt/Apptt/2025-26/1809 (A)

Hornbill Esports Festival starts in Kohima

KOHIMA, Dec 8: The Hornbill Esports Festival 2025, the second edition of Nagaland's premier competitive gaming showcase, commenced on Monday at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here.

The event is organised by the Esports Association of Nagaland (ESAN) in collaboration with the Department of Youth Resources and Sports, aiming to promote esports talent and integrate gaming with music, youth culture and digital entertainment.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Abu Metha, advisor to the chief minister, chairman of Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) and vice-president of the Athletics Federation of



India (AFI), lauded the department for sustaining a sector that is rapidly reshaping global youth engagement.

"eSports is a modern-day trend and a billion-dollar industry that cannot be ignored," he said, emphasising that Nagaland does not want its youth to miss opportunities in this

is not merely entertainment but also a genuine career pathway, with players, creators and developers finding sustainable livelihoods worldwide.

He added that esports also supports mainstream sports training, as many top global academies use football and basketball simulation games to teach strategy, management and game dynamics to young athletes. Welcoming over 300 participants who qualified through national-level rounds, Metha said each contestant arriving in Nagaland was "already a champion".

He encouraged visitors to enjoy the Hornbill experience, describing it as a time to "network, make friends and create memories". (PTI)

fast-growing global sector. He cited examples of international championships offering multi-million-dollar prize pools and highlighted that a Naga player recently won the football segment at the Khelo India Esports Championships—proof of the state's emerging talent. Metha stressed that esports

JEETHU JOSEPH SAYS ACTORS PREFER LARGER-THAN-LIFE ROLES: MANY ARE CONFUSED AFTER SUCCESS OF 'LOKAH'



Filmmaker Jeethu Joseph says many actors today, whether in Bollywood or the South, are worried about their public image and want roles that present them as larger-than-life heroes, a challenge that he faced with his most recent directorial "Mirage".

The filmmaker, known for "Drishyam" franchise and the film "Memories", said actors are worried that if they take on complex, grey, or negative roles, audiences might reject them.

"Not just in Bollywood, many actors here (Malayalam cinema) are stuck in their images. That's the main problem because

they're scared that if they do a negative character, the audience will hate them.

"As a director, I always want to do different types of films. So I believe that an actor should do all kinds of characters," Joseph told PTI in an interview. The filmmaker believes that actors are rushing to do larger-than-life stories, riding on the current wave of pan-Indian blockbusters from Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam cinema.

"After the success of 'Lokah', many actors are confused," Joseph said, referring to the Kalyani Priyadarshan-led superhero title which emerged as a surprise blockbuster earlier this year.

The director said he recently met an actor who cancelled four-five films as he felt those movies will not work now.

"I asked him, 'What kind of films were they?' He told me that they were all those realistic films and one of them was a comedy film. But in all those films, there are no larger-than-life kind of characters.

"So now he's looking for some

larger-than-life character where he is looking for a pan-Indian release. Because recently, even Kannada, Telugu (and in) Malayalam, pan-Indian films are making big bucks at the box office. So every actor wants to do the same," Joseph added.

He said he doesn't blame actors for chasing such projects because their income depends on box-office performance.

"But the problem is if you keep on doing this type of film, after a point, the audience will definitely be fed up," he added.

Joseph wanted to make "Mirage", a crime thriller, as a Hindi film and pitched the project to several actors but they all declined.

"The character was going to be a pure villain. So, many of the female actors were ready to do that film, but unfortunately, no hero was ready to do the film. After a while, I told the producer that let's drop this film because we've been running after this project for five years. And he really got upset.

"And I really liked it because the attraction of that subject was a hero

turning to be a pure villain. Usually, whenever a hero is doing a negative character, there will be some justification or some sugar coating for this thing. This is nothing like that. This is a pure negative character."

"Mirage" was released in theatres in September and it is now streaming on SonyLIV. The story revolves around a woman named Abhirami (Aparna Balamurali), whose fiancé mysteriously disappears after a train accident.

Unable to accept his fate as a simple accident, Abhirami teams up with Aswin (played by Asif Ali), an investigative journalist. Together, they dig deeper — uncovering financial scams, hidden identities, and a web of secrets pointing to something far darker than a simple tragedy, as per the official logline.

"I thought about Asif because he's a kind of actor who never bothered about his image or his kind of characters or his screen space. I narrated this storyline, then he said, 'Sir, I liked it. I want to do it.' That's why we brought this thing, this project into Malayalam," he said. (PTI)

30th International Film Festival of Kerala to open with Palestine film

The 30th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) beginning here on December 12, will open with the film 'Palestine 36', directed by Annemarie Jacir.

The film is an epic historical drama which portrays the Palestinian uprising against the British colonisation.

The opening film takes its name from the year when Palestine began to revolt against British rule and Zionism, a release from the Kerala State

Chalachitra Academy, the organisers of the event, said on Sunday.

The IFFK, which enters its 30th edition, will be held at the state capital here from December 12 to 19.

The inaugural film was awarded the best film at the Tokyo International Film Festival and was Palestine's official entry for the best international feature film at the 98th Academy Awards.

Another film by Jacir, 'Wajib' for

which she won the IFFK's Golden Crow Pheasant in 2017 will also be screened as part of the package of films which won Suvarna Chakoram in the early editions of the IFFK.

The Chalachitra Academy also announced that the Lifetime Achievement Award of the 30th IFFK will be conferred on renowned Malian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako, in recognition of his profound contribution to world cinema.

Born in Kiffa, Mauritania, Sissako's family moved to Mali, where he spent his childhood. He made his first short film *Le Jeu* (The Game) in 1989 as his graduation project.

His full-length feature film debut, *'Life on Earth'* (La Vie Sur Terre), released in 1999, was featured in the Directors' Fortnight sidebar at the Cannes Film Festival that year, and the definitive breakout hit was the 2014 film *'Timbuktu'*.

Sissako's films are primarily focused on globalisation, displacement, exile, identity, and the struggles of everyday life in Africa, which helped bring African cinema into the global spotlight.

Sissako's five films will be screened this year at IFFK. *'Life on Earth'* (1999), *'Waiting for Happiness'* (2002), *'Bamako'* (2006), *'Timbuktu'* (2014), and *'Black Tea'* (2004) are the movies to be screened at the festival.

The IFFK's lifetime achievement award, introduced in 2009, is presented to a filmmaker who made significant contributions to the art of cinema during their career.

Earlier recipients of the award include Jean-Luc-Godard, Werner Herzog, Fernando Solanas, Alexander Sokurov, Jiri Menzel, Majid Majidi and Bela Tarr. (PTI)

We are always together papa: Esha Deol honours Dharmendra on 90th birth anniversary

We are always together papa: Esha Deol honours Dharmendra on 90th birth anniversary

Veteran actor Dharmendra, who died on November 24, is being lovingly remembered on what would have been his 90th birth anniversary. His daughter Esha Deol has led the heart-felt tributes, honouring her father with cherished memories and emotional reflections just weeks after his death.

Esha honoured her late father on this significant date with a lengthy note on Instagram. She wrote about the memories they shared and the special bond they had, reflecting on her experiences growing up with one of India's most celebrated actors. The note serves as a personal remembrance and a way to connect with her father's admirers.

In her message, Esha Deol described the joy of spending time with Dharmendra, recalling the laughter they shared and the conversations that defined their relationship. It also highlights the closeness between father and daughter and the impact Dharmendra had on his family.

"Our pact, the strongest bond... us through all our lifetimes, all the realms and beyond... We are always together Papa. Be it heaven or earth. We are one. For now, I have very tenderly, carefully & precisely tucked you in my heart deep deep inside to carry on with me for the rest of this lifetime. The magical, precious memories... life lessons, the teachings, the guidance, the warmth, the unconditional love, the dignity, and the strength you have given me as your daughter cannot be replaced or matched by any other.

She recalled the magical memories of laughing and having endless conversations with him, and promised to spread his love to his fans.

"I so painfully miss you Papa your warm, protective hugs that felt like the coziest blanket, holding your soft yet strong hands which had unspoken messages & your voice calling out my name that followed with endless conversation, laughter & shayaris. Your motto "always be humble, be happy, healthy & strong"

I promise to continue your legacy with pride & respect. And I will try my best to spread your love to the millions who love you as I do. I love you Papa

Your darling daughter. Your Esha, your Bittu. (sic.)"

Dharmendra's death marked the end of a significant chapter in Indian cinema, with his ca-



reer spanning decades and earning him recognition as a versatile actor. His family has played a central role in commemorating his legacy following his recent death.

As fans and the film industry remember Dharmendra on this milestone, Esha Deol's words signal an ongoing effort to celebrate his life and work. (PTI)



TV ACTOR GAURAV KHANNA WINS 'BIG BOSS 19'

TV actor Gaurav Khanna is the winner of the popular reality TV show "Bigg Boss" season 19 after he beat rival Farrhana Bhatt to claim the trophy.

Show host and Bollywood superstar Salman Khan presented Khanna with the prize money of over Rs 50 lakh and the trophy.

"It is yet to sink in. It is very surreal for me now. I received so much of love. What I love about it that I didn't change a bit. I am the same when I went inside the house and came out and people like that (quality) a lot. I didn't change or faked anything," Khanna told PTI in an interview. The TV star, known for his roles in "Anupama" and "CID", said the turning point was when the superstar host expressed his desire to work with him.

"I cried at that very moment," he added.

Asked what he will do with the winning amount, Khanna said he will take the advantage of his MBA degree and invest it wisely.

The season 19 of the show, which kickstarted on August 24, saw Bhatt emerge as the first runner-up. Bhatt, who has acted in movies like "Laila Majnu" and "Notebook", said she is happy that she got a chance to win many hearts while on the show.

"I never had my eyes on trophy. I was just going with the flow, doing my best and trying to contribute 100 per cent. When I came out and saw the love of the people, I didn't feel the sadness of not winning the trophy. I was like whoever wants to win trophy can win, I have won hearts outside. So

I am very happy and I not sad at all," she said.

The stand-up comedian Pranit More ended up in the third spot. Content creator Tanya Mittal was at the four position and composer Amaal Malik settled at the fifth place.

The highlights of "Bigg Boss 19" was the spiritual content creator Mittal who found a new fame inside the house due to her distinct equation with each housemates.

The grand finale also saw Bollywood star Kartik Aryan promote his upcoming film "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri" along with the co-star Ananya Pandey. TV actor Karan Kundrra and Sunny Leone, and Bhojपुरi star Pawan Singh also marked their attendance.

At the beginning of the show, Khan thanked "Big Boss" fans and followers for their love and support for the contestants.

Khan also paid tribute to late superstar Dharmendra. Khan, who shared a personal bond with Dharmendra, said there won't be any one like the late superstar who gave 60 years of entertainment.

An emotional Khan said he lost Dharmendra on his father Salim Khan's birthday which was on 24th October.

This season of "Bigg Boss" had a blend of actors, influencers, musicians, and reality stars.

Awez Darbar, Ashnoor Kaur, Kunickaa Sadanand, Mridul Tiwari, Bashree Ali, Abhishek Bajaj, Zeishan Quadri, Nehal Chudasama, Nagma Mirajkar and Neelam Giri were also among the participants of season 19. (PTI)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MY DEAR HEART: HEMA MALINI REMEMBERS DHARMENDRA ON 90TH BIRTHDAY



Actor Hema Malini on Monday remembered Dharmendra with an emotional post on what would have been the actor's 90th birthday.

Dharmendra passed away at his Juhu home on November 24.

"Dharam ji. Happy birthday my dear heart. More than two weeks have passed since you left me heartbroken, slowly gathering up the pieces and trying to reconstruct my life, knowing that you will always be with me in spirit," Hema Malini posted.

The two stars got married in 1980 and have daughter Esha and Ahana. Dharmendra also has four children with his first wife, Prakash Kaur, including actors Sunny and Bobby Deol.

The actor and BJP MP also shared photographs from her life with Dharmendra on X. She captioned the images as "Our happy 'together' moments".

In her post, the "Sholay" star said the "joyful memories" of their life together can never be erased.

"... just reliving those moments bring me great solace and happiness. I thank God for our lovely years together, for our two beautiful girls who reaffirm our love for each other and for all the beautiful, happy memories that will remain with me in my heart. On your birthday, my prayers for God to grant you the wealth of peace and happiness that you richly deserve for your humility and goodness of heart and your love for humanity. Happy birthday dear love," Hema Malini added. (PTI)

DHURANDHAR BOX OFFICE: RANVEER SINGH-STARRER SEES OVER 15 PER CENT JUMP ON DAY 2



Ranveer Singh-starrer *Dhurandhar*, directed by Aditya Dhar, opened to largely positive reviews. Despite its long runtime of 3 hours and 34 minutes, the film has managed to pull audiences to theatres. The film, which opened at ₹ 28.6 crore on Day 1, saw a 15 per cent jump on Day 2. On the second day, Ranveer Singh's spy drama, inspired by real incidents, gained momentum. Owing to positive word of mouth, the film saw a boost in sales. On Saturday, the film collected ₹ 33.1 crore at the Indian box office. After two days, the film's total domestic collection stands at ₹ 61.70 crore.

Commenting on the film's performance, trade analyst Taran Adarsh wrote on X, "Dhurandhar goes on a rampage on Saturday - the film is now in unstoppable mode... While the major centres, especially the national chains, were rocking on Friday, the heartland, too, has joined the party, witnessing substantial growth."

The analyst further noted that the film is likely to close its opening weekend around ₹ 95 crore.

Both *Dhurandhar* and *Uri: The Surgical Strike* are based on or inspired by real-life incidents. The internet has now found a link between the two films. In *Uri*, Vicky Kaushal's character Vihaan meets Indian Air Force pilot Flight Lieutenant Seerat Kaur, whose Army officer husband was martyred in an ambush. Seerat is played by actress Kirti Kulhari. After *Dhurandhar* released, a clip of Seerat and Vihaan's conversation from *Uri* went viral. In the scene, Seerat reveals her late husband's name: Jaskirat Singh Ranghi of the Punjab Regiment, who lost his life during the Nowshera Sector ambush. (PTI)

India fined for slow over-rate in second ODI against South Africa



DUBAI, Dec 8: India were on Monday fined 10 per cent of their match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate against South Africa in the second ODI in Raipur.

India lost that match as South Africa squared the three-match series at 1-1. India won the Visakhapatnam ODI to clinch the series.

Richie Richardson of the Elite

Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after KL Rahul's side was ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined five per cent of their match

fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

Rahul pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Rod Tucker and Rohan Pandit, third umpire Sam Nogajski and fourth umpire Jayaraman Madanagopal levelled the charge. (PTI)

Don't see major changes in T20 squad before the World Cup: Pak skipper Salman

KARACHI, Dec 8: Pakistan's T20 skipper Salman Ali Agha has ruled out any major changes in his squad for the Men's T20 World Cup next year, saying the side has shown a marked improvement after the players were given specific roles in recent months.

Pakistan, who had made big changes to its side following the Asia Cup final defeat to India earlier this year, bringing in Abdul Samad, Babar Azam, Usman Khan and Naseem Shah, defeated South Africa at home in a three-match T20I series and then won the Tri-series, also involving Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, last month.

"In my personal opinion, I don't see any major changes in the national T20 squad before the World Cup," Salman said on a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) podcast.

"I think the current combination we have will be the one we will have in the World Cup. Every player has been given a specific role in recent months and with that the team had moved forward," he added.

Pakistan are scheduled to play six T20 games before the World Cup, scheduled to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka from Febru-



ary 7 till March 8 next year, and Salman said the limited number of matches will make it difficult to make major changes.

"We have six T20 matches to play before the World Cup and I don't think we can make any big changes now in these remaining matches. We have to show consistency and move forward with the current combination," he said.

Experienced allrounder Shadab Khan, who was the vice-captain of the side before he got injured in May and underwent a shoulder surgery in London, is now rehabilitated and is set to make a comeback in the Big Bash in Australia.

Salman said the "doors were not closed" for Shadab to return to the side for the T20 World Cup as

he was a very experienced player. Salman said his dream was to not just win the T20 World Cup but also the 50-over showpiece in 2027.

He said, playing a short series in Sri Lanka next month would be extremely beneficial for his players as they will play all their T20 World Cup games in the island nation. (PTI)

Pacer Thakur takes four-for as Vidarbha beat Andhra

LUCKNOW, Dec 8: Vidarbha pacer Yash Thakur halted Andhra in its tracks by grabbing four wickets to guide his side to a 19-run victory in a Group A final-round match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Monday.

Andhra, who have already qualified for the next stage along with Mumbai from the group, failed to overhaul Vidarbha's 154/8, with the 26-year-old right-hand bowler returning excellent figures of 4/22 to restrict the opponents to 135/9.

Thakur, who also had a five-wicket haul in an earlier match, ended his SMAT campaign with 18 scalps. Vidarbha's innings revolved around Aman Mokhadde's 50 and keeper-batter Akshay Wadkar, who scored a 33-ball 41 with Andhra pacer Satyanarayana Raju's 4/26 playing a big role in restricting the opponents to a below-average score.

However, Andhra fared even worse when they came out to bat, losing three wickets for 31 runs including India player Srikar Bharat for a golden duck. Pyla Avinash scored a 37-ball 44 but that was not enough as seven players could only manage single-digit scores.

In another match, young Assam pacer Sadek Hussain returned a four-wicket haul on way to defeating Kerala by five wickets.

Brief scores:

Vidarbha 154/8 in 20 overs (Aman Mokhadde 50, Akshay Wadkar 41; Satyanarayana Raju 4/26) beat Andhra 135/9 in 20 overs (Pyla Avinash 44; Yash Thakur 4/22) by 19 runs.

Kerala 101 in 19.4 overs (Sadek Hussain 4/19, Abdul Ajij Kuraisi 2/16, Avinov Choudhury 2/15) lost to Assam 105/5 in 18.5 overs (Pradyun Saikia 41 not out; KM Asif 2/22) by 5 wickets. (PTI)

Nice fans boo team during seventh straight loss, players show support for injured teammates

NICE (FRANCE), Dec 8: Nice was booed on the field a week after its players were attacked by supporters.

The French team's crisis on and off the pitch deepened as it lost 1-0 at home to Angers in Ligue 1 on Sunday for a seventh straight loss across all competitions.

After last week's defeat at Lorient, Nice players were confronted by a large number of their supporters when they returned to the club's training and academy center.

Players and staff were reportedly assaulted and fans shouted insults and demanded greater commitment from the squad. Jérémie Boga and Terem Moffi took multiple blows, including to the head and groin.

Those two players were absent against Angers and their teammates took the field with the names of either Boga or Moffi on the backs of their jerseys instead of their own.

The jeers rang out right from the start.

Yassin Belkhdid scored for Angers in the 33rd minute and Nice's hopes of ending its losing streak diminished early in the second half when Tom Louchet was sent off for a foul on Jacques Ekomié. (AP)

Gill feeling 'much better' after his neck injury rehab at CoE

CUTTACK, Dec 8: Having recovered from a nasty neck injury, Shubman Gill is feeling good ahead of his comeback in the T20 International series against South Africa after undergoing extensive rehabilitation at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The CoE cleared Gill to play in the five-match series against beginning here on Tuesday. India's Test and ODI captain had injured his neck while playing a sweep shot in the first Test against South Africa last month, forcing him to miss the second Test in Guwahati and the subsequent ODI series.

The T20 vice-captain would be looking for some strong performances against the Proteas.

"I'm feeling much better. I think the day that I came here, from that day till today, I've had quite a bit of skill sessions and some training sessions. So, I feel much, much better," Gill told 'bcciv'.
The BCCI also shared visuals of Gill's training and rehabilitation under the supervision of strength and conditioning coach S Rajnikanth.



Gill was also seen shadow practising the sweep shot in the video.

Having spent considerable time at the National Cricket Academy in his formative years, Gill spoke fondly about his times at the facility that has been now converted into a sprawling CoE in the city outskirts.

"Growing up playing under-14, under-16, you know, it used to be

a thing among us where we used to be like someone has been to the NCA and come back," he said.

"When you're coming here, you know, you're kind of cream of the crop. So, you know, you have the skillset to be able to reach to the next level and making use of the facility where you know that how I can go to the next level physically or how I can go to the next level mentally," said Gill. (PTI)

I was tired and chucked intentionally, admits Shakib on County suspension

LONDON, Dec 8: Out-of-favour Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan admitted that physical fatigue forced him to intentionally resort to chucking during an English County game for Surrey, which subsequently led to his suspension from bowling.

Left-arm spinner Shakib was suspended from bowling in all competitions organised by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) after his action was deemed illegal at an independent testing at Loughborough University in December last year.

The umpires called his action during a first-class game for Surrey against Somerset in Taunton in which

he had bowled close to 65 overs across two innings.

"I think I was doing it a little bit intentionally because I bowled more than 70 overs (in one match)," Shakib told the Beard Before Wicket podcast.

"I never bowled 70 overs in my career in a Test match. I was playing that four-day match for Surrey against Somerset in Taunton. I was so tired."

"I played back-to-back Test matches in Pakistan. We won that series and then I went to play those four-day matches. The only thing I was thinking the umpire could have done was just warn me first, at least. But it is in the rules, so they had the right. I didn't complain." (PTI)

F1 in 2026: Key dates, new title hopefuls and Cadillac's debut

ABU DHAB, Dec 8: Say goodbye to DRS, and hello to a battery power boost. Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix marked the last time Formula 1 uses the Drag Reduction System overtaking aid, introduced in 2011. Next year, drivers will have to manage the car's systems more closely than ever with a more visible role for aerodynamic and electrical technology.

After a season-long title battle ended with Lando Norris' first title, here's what to expect in 2026:

Smaller, lighter, more electric
The biggest regulation changes in years make cars shorter, narrower and lighter, with movable "active aerodynamics" — X-mode for straight-line speed, Z-mode for cornering — and more reliance on electric hybrid power.

The FIA's target was for electrical power to make up half of total output along with a traditional V6 turbo engine. Instead of DRS, drivers can deploy extra electrical power at key moments. That makes driving even more strategic but could lead to drivers lifting off the power and coasting on some straights to allow the electrical systems to harvest energy.

The FIA claims the rules emphasize driver skill but there have been mixed reviews from those who've tried 2026 designs in their teams' simulators.

Smaller, more agile cars could help overtaking but the fastest and slowest cars may be up to four seconds per lap apart on pace, tire supplier Pirelli has reported. In F1 terms, that's an eternity. Expect to see more engine



failures as teams balance reliability with performance.

Mercedes, Aston Martin aim for more
Could this be the year Lewis Hamilton finds his form again at Ferrari and chases an eighth title? Maybe not.

Even though he never got on with the 2022-25 cars, Hamilton told the BBC he was "not looking forward" to 2026 after the Las Vegas Grand Prix last month, yet another disappointment since he joined Ferrari.

Mercedes has designed some of F1's most dominant engines before, but its eye-catching "zero-pod" aerodynamic concept was a bust when the last regulation period began

in 2022. Get both aspects right this time and George Russell could be a title contender after two wins in 2025.

Another team to watch is Aston Martin, which has its first car created with design great Adrian Newey in charge, and is hoping it can make two-time champion Fernando Alonso an F1 race winner for the first time in 13 years. Williams too could make a step forward after abandoning its 2025 projects early to focus on 2026.

New Cadillac team, old faces
The F1 grid expands to 22 cars for the first time since 2016 as Cadillac becomes the 11th team with backing from General Mo-

76 teams to take part in T10 tennis ball cricket meet for lawyers and judges

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: As many as 900 lawyers and judges will be displaying their cricketing prowess during the upcoming Smt Mohinder Kohli Memorial T10 tennis ball tournament scheduled to be held at the Lodhi Estate Cricket ground here from December 12.

The tournament is being organised in the memory of Late Smt. Mohinder Kohli, mother of Hon'ble Ms. Justice Hima Kohli (Former Judge, Supreme Court of India) and Ms. Neelu Kohli.

The tournament will showcase the sporting prowess of lawyers and judges, comprising players of all genders, reflecting the diverse and inclusive nature of the legal community.

Around 76 teams, comprising close to 900 lawyers will be participating in this exciting event, that aims to highlight the importance of physical activity and teamwork in the lives of legal professionals.

The tournament will be played in 9-a-side format with 76 teams being divided into 18 groups. Each team shall compete in league matches against the other team within its respective group. (PTI)

Matsuyama rallies in the Bahamas and beats Noren in a playoff to win Hero World Challenge

NASSAU (BAHAMAS), Dec 8: Hideki Matsuyama ended his season the way he started it, winning the Hero World Challenge on Sunday when he closed with an 8-under 64 and then hit 9-iron to 2 feet for birdie on the first playoff hole to defeat Alex Noren.

Matsuyama, who began the year by setting a PGA Tour record to par by winning at Kapalua, holed out from 116 yards in the 10th fairway for eagle that allowed him to catch Sepp Straka, move past Scottie Scheffler and seize control at Albany Golf Club. Noren, unable to start his year until May because of a hamstring injury, charged along the back nine and caught Matsuyama with an 18-foot birdie putt on the final hole for a 64 to join him at 22-under 266 and force a playoff.

The overtime didn't last long. Matsuyama, known for taking one hand off the club even when the shots work out fine, this time twirled the 9-iron in his hand as he watched it take aim at the flag and plop down a few feet away. Noren's 20-foot birdie attempt slid by on the left.

"It was a perfect distance for me,"

Matsuyama said. "Early on the second shot (in regulation), I missed a little to the right. I was going right at it and was able to hit a great shot."

He won the holiday event hosted by Tiger Woods for the second time, winning in 2016.

Straka, the 54-hole leader by one shot over Scheffler, birdied the final hole for a 68 to finish alone in third. Scheffler had a slow start and a two-hole stretch early on the back nine that ruined his bid for a third straight victory at Albany Golf Club. He shot 68 and tied for fourth with U.S. Open champion J.J. Spaun (65). Matsuyama went out in 31 and suddenly was tied with Straka when he holed out for eagle.

But the tournament took shape behind him on the par-5 11th. Scheffler, two shots out of the lead, chose to hit driver off the fairway from 291 yards away with a speck of mud on the front of his ball. It went left under a small bush. He hacked that out to a sandy area, then hit his fourth shot over the green to back portion of a bunker. Only a superb bunker shot allowed him to escape with bogey. (AP)

Højlund's double sees Napoli beat Juventus and spoil Spalletti's return

MILAN, Dec 8: Luciano Spalletti's return to the team he led to the Serie A title was spoiled by Rasmus Højlund's brace as host Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 on Sunday.

The result also lifted Napoli back to the top of the Italian league. The defending champion moved a point above Inter Milan and three points above AC Milan, which visits Torino on Monday.

It was Juventus coach Spalletti's first time at Napoli as opposition manager since he led the southern team to its first scudetto in more than 30 years in 2023.

Napoli coach Antonio Conte was also facing his former team. He steered Juventus to three Serie A titles

during his time in charge and also played for the Bianconeri for 13 years, winning numerous trophies.

Adding to the occasion, it was the first time the two coaches had faced each other.

Napoli got off to a great start as the in-form David Neres got away down the right before rolling the ball across for Højlund to tap it in with less than seven minutes on the clock.

Napoli had the better of the chances but Juventus leveled in the 59th minute as the Bianconeri went on the counterattack and Kenan Yıldız played a one-two with Weston McKennie before placing an angled drive into the far bottom corner. (AP)

into the far bottom corner. (AP)

Nine-man Real Madrid loses at home for the 1st time this season

MADRID, Dec 8: Real Madrid had two players sent off in its 2-0 home defeat to Celta Vigo on Sunday and lost more ground to Spanish league leader Barcelona.

Madrid conceded early in the second half and then saw red cards for Fran Garcia and Álvaro Carreras in its first defeat of the season at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in all competitions. Unused Madrid substitute Endrick also was shown a red card for complaining. Williot Swedberg scored for the visitors with a nice flick from near the penalty spot in the 54th.

Madrid lost Garcia with a second yellow card in the 64th and Carreras in stoppage time. Swedberg sealed Celta's victory in a breakthrough shortly after Madrid was reduced to nine players.

"We are all upset. It wasn't the game or the result that we wanted," Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said. "The referee's decisions threw us off balance. I didn't like the refereeing."

Madrid has won only two of its last seven matches across all tournaments. It next hosts Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday. Madrid's only other league loss this season was a heavy defeat at Atletico Madrid in September. It also lost at Liverpool in the league phase of the Champions League in November. (AP)

Gill, Hardik return as India begin official T20I WC build-up vs South Africa

Hardik the opening bowler gives us lot of options: Suryakumar Yadav

CUTTACK, Dec 8: The return of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya will lend fresh sheen and much-needed completeness to reigning world champions India when they begin their official march towards the home T20 World Cup with the opening match of a five-game series against South Africa, here on Tuesday.

This series marks the start of India's formal build-up to the February showpiece, where they will play 10 T20Is -- five against South Africa followed by another five against New Zealand -- before opening their title defence against the USA at the Wankhede on February 7.

The defending champions will look to enter this phase with clarity of intent as they refine roles, streamline combinations and settle the XI that will carry the weight of expectations in front of home crowds.

India have been a formidable T20I unit post their World Cup triumph in the format last year, where they won eight matches in a row to lift the title. Since then, they have extended their tally to 26 wins with only four losses, including a seven-match streak during their Asia Cup victory in Dubai.

They have not lost a T20I series in this period, and with only minor tweaks needed, they will be hoping to sharpen the edges against the side they defeated in the T20 World Cup final.

Gill's return comes after he missed almost a month of cricket owing to a neck spasm suffered while attempting a slog sweep during the opening Test against the Proteas.

Having played non-stop cricket since the last IPL and with India facing a packed season ahead, his workload management will be closely monitored. But for Gill, who has 837 runs from 33 T20Is at an average of 29.89, this series also doubles up as vital preparation heading into the ICC event.

His reunion with Abhishek Sharma brings back a high-impact opening pair that marries brute force with clean, classical strokeplay.

Abhishek, fresh from a standout tour of



Australia where he topped India's scoring charts with 163 runs in the 2-1 victory, has been in monstrous domestic touch.

In the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s, the Punjab left-hander hammered 304 runs at an average of 50.66 and a staggering strike rate of 249-plus, including a breathtaking 52-ball 148 against Bengal as Punjab posted 310/5.

Pandya comeback
Hardik Pandya's comeback is equally significant.

Out for more than two months after a quadriceps injury during the Asia Cup, the all-rounder marked his return in style with a 42-ball 77 not out for Baroda in the SMAT before bowling four overs at full tilt for 1/52.

He arrived here a day ahead of the squad, trained solo at the Barabati Stadium, bowled for 20 minutes and went through an extended physical routine.

His presence not only deepens India's batting but restores the balance of a bowling attack built heavily on flexibility.

SKY's form
One of the central conversations ahead of

the series has been skipper Suryakumar Yadav's prolonged lean patch.

The contrast between his dazzling IPL 2025, where he amassed 717 runs for Mumbai Indians, and his underwhelming T20I returns has been striking.

Since taking over as full-time T20I captain in July last year, his form has dipped to an average of 15.33 with 184 runs in 15 innings, he has not scored a fifty in the last 20 games, and his strike rate has reduced to 127.77 from the 187-plus he clocked in 2022.

Even in the SMAT this season, he failed to reach a fifty, scoring 165 runs from five matches.

Any drastic move before the World Cup looks unlikely, but the next 10 T20Is will add fodder to conversations surrounding both his form and captaincy.

Sanju v Jitesh
The wicketkeeper-batter debate -- Sanju Samson or Jitesh Sharma -- remains equally tantalising.

India's handling of the pair during the Australia series raised eyebrows, with Samson

batting only once, promoted to No. 3, before Jitesh was backed for the last three T20Is.

Since India's World Cup triumph, Samson has been the team's third-highest run-getter, flourishing as an opener with three centuries, including two in South Africa. But Gill's return as vice-captain pushed Samson down the order into a role he rarely occupies in T20 cricket. In the recent SMAT, Samson looked in excellent touch with two fifties, two 40s and a 56-ball 73 not out against Andhra, while Jitesh managed modest returns for Baroda with a top score of 41 from six outings.

SA notes
South Africa, for their part, welcome back tearaway pacer Anrich Nortje for his first international appearance since last year's T20 World Cup final.

Marco Jansen's evolution as a genuine all-rounder adds heft to the visitors; his blistering 93 in the Guwahati Test and 70 off 39 balls in Ranchi underscored a renewed authority with the bat to go with his established potency with the ball.

Veteran left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj also returns to the white-ball fold, though the Proteas will sorely miss star batter Tony de Zorzi and young fast bowler Kwena Maphaka, both ruled out of the five-match series due to injury.

Teams :
India: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Shubman Gill (vc), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarty.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Ottineil Baartman, Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donovan Ferreria, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Tristan Stubbs.

Match Starts: 7pm IST. (PTI)

CUTTACK, Dec 8: India captain Suryakumar Yadav believes Hardik Pandya's return will restore the tactical depth and balance that shaped the team's Asia Cup surge when the world champions take on South Africa in a five-match T20I series starting here on Tuesday.

The ace India seam-bowling all-rounder, who sustained a left quadriceps injury and missed the Asia Cup final, is fully fit and in fine form after making his comeback in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

His timely return ahead of next year's T20 World Cup has brought back the much-needed flexibility and balance, with his new-ball spells offering India the cushion to field three, even four spinners.

"I think what you saw in the Asia Cup also, when he was bowling the new ball, he opened a lot of options, lot of combinations for us with respect to playing XI," Suryakumar said on the eve of the series-opening T20I here.

"That's what he brings to the table. His experience, the way he has done really well in all the matches, all good games also, all bigger games in ICC events."

"I think that experience will count a lot. His presence will definitely give a good balance to the side."

Incidentally, Pandya, who landed a day early in Cuttack and trained solo at Barabati Stadium, skipped the optional session on Monday, but the skipper confirmed that both he and Shubman Gill -- returning from a neck spasm -- are available.

"Right now, both of them look healthy and fit," he said.

For India, this series is the start of a 10-match run into the home T20 World Cup in February, but Suryakumar said the groundwork was laid long back.

"Our 2026 T20 World Cup preparation began right after we won the T20 World Cup in 2024... Our preparation is similar. The preparation started after the T20 World Cup 2024 got over. Since then, we have been trying new things and everything is working for us."

He underlined that India's recent success stems from consistency of selection.

"I feel in the last 5-6 series which we have played, we have tried and played with a similar combination. We have not changed too much... Everything is going well. We wanted to continue the



same way."

On the conversation around Sanju Samson and Jitesh Sharma, Suryakumar reiterated that flexibility is key.

"In terms of Sanju, yes, when he came into the circuit, he batted higher up the order. Now, the thing is, other than the openers, I feel everyone has to be very flexible... He was ready to bat at any number."

He insisted India will not indulge in needless tinkering.

"We won't be changing a lot of combinations. We won't be trying too many things because things are going really well. So, we want to stick to the process..."

Asked whether Rinku Singh is still in the scheme of things, with the rise of Shivam Dube, Suryakumar said: "Dube is an all-rounder. So, him and Hardik are the all-rounders. So, you can't compare an all-rounder."

"The thing is all the batters from 3 to 7 are capable of batting at any position."

On the series, Suryakumar kept the goals simple.

"The plan for the series is to play good cricket... There are some things that we are doing right. So, why should we change that?"

Barabati's red-soil pitch will be used for the first time. Suryakumar said he hasn't inspected it yet.

"...But we will see. If it is fast, then it is a good thing."

Asked about the dew and whether the toss could again be decisive, Suryakumar grinned as he recalled KL Rahul's quirky change of fortune with a left-handed flip that finally snapped India's run of 20 consecutive lost tosses in ODIs.

"I also do it with my left hand," he laughed. (PTI)

Assam cyclist Debanuj Saikia shines at National Road Cycling Championships

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Assam's promising cyclist Debanuj Saikia put up a determined performance at the 30th National Road Cycling Championships held in Sambalpur, Odisha, from December 2 to 6. Representing Jorhat in the Elite category, he competed in two gruelling events that tested endurance, speed and tactical skill.

In the 40-km Individual Time Trial, Debanuj secured the 15th position, maintaining steady pace against some of India's top riders.

He later participated in the 160-km Mass Start race, which featured more than 100 cyclists, finishing 36th despite the stiff competition and challenging course. Debanuj, the youngest child of Purnima Saikia and L K Saikia, credits his progress to his coach and mentor, national cyclist Arvind Panwar -- popularly known as veloarvind.

Panwar's guidance, he says, has been instrumental in shaping his competitive journey.

The young cyclist's strong showing in Sambalpur marks another significant step in his rising career and serves as an inspiration for aspiring athletes from the Northeast aiming to make their mark in competitive cycling.

Thimphu City FC wins Bhutan-India Open Football Tournament final

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 8: Thimphu City FC of Bhutan clinched the championship title in the final of the Bhutan-India Open Football Tournament, held at Samdrup Jongkhar on Sunday night, reinforcing the spirit of friendship between the two neighbouring countries.

Organised by the Bhutan-India Friendship Association (BIFA) with support from the Indian Embassy, the tournament -- titled 'Play for Friendship' -- began on November 22.

The final saw Thimphu City FC face Paro FC in a closely contested match inaugurated by Samdrup Jongkhar District Commissioner Tashi Wangmo.

Thimphu City FC defeated Paro FC 2-1 to secure the title.

The winners received a cash prize of ₹5 lakh along with a trophy, while the runners-up were awarded ₹2.5 lakh and a trophy.

The final match was attended by several dignitaries, including District Commissioner Tashi Wangmo, Tamulpur MLA Jolen Daimary, BTC Deputy Speaker Bijit Gaur Narzary and other distinguished guests. Gup Sonam Dukpa, Vice President of BIFA, was also present on the occasion.

Kokrajhar hails bronze medal winners

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 8: Kokrajhar erupted in celebration as two young Taekwondo players from the district -- Smriti Basumatary and Sinaithi Basumatary -- clinched bronze medals at the 69th National School Games Taekwondo Championship held in Jammu & Kashmir.

Representing Assam in the national meet, both athletes delivered strong performances to secure podium finishes in their respective categories.

Their achievement has brought pride not only to the people of Kokrajhar but also to the Bodoland Territorial Council



(BTC), showcasing the region's growing talent in martial arts. To honour the medalists, the

Kokrajhar District Taekwondo Association organised a felicitation ceremony today at the

Kokrajhar Taekwondo Gymnasium. The duo was presented with traditional Bodo aronai (shawls) amid applause from officials, coaches, sports lovers and well-wishers.

Speakers at the event praised the athletes' discipline and dedication, encouraging them to pursue higher goals and assuring all necessary support for upcoming competitions.

The twin bronze wins have sparked inspiration among young athletes in Kokrajhar, strengthening hopes for further development of Taekwondo training and sports infrastructure in the district.

1191 posts lying vacant in SAI, recruitment process initiated: Sports Minister in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday acknowledged that over 1,000 posts are currently lying vacant in the Sports Authority of India (SAI), a concern that was highlighted in a recent Parliamentary Standing Committee report which had described the body as "critically" under-funded and under-staffed.

The minister was responding to a question from Congress MP Adoor Prakash, who represents Kerala's Attingal constituency, in Lok Sabha.

Asked whether the government has noted the concerns raised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee over severe shortage of funds and staff in SAI, Mandaviya said, "The Government has taken note of the observations..."

"A total of 1,191 posts are lying vacant in the SAI. The recruitment process of certain posts has already been initiated," he added.

In its report in August, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on sports, headed by Congress' Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, observed that about 45 per cent of sanctioned posts in the SAI are presently vacant. (PTI)

FIH Junior Women's World Cup: India beat Wales 3-1 in classification match

SANTIAGO (CHILE), Dec 8: Out of quarterfinal contention, India defeated Wales 3-1 to remain in the hunt for a ninth-place finish at the FIH Junior Women's World Cup here.

Hina Bano (14'), Sunelita Toppo (24'), and Ishika (31') scored for India, while Eloise Moat (52') netted the lone goal for Wales. India had logged two wins and a loss to finish outside the top eight in the pool stage.

In Sunday's match, India began with a penalty corner in the first 30 seconds. They were playing between the lines to carve out opportunities on regular occasions, but couldn't find the opening goal early on.

Wales had the opportunity to surge ahead with a penalty stroke, but were denied by Nidhi as she made a sharp stop to keep the scores level.

India eventually managed to break the deadlock towards the end of the first quarter, courtesy a tap-in from Hina after some neat work by Sakshi Rana.

Looking to double their advantage, India maintained the pressure with another penalty



corner at the start of the second quarter.

They continued to create chances regularly, and were rewarded for their persistence

after Rana's initial shot fell in the way of Sunelita, who made no mistake from close range. With 14 circle penetrations in the first

half, India held a deserving 2-0 lead at the break. India extended their lead to 3-0 early in the second half as Ishika found the back of the net after a rebound from the Welsh goalkeeper fell in her way.

Jyoti Singh's side controlled the tempo of the game, stretching the Welsh defense by playing between the lines and pressing high, while remaining disciplined and compact at the back. India continued to create chances, pushing Wales back in their own half to close out the third quarter.

With the lion's share of possession, India remained in pursuit of more goal-scoring opportunities to further increase their advantage in the final quarter.

Wales had an opening on the other end and Eloise Moat (52nd) made it count, pulling one back for her side. However, that only proved to be a consolation goal as India held firm to secure a well-deserved 3-1 win.

India will next play Uruguay on Tuesday and the winner of this match will progress to the ninth place showdown. The losing team will fight for the 11th spot in the overall standings. (PTI)

There is nothing against Nathan Lyon: Smith on controversy over his exclusion for 2nd Test

ADELAIDE, Dec 8: Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith tried to douse the controversy over the exclusion of Nathan Lyon for the second Ashes Test in Brisbane, saying that the decision was taken to strengthen the pace-bowling department and there wasn't anything personal against the spin-bowling stalwart.

Lyon had described his mood as "absolutely filthy" after he was dropped by Australia for the first time in 13 years in a home Test. Australia's chairman of selectors, George Bailey, had described the exclusion as a "one-Test decision" and guaranteed the 38-year-old spinner a place in the XI for the third Test in Adelaide.

"It could have gone a few different ways, and it's certainly nothing against Nathan. He's a freak," Smith was quoted as saying post-match by Fox Sports.

Australia defeated the Ben Stokes-led England by eight wickets in the Brisbane Test on Sunday to take

a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

"He's (Lyon) been our spinner for such a long time, but the extra batting and the way the tail hung in for 50 overs gave us the balance we were after," added Smith.

Australian tail-enders, pacers Michael Neser (16) and Brendan Doggett (13), made decent contributions while pacer Mitchell Starc contributed 77 as the home side scored a mammoth 511 at the back-end of the first innings.

Neser took a five-wicket haul in the second innings to play a pivotal role in Australia's big win.

"(Neser) offers something different. We can bring the keeper up, he hits the stumps, he keeps things tight, and forces batters to take risks when the ball isn't as quick or is skidding. But it's nothing against Nathan. He's unbelievable and he's done it for so long." (PTI)