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Organiser detained, probe ordered as Mamata apologises to fans

Fans on rampage as Lionel Messi's Kolkata event turns 'messy'

KOLKATA, Dec 13: Chaos at the Salt Lake stadium here during a Lionel Messi event on Saturday escalated into a major law-and-order episode with police detaining the prime organiser for alleged mismanagement, even as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee ordered a high-level inquiry and apologised to fans who failed to see the football icon.

What was billed as a marquee sporting spectacle unravelled into disorder as thousands of spectators protested after being unable to get a clear glimpse of Messi, triggering vandalism inside the stadium and sharp political and administrative reactions later in the day.

Accompanied by long-time strike partner Luis Suárez and Argentine teammate Rodrigo De Paul, Messi, the World Cup-winning captain, arrived at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan around 11.30 am.

His vehicle was parked near the touchline and, as he stepped onto the field, he was quickly encircled by VIPs, organisers, celebrities and security personnel, leaving spectators in the galleries straining for a view.

Messi walked a short distance

on the pitch and waved briefly towards the stands amid chants of "Messi, Messi".

Fans, however, soon realised that he remained tightly cordoned off and barely visible from large sections of the stadium.

Several spectators complained that even the giant screens failed to provide a clear view.

Frustration mounted when it became evident that Messi would not complete the full lap of the stadium that was part of the original programme.

Instead, he turned back midway and was escorted out well before the scheduled end of his appearance.

As word spread that the football star had left prematurely, anger spilled over. Bottles and plastic chairs were hurled onto the pitch, sponsor banners and hoardings were torn down, fibreglass seats smashed, and sections of the crowd attempted to breach barricades to force their way onto the field.

Protesters raised slogans demanding the arrest of state Sports Minister Aroop Biswas and the event's chief organiser Satadru Datta, accusing them of gross mismanagement.

Eyewitnesses said the situation worsened after organisers, including Datta and his team, were no longer visible on the ground soon after Messi's exit.

Repeated announcements over the public address system asking unauthorised persons to vacate the field went largely unheeded as hundreds of spectators spilled onto the pitch, pulled down temporary tents and damaged equipment near the touchline.

Police personnel struggled to contain the surging crowd on the pitch, prompting the deployment of the Rapid Action Force inside the stadium. Some protesters were baton-charged to restore order, police sources said.

"This was complete mismanagement," said Ajay Shah, a football enthusiast who had come with his son. "People have spent a month's salary to see Messi. I paid ₹ 5,000 for a ticket. We came to watch Messi, not politicians."

Ticket prices for the event ranged between ₹ 4,500 and ₹ 10,000, with many fans arriving early in the morning in the hope of seeing the football legend up close.

The chaos forced an abrupt curtailment of the programme, with



several invited dignitaries, including Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan, former India cricket captain Sourav Ganguly and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, unable to participate as planned.

Police sources said the situation did not fully spiral out of control, only because Messi was taken out of the stadium earlier than scheduled and additional security forces

were rushed in.

Hours later, Banerjee expressed shock over the alleged mismanagement and announced the constitution of a high-level enquiry committee.

In a post on X, she apologised to Messi and sports lovers who had gathered at the stadium.

"I am deeply disturbed and shocked by the mismanagement

witnessed today at Salt Lake Stadium," she said, adding that thousands of fans had assembled at the venue hoping to catch a glimpse of the World Cup-winning star.

The inquiry committee will be chaired by retired Calcutta High Court judge Justice Ashim Kumar Ray, with the chief secretary and the additional chief secretary of the Home and Hill Affairs Department

as members.

The panel will fix responsibility and recommend measures to prevent such incidents in the future, Banerjee said.

Meanwhile, Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar said the prime organiser of the event had been detained in connection with the incident.

"The plan was that he would come, wave, meet certain people and leave. The government has already constituted a committee which will look into all aspects, including whether there was any mismanagement on the organiser's side," Kumar said.

He added that the organiser had given an assurance in writing that he would refund the ticket prices sold to spectators.

"The situation is now under control," the DGP said. TV channels, however, reported that the chief organiser has been arrested.

For a city that prides itself on its deep footballing culture, the scenes of broken chairs, ripped banners and angry fans stood in stark contrast to the promise of the day, as a much-anticipated Messi appearance ended in chaos at one of India's largest football arenas. (PTI)

Six bodies laid to rest; contractor arrested

Arunachal accident: Emotional scenes witnessed as families receive



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 13: Amid emotional scenes, the bodies of six workers killed in the tragic road accident in Arunachal's Anjaw were brought to their homes and laid to rest at Gelaphakuri tea estate in Tinsukia on Saturday evening.

The family members broke into tears when they saw the dead bodies of their sons, brother and husband. The entire Gelaphakuri tea estate bids last farewell to the youths who died in a tragic road accident in Anjaw's Arunachal on December 8, 2025.

The bodies which were laid to rest were identified as— Abhay Bhumij(33), Sanjay Kumar(36), Junash Munda(20), Agor Tanti(24), Rajni Nag (24) and Rahul Kumar(25). Tinsukia District Commissioner Swapneel Paul and Senior Superintendent of Police Mayank Kumar formally received the bodies at Tinsukia Medical College. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Centre of Excellence in aerospace, defence in Assam soon: CM



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Specialised skilling in high-value sectors such as aerospace, defence and electric mobility will now be accessible in Assam, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announcing that a state-of-the-art Centre of Excellence (CoE) will soon come up at the Assam Engineering College (AEC) campus in Guwahati.

Taking to the X platform on Saturday, the Chief Minister said that earlier, students and professionals aspiring for advanced skilling in these sectors had to travel to metros and spend significant amounts on training. "Not anymore," he wrote, adding that the new facility will bring world-class training infrastructure to the doorstep of Assam's youth.

The upcoming Centre of Excellence—focused on Aerospace & Defence, Automotive and Electric Vehicle (EV) industries—is being developed with a total investment of ₹243.66 crore, of which ₹200 crore will be contributed by Dassault Systèmes India. Spread over 5,000 sq ft, the centre is expected to train and upskill 10,000 candidates, including students, working professionals and employees from various industries.

A senior official asserted that the CoE will impart domain-specific skills, facilitate upskilling and reskilling, and provide crucial support to start-ups and MSMEs operating in emerging technology sectors. By integrating advanced simulation tools, digital manufacturing techniques and industry-driven modules, the facility aims to prepare a highly skilled workforce capable of meeting global industry standards.

The state government believes the initiative will significantly strengthen Assam's talent ecosystem while reducing dependency on larger cities for specialised training. The centre is also expected to enhance industry-academia collaboration, positioning Guwahati as a hub for high-end technological innovation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ex-IAF personnel held for alleged Pak links in Tezpur



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 13: A retired Indian Air Force (IAF) officer was arrested in Tezpur on Friday on charges of allegedly passing sensitive national security information to Pakistani intelligence agencies, triggering widespread (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tripura CM claims BJP sweep in TTAADC polls

AGARTALA, Dec 13: Chief Minister Manik Saha on Saturday asserted that the BJP would win all the 28 seats in the upcoming elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

The TTAADC, currently ruled by the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally in the BJP-led coalition government, is scheduled to go to the polls early next year.

Addressing a party programme, Saha said the BJP would hold a mega rally at Khumulwng, headquarters of the TTAADC, ahead of the council elections. "We are confident of winning all the 28 seats of the TTAADC because the BJP has been working for the welfare of the indigenous (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Zubeen case: Garima welcomes SIT chargesheet

'Guilty should be punished without delay'

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Zubeen Garg's wife Garima has welcomed the chargesheet filed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which named four people in connection with the singer's murder.

"The investigation began on the basis of the FIR filed by us against the accused on behalf of our family. The probe proceeded on expected lines for which we are very grateful to the investigating agency," Garima told reporters.

She added that the probe's results were in accordance with public expectations and said, "Now everything depends on the judicial process, which we hope will move smoothly. We have faith in our nation's judiciary and want the guilty to be punished accordingly."



Garima said Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has indicated that the Chief Justice will be requested for a fast-track court, adding, "We also want the matter to be resolved at the earliest. Our

house has been shattered and people are very disturbed that a person like Zubeen Garg could be killed. The people of entire Assam want the guilty to be punished."

On participation in investigations by Singaporean authorities, she said the probe is based on the family's FIR, and they have full faith in the probe and judiciary.

The SIT, probing the death of Zubeen Garg, charged four accused, including the singer's secretary Siddhartha Sharma and festival organiser Shyamkanti Mahanta, with murder in the chargesheet filed in a court here on Friday.

Garg's band members, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta, have also been charged with murder. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Flood management was not merely an engineering challenge but a governance issue neglected by previous regimes'

Making Assam flood free tops govt's priority list: Himanta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday asserted that building long-term flood resilience has emerged as one of the government's highest priorities, marking a decisive shift from what he described as decades of "temporary and fragile solutions" to a more durable and scientific approach.

Highlighting the transformation since 2016, Sarma said the era of weak earthen embankments is steadily coming to an end.

Taking a dig at previous Congress governments, Sarma said, "Before 2016, most embankments in Assam were earthen and had already crossed their lifespan. Flood protection was weak, temporary and highly vulnerable to breaches."

He also underlined how frequent embankment failures worsened annual floods and erosion across the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys.



According to Sarma, the government has since adopted a policy-driven shift towards long-life concrete embankments. He said that since 2022 alone, nearly 900 kilometres of new embankments have been constructed, with a target of completing 1,000 kilometres of concrete embankments in the

near future. This, he argued, reflects a clear political commitment to replace stop-gap arrangements with permanent infrastructure.

Drawing a contrast with the past, Sarma noted that earlier Assam witnessed between 17 to over 30 embankment breaches every year, severely impacting lives, agricul-

ture and public infrastructure. "This year, the number of breaches has been reduced sharply to just five," he claimed, adding that the impact of floods and erosion has been significantly curtailed in several vulnerable districts.

The Chief Minister said flood management was not merely an engineering challenge but a governance issue neglected by previous regimes. He maintained that his government's approach combines infrastructure creation with accountability, planning and sustained investment.

Sarma's remarks come at a time when flood control remains a politically sensitive issue in Assam, where seasonal floods have historically shaped public opinion and electoral narratives. By projecting tangible reductions in breaches and long-term infrastructure creation, the BJP-led (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gurjar praises Assam's progress in cooperative movement

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Union Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar on Saturday emphasised the role of the cooperative movement in making the country self-reliant, with states like Assam to play a special part in it.

He was speaking at the opening of the 4th Cooperative Mela 2025, organised by the state's Cooperation department, under the guidance of the Ministry of Cooperation.

The three-day event will showcase the strength, diversity and potential of the cooperative movement in the state. Gurjar, the Union Minister of State for Cooperation, said that the cooperative movement in Assam is a natural extension of the state's deep cultural and spiritual ethos.

He paid tribute to the great Vaishnavite saints, Srimanta Shankaradev and Madhavdev, whose teachings on unity, equality and service to society form the very foundation of the cooperative spirit.

He maintained that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the focused guidance of the Union Minister of Cooperation, the national vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhi' (Prosperity through Cooperation) is transforming into a vibrant reality.

Gurjar highlighted the establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 as a historic step, providing the necessary institutional impetus and a clear blue-



print for an all-round, world-class cooperative system in the country.

Praising Assam's reforms in this sector, the Union minister said this state-level proactive implementation has positioned it as a leader in key national initiatives, including the 100 per cent computerisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), with over 800 PACS already adopting the new Model Byelaws. He said that this progress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Philip Morris India strengthens fight against illicit tobacco trade with intelligence-driven actions and strategic partnerships

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Philip Morris India Trading Private Limited (PM India) has intensified its efforts to combat illicit tobacco trade, a growing threat to the country's economy and public health. Leveraging intelligence-led initiatives and strategic policy engagement, the company mapped contraband hotspots, assessed the penetration of illicit cigarettes and catalysed industry-government dialogue on enforcement and global best practices.

In 2025, PM India engaged with over 3,000 shops across 10 states and 500+ market clusters as part of its intelligence-gathering exercise on contraband cigarettes. The company also provided capacity-building support to more than 145 customs and taxation officers to strengthen their ability to identify illicit products.

According to Euromonitor International, India ranks as the fourth-largest market for illicit cigarette consumption globally, after China, Brazil and Pakistan. Recent government reports highlight that smuggled cigarettes worth ₹ 600 crore were seized during FY'25. The



North-Eastern region emerged as the largest smuggling hub, accounting for one-third of total seizures, followed by Maharashtra-Goa (20%), Tamil Nadu (13%) and West Bengal (9%), indicating the use of coastal and maritime routes for smuggling.

With the government rolling out the track-and-trace mechanism, PM India has committed to supporting this landmark reform by sharing global best practices. Philip Morris International (PMI), the parent company has implemented advanced track-and-trace systems in over 140 markets worldwide, digitally tagging every pack to strengthen supply chain integrity.

Navaneel Kar, Managing Director, Philip Morris India, said, "Illicit tobacco trade is not a new challenge and neither is our commitment to addressing it. This year, we engaged with over 50 key stakeholders from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, DRI, GST, Police and Customs—deepening collaboration through market intelligence, advanced track-and-trace systems and collaborative frameworks. Combating this issue requires sustained, collective action and we remain committed to working with regulators, enforcement bodies and civil society to build a transparent and compliant tobacco ecosystem in India."

Philip Morris India's initiatives highlight its commitment to combining technology-driven solutions, strategic partnerships and enforcement support to protect consumers and strengthen national interests. Moving forward, PM India aims to support government reforms, accelerate compliance innovation and collaborate with stakeholders to create future-ready frameworks that ensure transparency across the entire tobacco supply chain.

Blenders Pride Fashion Tour drives fashion into the fast lane



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: The Blenders Pride Fashion Tour shifted gears in Jaipur, turning the runway into a high-octane fusion of motorsport and high-fashion. The Jaipur edition, themed 'Fashion's Next Move', showcased motorsport-inspired designs, glamorous performance wear and cutting-edge couture, emphasising speed, precision and innovation.

In collaboration with the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), the event reimagined the runway as a high-speed circuit. Designers Namrata Joshipura and Abhishek Paatni translated racing aesthetics into statement-making couture. Bollywood star Hamaz Sandhu took center stage as the finale showstopper, while rapper Raftaar energized the audience with a high-voltage performance. The three-lap runway experience featured "The Start Line" racing silhouettes, "The Pit Lane" chrome-driven tactical looks and "The Glam Night" high-octane glamour. The show concluded with a thrilling sports car stunt, amplifying the adrenaline-filled atmosphere.

Debasree Dasgupta, CMO of Pernod Ricard India, said, "The Jaipur edition fuses motorsport and high-fashion, creating an immersive experience that celebrates boldness, style and innovation."

Designer Abhishek Paatni added, "We shifted fashion into new gears, fusing speed with style to present a bold glimpse of the future of fashion." Namrata Joshipura remarked, "We defined fashion's next evolution, bringing motorsport precision into haute couture."

Showstopper Harnaaz Sandhu shared, "Walking the runway felt like stepping onto a racetrack—pure adrenaline and confidence." Rapper Raftaar commented, "The Tour has taken fashion onto a whole new track, moving forward with speed, power, and attitude."

FDCI Chairman Sunil Sethi said, "The Jaipur edition celebrates creativity and culture, setting the pace for what's next in Indian fashion."

The tour will next move to Kolkata on December 20, where designer Anamika Khanna will present contemporary craftsmanship with showstopper Ishaan Khatter.

55 pc of Indians plan winter trips Goa Kerala lead demand says report

MUMBAI, Dec 13: Around 55 per cent of Indian travellers plan winter trips every year, and Goa and Kerala remain top choices for them during the travel season, according to an Airbnb report.

Indians are travelling in winter not just for holidays, but also to unwind and relax, the report said.

"This winter season, Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan and the Himalayan states dominate domestic travel interest on Airbnb, owing to their beaches, backwaters, heritage, winter weather and outdoor experiences," Airbnb Country Head, India and Southeast Asia, Amanpreet Bajaj said, quoting the report based on Airbnb internal data.

He said 55 per cent of Indian travellers plan winter trips every

Assam-based startup Ruloi launches affordable iced tea brand 'Oji' across Northeast

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Assam-based startup Ruloi has launched 'Oji,' one of India's most affordable iced teas made from real Assam tea brews, designed for modern consumers seeking mindful refreshment. Available in Lemon and Lychee flavors, Oji contains antioxidants and is enriched with Vitamin C, offering a healthy and flavorful beverage option.

Priced at just INR 10 for a 160 ML carton, Oji is currently available across Assam via Drinkoji.com, leading retail outlets, hypermarket chains and local stores. Plans are underway to expand its availability through quick-commerce platforms and select cities across the Northeast and beyond.

Oji is a winner of the 'Startup Challenge 2024' by Tetra Pak India in partnership with Startup

India. The program provided the startup with mentorship, product development support and access to Tetra Pak's Product Development Centre in Chakan for formulation and testing assistance.

Bijit Sarma, Co-Founder of Oji, said, "Oji was born in Assam, the cradle of the world's finest teas with a vision to make healthy, flavorful beverages accessible. Every sip carries the soul of the Northeast—where authenticity meets innovation. With support from Tetra Pak and Startup India, we've turned a local dream into a national offering."

Co-Founder Sagar Rai Deka added, "Our goal is to bridge Assam's natural wealth with the modern Indian lifestyle. Oji is authentic, functional and sustainable a homegrown brand redefining the beverage landscape in India."

Cassio Simoes, MD, Tetra Pak South Asia, said, "Oji exemplifies

how passion and purpose can create a refreshing, globally relevant product rooted in local heritage. Through the Startup Challenge, we supported Oji's journey from concept to shelf, empowering homegrown innovators."

Sanjiv Singh, Joint Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Startup India, commented, "India's startup ecosystem is dynamic, with over 180,000 recognised startups. Initiatives like Tetra Pak's Startup Challenge enable homegrown brands to combine global best practices with local insights, creating products that resonate with modern consumers."

Oji aims to gradually expand beyond the Northeast, reaching consumers across India through modern retail and traditional channels, signaling a new era of mindful, affordable refreshment.

Topcem Cement conducts 5th Annual School Stationery Drive supports over 600 children



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: Topcem Cement, one of North East India's leading cement brands, successfully conducted its 5th Annual School Stationery Distribution Program across Kamrup (M) and Kamrup districts, supporting over 600 children. The initiative aims to provide essential learning materials to underprivileged students, helping them begin their academic journey with confidence.

This year, Topcem Cement distributed 4,500 notebooks, 6,000 pens, 6,000 pencils, 6,000 erasers and 6,000 sharpeners to representatives of 12 schools and childcare institutions, including Assam Sishu Kalyan Sadan, Jalukbari, Children Home for Girls, Jalukbari, Seven Sisters Home, Lankeshwar, Observation Home for Children, Boko, UTAH Education/Community Centre, Bamunimaidam, Kalyani Niwas, Children Home for Girls, Rupnagar, Ashaneer Home, Rupnagar, Kasturi Children Care Home, Six Mile, Sneha Bandhan, Jayanagar, Children Home for Boys, Fa-

tashil, Jalukbari Higher Secondary School, Jalukbari and Saarothi School for Children, Bijoynagar.

Speaking about the initiative, Dr Anil Kapur, Sr president, Meghalaya Cements Ltd, said, "Topcem is committed to contributing to the betterment of society. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's future and by providing these essential items, we hope to support them in their academic journey and enable them to pursue their aspirations with confidence."

Teachers and officials from the beneficiary institutions expressed gratitude, noting that the timely support will enhance classroom learning and ease the financial burden on families.

Launched in 2021, the Annual School Stationery Distribution Program has benefited over 3,000 children across the region, reinforcing Topcem Cement's commitment to empowering young learners. The brand remains dedicated to expanding this initiative in the coming years to create lasting impact in the communities it serves.

Cybersecurity of Power Grid Infrastructure Draws Policy Attention Amid Ongoing Parliament session

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: The increasing digitalisation of India's power sector has brought renewed focus on strengthening cybersecurity safeguards across the national transmission network. With modern grids relying heavily on connected systems, experts highlight the importance of advanced protection layers, real-time monitoring and international best practices to ensure uninterrupted power supply. The issue has also gained parliamentary attention. An unstarred question submitted in the Lok Sabha for reply on December 18 has sought updates from the Ministry of Power on various aspects of grid cybersecurity. These include the identification of substations requiring Next Generation Firewalls (NGFWs), priority locations for intervention, the status of cybersecurity audits undertaken over the past year, and ongoing collaboration with national agencies such as CERT-In for real-time monitoring and response coordination.

As part of the sector's modernisation efforts, utilities periodically revise procurement plans to align with emerging technical requirements. In this context, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (PGCIL), through an official communication dated 22 August 2025, informed bidders that the earlier tender for Procurement of Firewall for Substation had been annulled. But the annulment of the tender raised serious question by various stakeholders as Power Grid corporation required immediate upgradation as far as cyber security is concerned.

Experts say that as cyber threats evolve globally,



critical infrastructure operators are increasingly integrating multi-layer security approaches. These include NGFW deployment, Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) systems, intrusion-prevention tools, and compliance with international frameworks such as NERC-CIP and ISO 27001. Strengthening institutional coordination between central utilities, state entities and national cybersecurity agencies is also seen as a key component of future readiness.

Stakeholders expect that ongoing discussions, combined with parliamentary queries and periodic upgrade cycles, will support the development of a more resilient digital ecosystem for the power sector. With India's grid expanding and adopting advanced technologies, cybersecurity preparedness is anticipated to remain a priority area in the sector's long-term planning. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Six bodies laid to rest;

Assam minister Bimal Borah and Tinsukia MLA Sanjay Keshan were also present during the arrival of the bodies. "It is a tragic incident and we are doing the investigation. So far, the police have arrested the contractor and another person will be arrested soon. The police will investigate and bring justice to the family," said Tinsukia DC Swapneel Paul.

"Today, the team have retrieved 11 bodies from the site and the rescue operation was called off for today and tomorrow morning, again the rescue operation will start at 6 am. Yesterday, we have retrieved six bodies and handed them over to Tinsukia district administration," said Nang Chingni Choupoo, DDMO (In-charge) Anjaw district. Choupoo said, "It is one of the most dangerous rescue operation. The NDRF, BRO, Indian Army and official of Anjaw district administration were engaged in the Tinsukia operation. It is a very tough terrain and very risky operation."

A tragic vehicle accident involving a mini dumper occurred on December 8 last on the HMC (Hayuliang-Metengliang-Chaglagam) road, near Chaglagam Circle under Hayuliang Sub-Division, Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, in which 22 persons including the driver were reported to be involved.

The incident site is approximately 60 km from Hayuliang towards Chaglagam in a deep gorge, making access and retrieval extremely challenging.

The incident came to light after the lone survivor Budheswor Deep informed the people about the accident.

Ex-IAF personnel held for alleged

public outrage in the locality. The accused, Kulendra Sarma, a former Junior Warrant Officer who retired from the IAF in 2002, was apprehended following a secret operation carried out by Tezpur police based on confidential intelligence inputs. Sarma is a resident of Patiaachuburi under the Kachari Gaon police outpost.

Police sources said Sarma was detained during a discreet raid at his residence on Friday evening. Several electronic devices, including a mobile phone and a laptop, were seized during the operation. Forensic examination of the devices reportedly revealed objectionable material, leading to the registration of a case (Case No. 785/2025) under Sections 147, 148, 152, 238 and 62(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). He was subsequently placed under arrest.

Investigators allege that Sarma used WhatsApp to share sensitive defence-related information with individuals linked to Pakistani spy agencies. Authorities are now attempting to retrieve deleted messages and data from his devices to determine the full extent of the alleged security breach.

After retiring from the Air Force, Sarma worked as a Technical Officer in the Department of Electronics at Tezpur University and retired from the post around two years ago. He has been residing in the area for nearly a decade. Notably, his only son is currently serving in the Indian Air Force. Sarma was produced before a local court on Saturday, which granted police custody for five days for further interrogation.

Meanwhile, the arrest sparked protests in the neighbourhood, with residents demanding strict punishment and raising slogans condemning the accused.

Centre of Excellence in aerospace

in the Northeast. With rapid growth in aerospace, defence production, EV adoption and advanced automotive technologies across India, the Centre of Excellence is being seen as a strategic investment that could open new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the region's youth.

A senior government official said the facility will be operational soon, marking a major step toward transforming Assam into an advanced skilling and innovation destination.

'Guilty should be punished

Shyamkanu Mahanta was the chief organiser of the North East India Festival, to attend which Garg had gone to Singapore, where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19.

The singer's two personal security officers (PSOs) -- Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya -- have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust by misappropriating funds or property entrusted to them, Gupta said. (PTI)

Tripura CM claims BJP sweep

people", he said in an indirect challenge to ally TMP. Downplaying the TMP's claim of helping the BJP win the 2023 Assembly elections, Saha said the Motha was nowhere when the saffron party won the 2018 elections.

On Friday, the TMP supremo claimed that had the party contested in 30 constituencies in 2023 Assembly polls, the BJP probably would not have won the elections. Saha said there was a time when the Left parties would begin counting their seats from 20, referring to constituencies reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

"We also want to kick-start the seat tally from 20 just like the communists used to do before the 2018 Assembly elections. Our tribal leaders are frequently receiving threat calls. The more threats the BJP receives, the stronger it will become," he said. Saha also responded to its ally's persistent demand for speedy implementation of the Tripura accord for overall development of the tribal community in the northeastern state.

"In the accord, it was mentioned that there would be no agitation against the government for six months after signing it, but from day one they have been creating problems. You are being supported by goons of the Gana Mukti Parishad, the tribal wing of the CPI(M). Do politics by involving good people," he said referring to TMP's recent movement.

The chief minister also clarified the state government's position on the script of the Kokborok language amid TMP's demand for adoption of the Roman script.

"If the Chakma community can use its own script, why are you demanding Roman script for Kokborok? The tribal community has many intellectuals. Involve them to develop your own script. Imposing foreign scripts will adversely affect the culture, tradition and language of the indigenous people," he said. (PTI)

Ex-CM hopeful of positive result

MLA Kh Joykishan Singh said the meeting is expected to be related to the government formation. MLA RK Imo Singh said, "We have been called for a meeting tomorrow. Let's see what will happen. We don't have much detail." Some other BJP MLAs are also in the national capital for "personal reasons", a party leader said. BJP has 37 MLAs in the 60-member Manipur assembly.

The state has been under the President's Rule since February, after Singh resigned amid criticisms over his government's handling of the ethnic violence that broke out in May 2023. (PTI)

Making Assam flood free

government is seeking to position itself as one that delivers stability and security against one of the state's most enduring challenges. "Assam deserves lasting protection, not temporary repairs," Sarma said, asserting that the state is now moving towards a safer and more resilient future.

Gurjar praises Assam's

is empowering youth and women, fostering entrepreneurship in diverse sectors and contributing to financial inclusion for over 32 lakh women.

Assam is now firmly aligned with the National Cooperative Policy 2025's goal of establishing one cooperative in every village by 2026, Gurjar said, urging collective effort to build a prosperous, self-reliant and cooperative-led future for the state. State Minister for Cooperation Jogen Mohan, also speaking on the occasion, said the exhibition is a celebration of grassroots empowerment.

He praised the participants for achieving self-dependence and demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness by successfully turning waste into valuable resources using locally available materials.

He detailed the comprehensive benefits these cooperatives are bringing to the people, spanning diverse sectors from the production of essential goods to the success of women's Self-Help Groups.

The Cooperative Mela features participation from 160 cooperative societies representing key sectors such as handloom, fishery, dairy, agriculture and youth, and women-led enterprises, providing a vibrant platform for showcasing local products, innovations and cooperative success stories. (PTI)

Illegally transported livestock recovered in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Dec 13: The Nellie Police under Jagiroad co-district, acting on a tip-off, arrested a suspect and recovered nine bulls from Palahguri in Morigaon district at around 10:30 PM on Thursday night.

The arrested person was identified as Abdul Latif, a resident of Basundhari village under Jagiroad police station. Police sources said the smugglers were planning to illegally transport the livestock from Kamrup in Nagaon district via Dabarghat to Meghalaya.

During the operation, the police also seized the vehicle bearing registration number AS 21 AC 4898, in which the bulls were being transported in a highly congested and inhumane condition.

The rescued bulls were later handed over to Jyoti Go-Sala at Bengena Ati in Nagaon district for necessary treatment and care. Further investigation into the case is underway.

Combine harvester catches fire in Sootea paddy field

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 13: Sensation prevailed in and around the Sootea area when news spread that a combine harvester caught fire in the middle of a paddy field at Metera Gaon, causing panic among nearby paddy reapers.

According to local reports, the combine harvester, a paddy harvesting machine deployed at Metera Gaon and manufactured by the Chinese GAM company, suddenly caught fire. The blaze quickly engulfed the entire machine and spread to the surrounding paddy field.

Farmers attempted to control the fire, managing to prevent it from spreading further, but were unable to extinguish the machine itself. The local residents informed the fire brigade; however, the fire service could not reach the site due to lack of easy access.

One of the machine's owners stated that the fire broke out due to technical issues. Fortunately, no person was injured in the incident. It is noteworthy that a youth from Sootea had hired the harvester on rent to carry out paddy harvesting across the area.

Nagaon girl earns PhD in Engineering from US University

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 13: Dr Ananya Hazarika, a young achiever from Nagaon, has brought laurels to the town and the state by earning a PhD in Engineering from the prestigious Cleveland State University in the United States. A resident of Nagaon town, Dr Hazarika was awarded the doctoral degree in Computer and Electrical Engineering.



She completed her schooling from Dhing Christ Jyoti School and Nagaon Christ Jyoti School, before pursuing her B Tech from North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong and MTech from IIT Guwahati. She joined Cleveland State University in August 2021 as a full-time PhD scholar and successfully completed her research in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

Her research work has been published in several international journals and has received wide appreciation from the academic community. Dr Hazarika's achievement reflects her dedication, perseverance and academic excellence.

Her parents, Tarun Hazarika and Banti Hazarika, expressed immense happiness over her success. Adding another feather to her cap, Dr Hazarika has been appointed as a senior researcher at Fujitsu, a multinational company.

The convocation ceremony was held on December 12, during which she formally received her PhD degree. She is scheduled to join her new professional role in Pittsburgh, USA, in the first week of January. Dr Ananya Hazarika's accomplishment has been widely appreciated by the people of Nagaon and Assam and stands as an inspiration for aspiring students across the state.

Fastest LOI-to-operation project in India achieved in Dima Hasao

North Boro Lakhindong Limestone Block sets national record

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: In a major industrial milestone for Assam, the North Boro Lakhindong Limestone Block in Umrangso— auctioned to M/S Dalmia Bharat Ltd has achieved full operational status within an unprecedented nine months from the issuance of the Letter of Intent (LOI), marking the fastest LOI-to-operation project in India.

This exceptional achievement has been credited to the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, whose continued emphasis on rapid industrial development has transformed project execution timelines across the state.

The inauguration ceremony witnessed the presence of several key dignitaries, including NCHAC, and Kaushik Rai, Minister of Mines & Minerals, Government of Assam. Also present were Executive Member of the North



Chachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), and Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari, Director of Geology & Mining Paragmani Mahanta and Additional Secretary (Mines)

Pranjit Warry.

Speaking on the occasion, officials highlighted that the project will unlock significant economic opportunities for Dima Hasao district. With the limestone block entering full operation, the initiative is expected to create substantial local employment, reducing the need for educated youths to migrate outside the district, enhance Council revenue through mineral development and spur overall socio-economic growth in the region.

NCHAC CEM Debolal Gorlosa expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Minister, acknowledging his "vision, support and commitment toward accelerating industrial progress in Dima Hasao." He reiterated that this historic achievement marks a new chapter of development and self-reliance for the district.

Community conservation revives wild honey bees and wildlife at Chakrashila

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 13: Community-led conservation efforts at the Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary have led to the restoration of wild honey bee colonies and associated wildlife, showcasing the power of indigenous stewardship in protecting ecologically and culturally significant landscapes.

This success story was highlighted at the fourth edition of the Community Conference on Commons, organised by the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) from December 10 to 12, 2025, where Gala Basumaty, a local spiritual leader and environmentalist from Bandarpara village, shared his journey of mobilising the community to protect the Pedpakra sacred forest, located at the heart of the sanctuary.

In his presentation, Basumaty traced how destructive and unregulated honey-hunting practices had

posed serious threats to the ecological integrity and cultural sanctity of Pedpakra. He explained how a timely intervention by community leadership, combined with his personal commitment to conservation, gradually evolved into a community-wide movement that significantly reduced harmful honey-hunting and forest degradation.

The initiative received support from BERE (Bwiswmuthy Eco-Reverence Ensemble), which facilitated Basumaty's participation at the international forum to highlight indigenous-led conservation practices and the deep-rooted relationship between local communities and the hills and forests of Chakrashila. The presentation was facilitated by Pinky Brahma Choudhury, Founder of BERE.

To ensure the impact of the global platform resonated locally,

BERE also organised a community screening of the conference at Bandarpara Community Hall, alongside schoolchildren and residents to witness their collective story being shared internationally. The screening further provided exposure to community conservation initiatives and commons governance practices from other regions of India and across the world.

The Community Conference on Commons is a global forum that brings together community stewards, academicians, practitioners, policymakers and civil society organisations working to conserve and manage common natural resources. This year's conference coincided with World Commons Week and featured 164 presenters from 18 states across India and 10 countries worldwide, underscoring the growing global recognition of community-driven conservation models.

Two arrested in connection with Jorhat woman's murder

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 13: Two persons have been arrested in connection with the murder of a 70-year-old woman, Kunti Tanti, whose body was discovered on Thursday inside the Mohbandha tea estate in Jorhat district.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Munna Lohar of Ikorajan, Bokakhat in Golaghat district, and Putan Karmakar from near Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary under Mariani police station.

Police sources said the motive for the murder is yet to be established with further details expected as the investigation progresses. The body of the elderly woman was found in a semi-undisclosed condition with visible marks of violence on the chest and other parts. Evidence of the body being dragged inside the garden was also observed, prompting the deployment of a sniffer dog by the police.

First level checking of EVMs and VVPATs underway in KA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 13: As part of preparations for the General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 2026, the First Level Checking (FLC) of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) is being conducted in the Karbi Anglong Election District as per the schedule issued by the Election Department, Dispur.

The FLC process commenced on December 11 and will continue till December 22, 2025, at the EVM/VVPAT Warehouse located at DC Colony, Diphu. The checking process covers three Legislative Assembly Constituencies of the district—108 Bokajan (ST), 109 Howraghat (ST) and 110 Diphu (ST).

The exercise is being carried out in the presence of authorised representatives of recognised National and State political parties of Karbi Anglong district, ensuring transparency and strict adherence to the guidelines of the Election Commission of India.

The FLC of EVMs and VVPATs is being conducted daily from 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM by a team of five engineers from ECL. Roland Merry, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer and Nodal Officer (EVM), Nagaland, has been deputed by the Election Commission of India to inspect the preparedness, quality checking and storage of EVMs under Karbi Anglong Election District.

Jaggery farmers in KA face crisis as market sees no buyers

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 13: The biggest jaggery market in Assam, located in West Karbi Anglong, is witnessing a severe slowdown with no customers coming to buy jaggery. Traders who usually purchase jaggery for export to various parts of the state are reportedly absent, leaving local farmers in distress.

The situation was observed at the Kheroni weekly market, where farmers who cultivate sugarcane had brought jaggery for sale but found no buyers. Allegations have emerged that in recent days, police in Upper Assam have been conducting raids against jaggery traders, arresting them under the pretext of selling 'Lali Gur,' a type of low-grade or liquid jaggery.

As a result, the jaggery business has come to a standstill. Farmers are reportedly facing significant losses, unable to sell their produce. Meanwhile, some traders have alleged that Bokakhat police are collecting money from exporters who transport jaggery from Karbi Anglong to Upper Assam, further complicating the situation.

Sonitpur DC launches free coaching camp for remote area students

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 13: In a major effort to boost secondary education in remote areas, Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das inaugurated a free coaching camp for Class X students preparing for the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examination. The initiative targets government schools in interior parts of the district, where students face academic disadvantages due to poor connectivity, limited resources, and a shortage of subject teachers.

The newly launched camp at Chengliamora

Higher Secondary School, under the Naduar constituency, will also serve students from Bogijuli Higher Secondary School. A total of 71 Bodo-medium students will receive focused coaching in Mathematics, General Science and English. Three qualified Bodo-medium teachers, one for each subject have been engaged for the camp, with additional honorarium provided by the District Commissioner.

The inauguration was attended by Assistant Commissioner Rajen Acharya, District Education Officer Prabhat Das, School Management

Committee president Jogeswar Das, office-bearers of the Balipara Boro Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students' Union, along with headmasters, teachers and students.

Addressing the gathering, DC Ananda Kumar Das emphasised that no student should be deprived of quality education due to geographic or social disadvantages. He also distributed free educational kits to all 71 students, encouraging them to study diligently, build confidence and strive for excellence in the upcoming HSLC examination.

Vishal Mishra pays tribute to Zubeen Garg at Umrangso Falcon Festival

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 13: "Joy Zubeen da" (Hail/Victory to Zubeen-da) resonated from the stage as popular Bollywood playback singer Vishal Mishra paid tribute to the late Assamese singing icon Zubeen Garg while performing at the Falcon Festival in Umrangso. The heartfelt homage came on the very day a charge sheet was filed with Mishra recalling Zubeen da while singing the song 'Mayabini'.

The Falcon Festival held annually in Umrangso, Dima Hasao district, is a premier event in the Northeast aimed at raising awareness about the conservation of migratory birds, particularly the Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). These birds migrate from South Africa, East Africa and Siberia, crossing the Arabian Sea and reach the region around the end of October. The festival coincides with the arrival of migratory birds, adding a unique charm to the scenic hill district.

On Saturday, Vishal Mishra, as composer and singer, captivated the audience, interspersing his performance with repeated shouts of "Joy Zubeen Da." The audience joined in, singing 'Mayabini' together, creating an emotional moment at the festival.

The festivities continue with performances by popular singers Shilpa Rao and Nikita Gandhi, promising more musical highlights as the Falcon Festival celebrates both culture and wildlife conservation.

NFR GM lays foundation stone for new School building at Maligaon



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 13: In a significant step towards the development of educational infrastructure, the General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, laid the foundation stone for the construction of an additional double-storey building with 20 new rooms at Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School, Maligaon, on December 12, 2025.

NFR has been undertaking a series of important works across its jurisdiction, reaffirming its commitment to providing improved learning environments for students of railway schools. At Netaji Vidyapith Railway Higher Secondary School, several development initiatives are in progress alongside the new double-storey building. These include the establishment of a dedicated laboratory complex, provision of modern furniture, green boards, smart boards and CCTV systems, as well as the creation of a digital library and upgradation of computer lab facilities.

Additional improvements such as enhanced teacher rooms, upgraded toilet complexes, installation of water RO units, development of a music room, covered sheds, auditorium enhancement, fencing and improvement of the circulating area are also being taken up.

Several important works, both completed and ongoing, are transforming the educational infrastructure of railway schools under NFR.

Key initiatives currently underway include renovation and development works at Railway Higher Secondary School, Maligaon, along with the creation of a modern playground, upgraded prayer ground, improved boundary wall, vehicle parking area, entrance gate and smart classrooms. Construction and repair of the Dimapur Railway High School building and renovation of Railway Higher Secondary School, Alipurduar are also progressing steadily.

In recent months, NFR has completed several major projects, including repair and renovation of Railway Girls High School at New Jalpaiguri, development of playgrounds and prayer grounds, reconstruction of boundary walls, creation of vehicle parking spaces and entrance gates, and renovation and upgradation of Banimandir Railway Higher Secondary School at Siliguri. Renovation and repair of Railway Higher Secondary School at Lumding and upgradation of Railway Higher Secondary School at Badarpur have also been accomplished.

These initiatives reflect NFR's long-term vision to enhance academic facilities, strengthen basic infrastructure and create modern, student-centric learning spaces. With continuous upgrades, planned expansions and a strong focus on digital and infrastructural development, NFR remains committed to supporting educational excellence and the academic growth of children across its jurisdiction.

Karbi artisan Sabina Teronpi receives National Handicrafts Award

Assam weaver honoured by President Droupadi Murmu for preserving tribal textiles

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 13: Basapi Teronpi, a celebrated artisan and weaver from Assam's Karbi Anglong district, has received the National Handicrafts Award for the year 2023, which was presented by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, in the presence of Minister of State for External Affairs & Textiles, Pabitra Margherita, along with several dignitaries, held on last December 9 at Plenary Hall, Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

The Award is presented by the Ministry of Textiles, Govt of India, to outstanding master craftspersons in recognition of their outstanding contribution towards the development of craft. The award is among the highest awards for handicrafts artisans of India. Alongside, another celebrated artisan, Bapukan Payeng from Mokhuti village, Majuli, received the award for the year 2024.

Teronpi has received the National Handicrafts Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution in preserving and promoting traditional crafts. The award consists of a memento, a certificate and a cheque of ₹ 2 lakhs.

Back at home, the Chief Executive Member (CEM), Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council



(KAAC), Dr Tuliram Ronghang, congratulated Sabina Teronpi in his Facebook post, saying, "Truly a momentous occasion for Karbi Anglong!

Congratulations to Sabina Teronpi, on being conferred the prestigious Handicrafts Award 2023-2024."

MLA Darsing Ronghang also congratulated Teronpi, who happens to be his wife, for her success and achievement, writing via his Facebook page, "It is a moment of immense pride and joy as my wife, Sabina Teronpi, has been conferred the prestigious National Award for Handicrafts on Tribal Textiles from the President of India, Droupadi Murmu Ji."

About Sabina Teronpi: She is a resident of Matipung, Diphu. By profession, she is an LP School teacher teaching at Rongnighang LP School, Diphu. She is the wife of Howraghat MLA Darsing Ronghang.

At the initial stage, Teronpi took training on making dry flowers, dolls and pot paintings from a group of trainers from Guwahati way back in the 1990s in Diphu. By gaining basic knowledge in handicrafts and artisan works, Teronpi started her own venture with a handful of 10 to 12 people, making dry flower bouquets, embroideries, pot paintings, jams and pickles, bamboo and wood-crafts, and several other items.

Teronpi then took up textiles activities, opening

up weaving for young girls and women to produce Karbi traditional costumes and fashion clothes.

In 2000, Teronpi formed a society called M/S Matipung Boa Kata Samabai Samity Ltd, and got it registered with the Handloom & Textiles Department and also with the Development Commissioner (Handicraft), Jorhat. Under this society, she trained many local artisans in bamboo and wood crafts and weavers on handlooms. Sabina's remarkable dedication to Karbi looms and textiles has enriched the Karbi cultural identity and inspired artisans across the district and beyond.

She is an expert in traditional Karbi tribal textiles and particularly skilled in Saphee Lanphee (hand embroidery) crafts. Teronpi is recognised for her unwavering dedication to preserving, promoting, and innovating traditional Karbi art forms and the Karbi cultural heritage. Her creations are known for vibrant motifs, natural dyes and intricate detailing. Traditional items include the Seleng Pekok, a cotton garment worn over the upper body.

For over two decades, she has worked passionately to uplift indigenous artisans and empower rural women through skill development, earning

The future of Mobile Theatre and our responsibility

Mobile theatre has been working as a powerful element in the propagation and expansion of the Assamese language. Though various dialects and spoken forms prevail in different parts of Assam, the mobile stage has always held up a model of standard Assamese before the audience, helping to establish linguistic unity. Yet in some plays nowadays, distorted use of language and application of obscene words in the name of character popularity or humour have become a matter of concern. As a result, there is a danger that the new generation, who learn or imitate language by watching mobile theatre plays, may receive wrong lessons

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Mobile theatre is not merely a theatrical genre or a medium of entertainment on the cultural map of Assam; rather, it is a throbbing pulse of Assamese national life and a symbol of pride that has profoundly influenced our social system over several decades. This unique art form, unseen anywhere else in the world, has achieved a marvellous fusion of art and commerce where thousands of people sit together in temporary auditoria to enjoy plays. Yet with the changing social order, the impact of globalisation, and the rapid onslaught of technology, this historic institution now faces certain new and complex challenges. Unless we engage in deep reflection and discussion right now, the possibility of a threat to its very existence in the future cannot be ruled out.

The future of mobile theatre does not depend only on producers or actors and actresses; it rests on the sense of responsibility of the audience—that is, the general public of Assam and its conscious citizens—because this institution has played the role of a powerful carrier in taking our language, literature, and culture to the grassroots level. Therefore, at this critical moment, determining the future course of mobile theatre and carrying forward its heritage intact while keeping pace with the new era has become a moral and social duty for all of us.

The economic foundation of mobile theatre and its social impact are extremely wide-ranging, and for their analysis we must not look only at the external glamour but comprehend the vast economic cycle that operates behind the scenes. In a state like Assam, industrially backward and grappling with burning unemployment, mobile theatre has taken the shape of a huge unorganised industry that arranges livelihood for thousands of families. A single theatre troupe does not involve only actors and actresses; numerous technicians, lighting artists, sound engineers, pandal-building workers, cooks, drivers, and their assistants are associated with it. When a troupe travels to a village or town, an economic vibrancy is created in that area for a few days, benefiting local traders, small shopkeepers, and people connected with transportation. Yet at present the running costs of this industry are rising rapidly, and competition is intensifying in parallel. In order to attract audiences, excessive dependence on costly glamour and publicity sometimes leads to compromise in the core standard of the play. This trend of commercialisation raises apprehension that it may adversely affect the distinctive character of mobile theatre. For this industry to survive in the future, it must not remain confined merely to earning money; it has to live on as a healthy cultural movement, where producers develop the mentality of spending a fixed percentage of profit on improving the standard of plays and on the welfare of workers. Our duty is to understand this economic struggle and, instead of thinking our responsibility ends with buying a ticket, to help create a favourable environment for the sustainability of this industry.

The sophisticated lighting and sound tech-

niques used on today's mobile theatre stages carry the audience into a magical world and make it possible to present cinematic visuals in living form on stage. Yet this technological advancement has a negative side: sometimes the dazzle of technology devours the emotion of acting and the essence of the story. When excessive emphasis is placed on eye-catching scenery and technical tricks, there is a danger that the main element of drama—the spontaneous expression of human feeling—will fade. The real strength of mobile theatre lies hidden in its story and dialogue, which can touch the heart of the audience. In the future mobile theatre, technology must be used as a complement to the story so that it helps take the audience deeper into the play rather than remaining limited to external pomp. We want our folk arts and traditional elements to be presented in new forms through technology, but vigilance is needed so that mechanisation never suppresses human values. For playwrights and directors it is a big challenge to maintain a beautiful balance between modern technology and classical acting style and to give the audience a complete aesthetic experience.

The crisis of subject matter or script in mobile theatre has become one of the most impor-

tant topics of discussion today, and it will play a major role in determining the future direction of this art. In the past, literature-based, history-centred, and deeply socially relevant plays dominated the mobile stage, which not only entertained the audience but also provided food for thought. Yet in recent times, citing so-called audience taste and in pursuit of cheap popularity, some troupes have been seen giving importance to overly dramatic, illogical stories that merely stir emotions. Blind imitation of foreign-language films or serials has weakened our own sphere of original thought, and as a result there is a possibility that the respect of the new generation towards mobile theatre may decrease to some extent. If future mobile theatre wishes to preserve its existence with pride, it must once again connect itself with original plays that smell of the soil, reflect the real problems of society, and are composed on the basis of our own culture. There is abundant scope to write powerful plays dealing with various events happening in our society, superstition, corruption, and the complexities of human relationships. Writers must have the courage to choose subjects that can shake the audience and force them to self-examine. Here too we have a responsibility: to welcome good stories and strong subject matter and, by rejecting low-taste plays, indirectly compel producers to prepare plays of better quality.

Mobile theatre has been working as a powerful element in the propagation and expansion of the Assamese language. Though various dialects and spoken forms prevail in different parts of Assam, the mobile stage has always held up a model of standard Assamese before the audience, helping to establish linguistic unity. Yet in some plays nowadays, distorted use of language and application of obscene words in the name of character popularity or humour have become a matter of concern. As a result, there is a danger that the new generation, who learn or imitate language by watching mobile theatre plays, may receive wrong lessons. The responsibility of the future of mobile theatre is to protect this purity and dignity of language. Playwrights and actors-actresses should keep in mind while uttering every dialogue that they are not only entertainers; they are teachers of the language, one by one. Moreover, the mobile stage can also take the lead in uniting the diverse ethnic cultures, songs, melodies, and traditions of Assam and propagating a message of harmony. We hope that in the days to come mobile theatre will be transformed into a sacred pilgrimage site of language and culture where audiences will come not only to watch plays but also to search for their own linguistic and cultural roots. To fulfil this sacred duty, it is desirable that every theatre troupe rises above its commercial interest and gives priority to national interest.

In today's digital age, the rapid change taking place in audience mentality and the concept of entertainment is a big test for mobile theatre to keep pace with it. With the best entertainment of the world now available in people's palms, human patience has decreased and interest in sitting in one place for a long time to watch a play has somewhat diminished. Especially attracting the youth, who spend more time in the world of internet and social media, has become difficult. In this context, bringing some change in the presentation style of mobile theatre has become a demand of the time. Only by reducing the length of plays, making the story move faster, applying modern cinematic style in visualisation, and presenting through plays the problems related to the lives of the young generation can new audiences be attracted. Yet this does not mean that we will completely abandon our heritage. Rather, a new stream must be created by blending the old and the new. Parents in our society also have a responsibility to familiarise their children with the environment of mobile theatre. When a family sits together to watch a play, a family bond and an atmosphere of cultural exchange are created. The responsibility



of making mobile theatre relevant for the contemporary young generation instead of considering it only entertainment of the old generation will depend on the creativity of playwrights and directors.

For the healthy development and sustainability of mobile theatre, a positive and cooperative attitude from the government and administration is also necessary, although this industry is mainly run by the private sector. Instead of treating this vast industry merely as a source of tax collection, the government should recognise it as a glorious cultural heritage of Assam and adopt policies for its preservation and development. The deplorable condition of the roads used by theatre troupes for travel, uncertainty of power supply, and problems in getting permission to set up pandals in various places often put the troupes in trouble. If the government solves these basic problems, the journey of mobile theatre will become smoother. Moreover, the absence of any kind of social security or insurance for the thousands of workers and artists associated with this industry is a sad matter. If the government adopts welfare schemes for these artists and workers, they will be able to work with greater enthusiasm. On the other hand, a system of government honour or financial grant to troupes that produce good and quality plays will create a healthy competitive environment in this field. Of course, we must remain aware that under the name of government assistance the creative freedom of the troupes is not curtailed or political interference does not occur. Mobile theatre must always remain the beloved of the common people and,

instead of becoming a propaganda machine for someone, it should remain a reflection of the joys and sorrows of the masses.

Moreover, whatever discussion takes place about mobile theatre in print media and social media usually remains confined to glamour, remuneration of star artists, or controversial comments, which diverts the audience from the real beauty of the play. In-depth analytical writing on the literary value of a play, directorial skill, subtle aspects of acting, or social relevance is very rarely seen. A section of our intellectual society is also sometimes seen despising mobile theatre by calling it "light art," which is not acceptable at all. Mobile theatre is the only medium that can directly connect with thousands of rural audiences at once. Therefore, the duty of critics is to point out mistakes as well as to praise good work and help shape audience taste. When playwrights and producers know that the intellectual circle is keeping an eye on their work, they will become more conscious and responsible. The media should highlight the positive aspects of mobile theatre before society not only from a commercial point of view but with a sense of cultural responsibility, so that this art form can recover its lost prestige.

Mobile theatre was not created merely for entertainment; it is an expression of the fighting spirit of the Assamese nation. The indomitable courage with which mobile theatre troupes perform plays going village to village every year even amidst floods, disasters, and economic problems is nothing but another name for the irreplaceable desire of our nation to survive. Yet to keep this courage alive, we as audience cannot manage merely by clapping hands and floating in momentary excitement. We have to judge what we are watching and what is being shown to us. Audience indifference often patronises low-quality plays. We must consciously demand good plays. When audiences start rejecting illogical and cheap plays, producers will be forced to turn towards quality plays. Awakening this mass consciousness is the duty of every conscious citizen of ours. The mobile theatre pandal is not merely a place of commercial transaction; it must become an open school where people receive life lessons through entertainment. So that future mobile theatre does not remain busy only in building mountains of money but also extends a hand in building society, we must keep a constantly vigilant eye.

Finally, one thing is certain: no matter how much technology advances or how modern society becomes, the appeal of live acting by people of flesh and blood never ends. The future of mobile theatre is not dark, but it is facing challenges, and the ability to turn these challenges into opportunities lies in our own hands. Our duty is to carefully nurture this priceless asset and help remove the obstacles that come in the way of its evolution. We must dream of such a future where mobile theatre is not confined within the boundaries of Assam but becomes capable of representing Assamese culture in the world arena. For this, the honesty of producers, the dedication of artists, the far-sightedness of playwrights, and the conscious cooperation of audiences will be needed. If we all together build a healthy cultural environment, mobile theatre will continue to glitter age after age as the mirror of Assamese life. Come, let us all resolve that we will not only keep our mobile theatre alive but hand it over to future generations in a stronger, more humane, and more beautiful form, so that they too can proudly say that mobile theatre is our heritage and our cultural identity.



By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The mist rose slowly over the Brahmaputra, soft as a prayer and just as ancient. Riya leaned out of the window of the river-facing hotel in Jorhat and inhaled deeply. The cool December breeze smelled of grass, silt, and faraway mountains—mountains she had dreamt of touching ever since she was a child in Guwahati. Now she wasn't alone. Her husband, Arjun, walked up from behind and wrapped a shawl around her shoulders. "You'll catch a cold," he said.

"I've waited to see this since forever. Let me breathe it in." He smiled. They had married only eight days ago—two quiet ceremonies, one Assamese and one Bengali, and then a house full of voices, laughter, advice, and blessings. The honeymoon was their first silence. "Tomorrow we drive to Ziro," Arjun said. "You'll have all the mountain air you want."

Ziro—hidden in the green folds of Arunachal Pradesh—was to be their first destination. They had planned a simple week: Ziro, then Dirang, and finally Tawang. A honeymoon of forests and snow, of quiet trails and warm soups, of time spent simply being with each other. But love, like mountains, often carries unpredictable trails. Their Sumo driver, a cheerful man named Mibang, greeted them at dawn. By the time they crossed the Assam-Arunachal border gate at Kimin, the world had already changed. The air felt colder, the forests taller, the sound of human life quieter. Arjun spent the ride taking photos while Riya pressed her face to the glass, mesmerized by the clouds hanging low over the valleys like white curtains. After crossing Yazali, the road narrowed into a winding path. Pine trees emerged, their tall frames forming cathedral-like pillars on both sides. Birds they didn't recognize darted across the road. Occasionally, Mibang pointed at the forests. "This hill... people say strange things happen there in winter."

"What kind of strange things?" Arjun asked. "You hear whistles. Sometimes at night, footsteps on stones. Even when nobody is there."

"Wind, I think," Riya laughed nervously. "Maybe wind," the driver agreed, though his voice was not entirely light. When they reached Ziro by afternoon, the golden paddy fields of the Apatani valley stretched like a giant woven tapestry. They checked into a wooden homestay run by a warm Apatani couple, Auntie Yama and Uncle Naru.

The valley looked so serene that it was hard to imagine anything mysteri-

ous could happen here.

That night, over thukpa and smoked pork, Auntie Yama asked if they planned to walk to the forest shrine the next morning. "You should go early," she said. "The forest is beautiful at dawn. But don't wander off the trail."

"Why?" Riya asked. "There are places where guests... hear things," Arjun laughed. "Everyone here talks like a storyteller!" But Riya felt something tighten in her chest. The next morning, they set off toward the forest shrine—Hari Eco Park Trail. Brown pine needles cushioned their steps. The air smelled of resin and morning light filtered through the tall trunks in delicate lines. Halfway down the trail, Riya suddenly felt someone watching them. "Arjun," she whispered, "did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" asked Arjun. "Someone whistled," said Riya with surprise in his eye. "It's birds, Ri," Arjun said. Riya protested, "No... it didn't sound like a bird." But Arjun reassured her, holding her hand, and they continued until they reached the small Apatani shrine: simple wooden poles, woven bamboo, and prayer offerings. They sat on a fallen log. For a few minutes, silence wrapped around them. Then the whistling came again—three short notes. This time Arjun heard it clearly.

"Someone must be nearby," he said, though he didn't sound convinced. Riya scanned the trees. Through a gap, she thought she saw a figure—tall, unmoving, wrapped in something dark. "Arjun," she said slowly, "someone is standing there." He followed her gaze. The figure disappeared. They both froze.

"Let's go back," Riya whispered. He nodded. They walked quickly, hand in hand, not speaking until they reached the homestay. When they described what happened, Uncle Naru simply said, "It is an old forest. Old forests have old spirits. They don't harm people. But it is better not to look for them." Neither wanted to admit how shaken they were. The next day they left Ziro and drove toward Dirang. Fog lay thick on the road, swallowing hills and trees. When they reached Nyukmadung, a light drizzle began. By the time they reached Dirang Dzong, the fortress village was wrapped in cloud. Stone houses rose like ghosts from the mist. Children played by the river though the cold was sharp. They stayed in a homestay

overlooking the Dirang Chu River. That evening, after a bowl of hot momos, they walked along the suspension bridge, the wooden planks creaking beneath them.

"Maybe we imagined everything yesterday," Arjun said gently. "There was," she insisted, trembling. "Maybe," Riya agreed, though she wasn't sure. Halfway across the bridge, she suddenly felt cold fingers brush her arm. She gasped and jerked away. Arjun grabbed her. "What happened?"

"Something touched me!" "There's nobody here."

"There was," she insisted, trembling. "It felt real... like a hand." He looked around. Fog rolled across the river like smoke. The bridge was empty. They walked back quickly. Later that night, while Arjun slept, Riya dreamt of a figure standing at the edge of the forest—watching her with blank eyes. When she woke, her pillow was damp with tears. Their final destination was Tawang. The road from Dirang to Tawang passed through Sela Pass, a world carved out of snow and silence. At Sela Lake, they stepped out of the car. Snowflakes drifted lazily, touching their hair, their cheeks and their eyelashes.

"It's beautiful," Riya whispered. Arjun hugged her from behind. "We'll remember this forever." But as they walked toward the frozen lake, a strange thing happened. Riya saw footprints—fresh ones—leading from the flat snow toward the steep cliff beside the lake. But there were no footprints returning. "Arjun..." He followed her gaze. "That's odd," he admitted. "Someone must have walked here earlier."

"In this cold? Barely any tourists are here today." They followed the trail for a few meters. The footprints led to the edge of the cliff... and stopped.

No sign of a fall. No sign of retreat. It was as if the person simply vanished. Arjun's voice grew serious. "Let's go back to the car." She nodded. As they turned, Riya felt something behind her—close enough that she could sense breath, warmth, a presence. She spun around. Nobody. But the feeling lingered.

They reached Tawang by evening. The monastery, its golden rooftop, and rows of fluttering prayer flags greeted them like a blessing. If anything could calm the shadows following them, it was this place. Their room overlooked

the mountains. For the first time in days, Riya felt safe enough to smile. "Let's walk to the monastery early tomorrow," Arjun suggested. "The morning prayers will help." But that night, something happened that neither could explain. Riya woke at around 2:30 a.m. The room was dark. Arjun slept beside her. She turned toward the window. A figure stood outside—silhouetted against the faint moonlight. Tall. Still. Watching. She covered her mouth, choking back a scream. The figure raised a hand and pointed toward the mountains. Then it disappeared. She shook Arjun awake. "Someone was at the window!"

He grabbed a torch and hurried outside, but he found nothing—no footprints, no marks on the frost-covered ground. "Maybe it was a dream," he said gently. "No," she whispered. "It wasn't." The next morning, they visited Tawang Monastery. The chanting of the monks, deep and resonant, filled the hall like waves of warm air. Riya closed her eyes. A saffron-robed monk approached them. He was elderly, with kind eyes.

"You look troubled," he said gently. Riya hesitated but then told him everything—the forest, the bridge, Sela, the window. The monk listened patiently. When she finished, he said, "The mountains are alive. Some ancient presences move with the wind, with the snow, with memory. They do not harm. They observe."

"But why us?" Arjun asked. "Because you are at the beginning of something sacred—love. Mountains bless love, but they also test it. Fear makes the heart doubt. But love..." He smiled. "Love protects."

Riya felt tears gathering. "What should we do?" she whispered. "Walk together," the monk said. "Fear comes when one heart walks ahead and the other falls behind." On their last day, they took a short trek near Jung Falls. The air shimmered with cold spray. Prayer flags flapped wildly in the wind. They held hands.

For the first time, the mountain didn't feel threatening. It felt alive—watching, yes, but benign. As they sat on a mossy rock by the waterfall, Arjun said, "We faced all this together. Maybe that's the point." Riya rested her head on his shoulder. "I'm glad it was you beside me." Snow began to fall—soft, delicate flakes melting on



their hair. Far across the valley, almost hidden by fog, Riya saw a shape standing on a ridge.

A tall figure. Still. Watching. But this time, she didn't feel fear. She felt... acknowledged. The figure slowly raised a hand, as if in blessing. Riya raised hers in return. The figure dissolved into mist. On the drive back to Assam, the mountains seemed calmer. The forests no longer whispered threateningly. At Sela, the wind was gentle. At Dirang, the bridge did not creak with unseen footsteps. In Ziro, the pines swayed like old friends. Love had entered the mountains—and the mountains had accepted it. When they finally crossed back into Assam, Riya looked at Arjun and said, "Let's

come back here on our first anniversary."

"Of course," he said. "The mountains are part of our story now." She glanced once more at the fading peaks. And for a moment, just before the mountains disappeared behind the mist, she thought she heard a faint whistle—three short notes. Not threatening. Not frightening. A greeting... A promise. A blessing carried by the wind. (International Tagore Awardee writer Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee whose second book of fiction *Twilight of Love* (2025) is published in a former Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University and a multilingual poet. Email profpratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

BOOK REVIEW

NIL XAGOROR
XANKHADHWANI

By: Dr Sarita Sharma

Nil Xagoror Xankhadhwani by Sarmishtha Pritam unfolds as a tender, radiant love story between two contrasting lives—Arohi, whose world is anchored to a wheelchair, and Ribhu, a young man defined by movement, freedom, and youthful energy.

What begins as a simple connection slowly grows into a profound companionship where love flows in unexpected directions. At the centre of the narrative lies a striking interplay of opposites. Arohi's physical dependence on Ribhu is beautifully counterbalanced by Ribhu's quiet but unmistakable emotional dependence on her.

This becomes the story's emotional heartbeat—a powerful juxtaposition. Arohi's physical dependence on Ribhu contrasts beautifully with Ribhu's deep emotional dependence on her.

This inversion becomes the soul of the novel. Arohi relies on Ribhu for mobility, for physical ease, and for navigating a world that often overlooks or underestimates people with disabilities. Yet, Ribhu turns to Arohi for something far more essential—emotional grounding, understanding, stability, and unconditional acceptance.

Where he offers strength to her body, she offers strength to his heart. This delicate exchange creates a rare balance, where neither is weak nor strong alone. They complete one another.

Pritam portrays Arohi with quiet resilience and inner clarity.

Despite her physical limitations, she becomes Ribhu's safe space, the one person who listens without judgement, loves without expectation, and offers a refuge from the chaos of his own emotional world.

Her silence is not frailty, it is steadiness. Her stillness is not helplessness, it is rootedness. And in her presence, Ribhu discovers a sense of belonging he never knew he needed.

This narrative rises above stereotypes that often dominate stories about disabled protagonists.

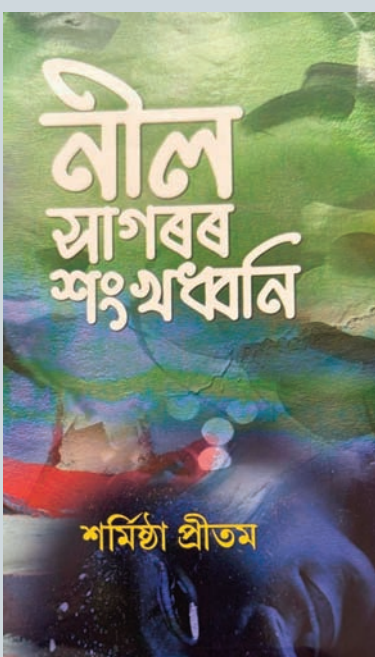
Instead of portraying Arohi as tragic or defeated, Pritam presents her as a woman fully capable of loving and being loved—deeply, passionately, and fearlessly.

The novel asserts an essential truth that physical disability does not diminish one's right to happiness, companionship, or a fulfilling life.

Arohi's journey challenges the conventional belief that a wheelchair-bound person must accept compromise or loneliness.

Here, she is cherished, valued, and chosen not out of pity, but out of genuine, transformative love.

In a society where narratives around disability often lean towards sorrow or sacrifice, Nil Xagoror Xankhadhwani stands apart. It celebrates a love that transcends physical constraints and societal expectations, leaving readers with a message of hope that emotional strength can reside in the most unexpected places, that love can balance two very different kinds of dependence, and that every individual regardless of physical ability, deserves the joy of companionship, a home of affection, and a life filled with dignity.



Echoes of a Promise

A Love Story Beyond Time

By: Chafikhur Rahman

(CONTD FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE)

Rudra took a deep breath. He did not answer directly. But his silence said enough.

As the SUV rolled back toward town, the sun was already low. The mist had lifted, and the hills glowed gold. Kaberi sat with her notebook open, scribbling down names, places, details. Rudra drove steadily, his mind racing with questions.

Who had killed them?

Why was the case closed so easily? And why did fate bring him and Kaberi here now, thirty years later? When they entered Diphu town, the streetlights flickered on. The market was alive with vendors shouting, frying, laughing. Yet Rudra and Kaberi felt a strange silence between them, the silence of two souls who had seen too much.

As Kaberi stepped out of the car at her bungalow, she paused. "Tomorrow morning, let us go to the river. To the place where it happened." Rudra nodded. "Yes. The river remembers. Maybe it will tell us."

Kaberi gave him a long look, her eyes both strong and soft. Then she said quietly, "Rudra... whatever happens, we are in this together."

And before he could reply, she walked inside. That night, Rudra lay awake in his quarters. The faces of villagers, the words of Kabita's aunt, the image of the lonely father at the river—they all spun in his mind.

When sleep finally came, he dreamed of walking by a river. A red duffa floated in the water, and someone called his name. But the name was not "Rudra."

It was "Ratneswar."

The river was silver in the early morning light, its surface broken by soft ripples. Mist hung above the water like a white shawl. The sound of flowing water was steady, like an old song without words. Rudra Baruah parked his SUV near the edge of the forest and stepped out. Kaberi Mahanta followed, her shawl drawn close against the chill.

Neither spoke. The silence of dawn was too deep to disturb. The file, the photographs, the villagers' stories—all of it had led them here. To this river. To this bend where, thirty years ago, two young lives had ended.

They walked down the muddy path, past tall bamboo and wild ferns. A bird flew out suddenly, startling Kaberi for a moment. Then, through the mist, they saw him.

An old man sat on a flat stone by the river bank. His hair was long, white as ash, his clothes simple and worn. His bare feet were in the water. He leaned forward slightly, whispering something again and again.

Rudra and Kaberi stopped a few steps behind him. The old man's voice carried over the sound of the river: "Ratneswar... Ratneswar... come back, my son."

Kaberi's throat tightened. She pressed her shawl to her chest. The old man dipped his hands into the river, lifted water, and let it fall again, as if washing invisible wounds. "You were my pride," he whispered. "You were my breath. Why did the river take you? Why did they kill you?"

Rudra cleared his throat gently. "Baba..." he said softly.

The old man turned. His eyes were clouded but sharp in their pain. For a moment he looked at Rudra as if seeing a ghost. Then he cried out, his voice breaking: "Ratneswar! My son has returned!"

He stumbled to his feet, his body trembling. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He reached out his hands toward Rudra. "You came back... I knew you would. The hills told me. The river told me. My boy, my Ratneswar!"

Kaberi gasped softly. She had heard of this moment before—villagers had said the father sometimes mistook strangers for his son. But standing there, watching the raw pain in his eyes, she felt her own heart twist.

Rudra stepped forward, steadying the man gently by his shoulders. "Baba... I am not your son. I am Rudra Baruah, Superintendent of Police. We have come to talk about Ratneswar... about what happened that night."

The old man shook his head wildly. "No, no. You are him. I see his face. I see his eyes. The world may call you by another name, but a father knows his child."

(CONTD TO NEXT ISSUE)

I AM NOT A FALLEN EGO'S
ILLCIT EXPRESSION...

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Vowing not to stoop to pick up fallen fortune,
I will taste squeezing situations
In your fiery eyeballs
In my skyrocketing patient journey
With my lonely but resolute self-respect;
Will remain silent if silence extinguish my selfish pain.
I am not a fallen ego's illicit expression,
My voice trusts my standpoint,
Expressing boldness galore
To connect my soul to spiritual bondings;
Why should I remain silent to help you grow poisonous?
Many a hypocrite dances in darkness
Away from the sources of light,
Joyfully ignoring all sorts of civil signals;
Broken heart of my global mind
Can't remain silent in self centred uncivil celebrations.
Your fiery eyes heniously decorate your frowning forehead
Threatening me in your soulless rhythmic ways
Not to be honest in my duty
But to be supportive to your dirty emotional politics;
Contrasting your illicit mind-games
I've armed my voice
With truth, peace and rationality
To overcome anything that prevents me from enjoying light.

Rising Like a
Phoenix

By: Rumakshi Khandu

Accusing her for adultery is easy.
Oh abusive mouth!
Your judgement of each woman
Being blasphemous marks easy.
I know you are the seed
Of that same ingrained patriarchy.
Please! Live her life
Just for an hour
Or exchange her crushed soul
For a day or two.
I wish, then you may know
The agony of her flopped marriage,
Her tattered beliefs,
And her shrunken eyes.
'Eyes' that once hoped for a paradise.

I suppose, your universal definition
Of a married woman gets
Withered like a deflated balloon
Or disfigures like a burnt plastic
Whenever you see her
'Staining' herself with her desires.
Desire to experience love
Desire to freely laugh.
But let me tell you
There is no need of your intrusion now
As you know what?
She has surpassed all your poisons,
Your stinking judgements
With her insouciant, aloof spirit
Singing the songs of wild mountains
Valleys and an endless field.
Now she is beyond
Your set limits
Of those imprisoned conventions.



Unveiling

By: Mowsam Hazarika

In the heart of matter, atoms play,
Electrons twirl in a cosmic ballet.
Forces weave and bonds are spun,
A dance of elements, joined as one.

In labs where wonders start to gleam,
Scientists chase a hidden dream.
From distant stars to life's deep thread,
Science shows the world ahead.

Naxalism benefits nobody, only peace can pave way for development: Amit Shah

RAIPUR, Dec 13: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said Naxalism does not benefit anyone - neither those who take up arms nor the security personnel, and asserted that only peace can pave the way for development.

Reiterating the Narendra Modi government's resolve to end Naxalism by March 31, 2026, he said the Centre has decided to transform Chhattisgarh's Bastar division, comprising seven districts, the most developed tribal region in the country in the next five years.

Addressing the closing ceremony of Bastar Olympic 2025 sport event at Indira Priyadarshini Stadium in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of state's Bastar district, Shah said Naxalism was like a "poisonous snake" that stalled the development in the region, and a "new chapter of development" will begin once the menace ends.

He appealed to those who are still associated with outlawed CPI (Maoists) to lay down arms and join the mainstream of society.

The government has decided to end "red terror" across the country before March 31, 2026, and the goal is now within reach, the Union minister said.

"I came here to participate in Bastar Olympic 2024, again in



2025, and I promise I will come in 2026 as well. When I arrive for the Bastar Olympic in 2026, Naxalism will have been wiped out from Chhattisgarh and the entire country," he said.

Shah said the seven districts of the Bastar division - Kanker, Kondagaon, Bastar, Sukma, Bijapur, Narayanpur and Dantewada - will be developed into the country's most advanced tribal districts by December 2030.

The BJP governments at the Centre and in the state are committed to

ensuring housing, electricity, toilets, tap water, LPG connections, five kg of free foodgrains and free medical treatment up to ₹ 5 lakh for every household in these districts, he said.

The Bastar division will be the most developed tribal region in the country, Shah said, adding that every village will be connected by roads, have electricity, banking facilities within a five-km radius and a strong network of primary and community health centres.

"Naxalism acted like a poisonous snake blocking development in this

region. With its end, a new chapter of development will begin," he said. "Naxalism will be eliminated by March 31, 2026, but I want to appeal to those still associated with it to lay down arms and join the mainstream for the welfare of their family and society.

"Naxalism benefits no one - not those who take up weapons, not tribals and not security personnel. Only peace can pave the way for development," he said, calling on misguided youth to take advantage of the rehabilitation policy and lead a dignified life.

Highlighting the changing face of Bastar, Shah said fear has been replaced by hope, schools bell now ring where gunfire once echoed, and roads, railways and highways are being built where development was once a distant dream.

Slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" have replaced slogans of 'Lal Salaam', marking a major transformation, he added.

"We are all committed to a developed Bastar. In this campaign that has been launched, the Chhattisgarh government and the Centre did not set the goal of merely engaging in encounters with armed cadres and killing them. More than 2,000 Naxalites have surrendered (in the last two years)," he said. (PTI)

Congress govt in Himachal failed to utilise funds sent by Centre: Nadda

SHIMLA, Dec 13: BJP chief J P Nadda on Saturday alleged that the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has failed to utilise the funds allocated by the Centre and therefore has no right to remain in power, accusing the state administration of functioning with a carefree mindset.

"Congress government in Himachal Pradesh is working with a mindset of 'Khao Piya Mauj karo, aage kisse dekha hai (indulge in merry making, who has seen the future)," he said and stressed that "double engine government is the only way to ensure development of the state".

Addressing an event here, Nadda accused the state government of corruption and misutilisation of funds given by the Centre under various heads, including building of houses, repair of roads and smart city.

Refuting the allegations of the Congress government that the Centre is not giving enough funds to the state, Nadda claimed, "₹ 3,789 crore were given for disaster relief, over ₹ 1,000 crore for Smart Cities besides funds for Vibrant Village development, medical colleges, AIIMS Bilaspur, a bulk drug park, four-lane highways and developed Baddi as a pharmaceutical hub in the state yet the Congress continues to spread falsehoods and mislead the innocent people of Himachal."

Targeting the Sukhu-led government for its incompetence, he claimed that the Centre has sent over ₹ 2,000 crore as special assistance and approved ₹ 1,442 crore under JICA funding, but the Congress government utilised only about 50 per cent of the funds in several schemes.

Taking a jibe at the Congress, Nadda said that Himachal's treasury is frequently shut, the entire administration runs on ad-hoc arrangements with the chief secretary and director general of police working on additional charge and there is no coordination between the chief minister and his ministers.

The Congress government has not brought even a single concrete project to the Centre, he said, and called upon BJP workers to take these facts and truths to every village and town, so that the "people of Himachal can free themselves from Congress misrule" and move decisively towards development and good governance.

"Victory of the NDA in recent Bihar Assembly polls has sent a clear message that people who want to run the country with the help of the intruders would not be accepted", said Nadda and asserted that the BJP would form government in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Nadda alleged that "earlier the government used to come to power with the support of all but used to be limited to a particular caste, segment and religion, but 11 years back Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed the political scenario of the country by becoming the 'Pradhan Sevak' of the nation and moved from Rajpath to Kartavya Path." He recalled that during the previous state Assembly elections, he had warned the people against making the mistake of bringing the



Congress to power, asserting that Himachal Pradesh's development is possible only under a "double-engine government".

He said the "BJP government is a performance (report-card) based government, what it promised, it delivered and in contrast, the UPA politics revolved around casteism, appeasement and nepotism, while BJP politics is rooted in accountability and good governance."

Citing recent electoral outcomes, Nadda said in Haryana and Maharashtra, the Congress had already ordered sweets and prepared for celebrations, but people voted for a responsible government under the leadership of Modi.

Nadda said all political parties other than the BJP are immersed in the pursuit of power and suffer from ideological emptiness, while the BJP works with the motto of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas".

The BJP president said that the Congress undermined Vande Mataram and the very spirit of India's freedom struggle, whereas the BJP practises politics aimed at taking the nation forward.

Highlighting India's transformation under Modi, Nadda said India has become the world's fourth-largest economy. Over 160 new airports have been built, and 'Made in India' now dominates mobile manufacturing and 'Ayushman Bharat' has benefited more than 62 crore people. Nadda also reiterated the achievements of the central government, including the abolition of 'Triple talaq', section 370 and the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

He said this gathering was not merely a political event, but an occasion to reaffirm the collective resolve for nation-building.

State BJP president Rajiv Bindal said that Congress was reduced to only six seats in Bihar, which is proof of its declining credibility and claimed that the same situation will prevail in the upcoming 2027 Himachal Pradesh assembly elections, where the Congress will not even reach double digits and will be reduced to only two seats.

Bindal said, "BJP workers and the people of the state have resolved to oust this anti-people Congress government and symbolically indicated that the bow and arrow have been handed over to Nadda and his aim is unerring." (PTI)

LAND DEAL ROW

Revenue officials should have refused faulty registrations: Pawar

NAGPUR, Dec 13: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Saturday said officials responsible for registering documents should have refused to process agreements that were not permissible under the law and clearly informed the parties concerned about such limitations.

His comments come against the backdrop of a notice issued by the deputy registrar to the firm of his son, Parth Pawar, seeking ₹ 21 crore in stamp duty and penalties in connection with a controversial land deal in Pune.

Hitting out at Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said as the deputy CM wields so much of influence in the government, would any officer dare to question him.

"Does anyone have the courage in the revenue department (to defy) if Parth Pawar comes up with any proposal?" Raut asked.

Recently, the Bombay High Court raised sharp questions regarding the police probe into the land deal, suggesting authorities might be shielding Parth Pawar by failing to name him in the FIR.

Ajit Pawar sought to dispel perceptions stemming from a bill cleared by the legislative assembly on Friday, which empowers the revenue minister to hold hearings in contentious cases related to the Inspector General of Registration (IGR).

Pawar said those who registered such documents were at fault, and officials should have exercised due diligence at the time of registration.

"The officials who received the documents for registration of a deal should have refused to register it. They should have clearly informed the parties that such an agreement cannot be processed," the deputy chief minister told reporters in Nagpur.

When asked about allegations that the bill was moved to protect Parth, who holds a 99 per cent equity stake in Amadea Enterprises LLP, Pawar reiterated that the responsibility lay with the registering authorities.

"We are elected representatives in the House, and people have voted for us. We are free to take decisions or make amendments we find suitable," he said when asked about the intent behind the amendment.

Revenue Minister Chandrashekar Bavankule has said that under the earlier provision, complainants dissatisfied with decisions at the level of the IGR had to approach the high court. After the amendment, such complainants can now approach the revenue minister, who will be authorised to hold hearings in these matters.

He also stated that certain transactions have caused financial losses to the state exchequer, necessitating a more effective redressal mechanism.

The sale of 40 acres of land in Pune's upscale Mundhwa area for ₹ 300 crore to Amadea Enterprises LLP, in which Parth Pawar is a majority partner, came under scrutiny after it emerged that the plot belongs to the government and it could not be sold. The firm was also allegedly exempted from paying ₹ 21 crore in stamp duty.

A committee headed by the Joint Inspector General of Registration had indicted Digvijay Patil (Parth Pawar's business partner and cousin), Sheetal Tejwani (who held the power of attorney on behalf of the land sellers), and sub-registrar Ravindra Taru. They were named in an FIR registered at a police station in Pune.

Parth Pawar was not named as his name didn't appear on any document, a senior official had said. (PTI)

Beauty of democracy: Tharoor congratulates BJP on civic body poll win in his constituency

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Saturday, while lauding the win of the UDF in Kerala local bodies elections, also congratulated the BJP for its historic performance in his Thiruvananthapuram constituency, calling it the "beauty of democracy".

In a post on X, he said the people's verdict must be respected, whether for the UDF overall or for the BJP in his constituency.

"What a day of amazing results in the Kerala local self-government elections! The mandate is clear, and the democratic spirit of the state shines through.

"A huge congratulations to

@UDFKerala for a truly impressive win across various local bodies! This is a massive endorsement and a powerful signal ahead of the state legislative elections. Hard work, a strong message and anti-incumbency have all clearly paid off to achieve a much better result than in 2020," Tharoor said.

He said he also acknowledges the historic performance of the BJP in Thiruvananthapuram, and "offer humble congratulations on their significant victory in the city corporation -? a strong showing that marks a notable shift in the capital's political landscape."

Tharoor said he campaigned for

a change from 45 years of the LDF "misrule", but the voters have ultimately rewarded another party that also sought a clear change in governance.

"That is the beauty of democracy. The people's verdict must be respected, whether for the UDF overall or for the BJP in my constituency.

"We will continue to work for the betterment of Kerala, advocating for the people's needs and upholding the principles of good governance. Onwards and upwards!" Tharoor, who is the MP from Thiruvananthapuram, said. (PTI)

Modi govt 'master' at renaming schemes: Congress

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: With the Cabinet approving a Bill to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Congress on Saturday said the Modi government is a "master" at renaming schemes and asked "what is wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi" that it had to take this step. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government is a "master" at renaming schemes and laws.

"They renamed the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and the rural LPG distribution programme to Ujjwala. They are experts in re-packaging and branding," he told PTI.

"They hate Pandit Nehru but it seems they also hate Mahatma Gandhi. What's wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi, why rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to Pujya Babu Employment Guarantee Scheme?" Ramesh said.

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved a Bill to rename the MGNREGA and increase the number of work days, sources said. According to them, the scheme will now be renamed as 'Poojya Babu Grameen Rozgar Yojna', and the number of work days under it would be increased from 100 days at present to 125 days. Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal said the PM, who once called MGNREGA a "monument of failure", is now renaming it to claim credit for the revolutionary scheme.

"It's yet another way of erasing Mahatma Gandhi from our national psyche, especially from the villages, where, he said, India's soul resides," he alleged.

"This move is also nothing but a cosmetic change to paper over the deliberate neglect being meted out to this scheme," Venugopal said on X. MGNREGA workers have been demanding higher wages, but the Centre has been reducing allocated funds for the scheme year after year, he said.

"The arrears keep piling up, and it seems to be a carefully planned strategy to engineer a slow death for the scheme. In reality, this government has no intent of delivering welfare - and is merely putting up a pretence when it has run out of ideas," Venugopal alleged.

"But Mr Modi, rename it all you want, the people know it was Dr Manmohan Singh ji and Smt Sonia Gandhi ji who brought this transformative scheme to every village of India," he said.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, better known as MGNREGA or NREGA, is a flagship scheme of the government aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in the rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It was enacted in 2005. (PTI)

Punjab rural polls: Mann slams Cong, SAD for 'high-handedness' charge

CHANDIGARH, Dec 13: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday slammed the Congress and Akali Dal over their "high-handedness" allegation against the AAP government in the zila parishad and panchayat samiti polls, saying they have accepted their defeat in the elections. Congress leader and former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi alleged that the AAP government in the state had printed fake ballot papers for the December 14 Zila Parishad and Block Samiti elections.

Referring to Channi's statement, Mann took on the Congress and reminded it that the AAP supported the grand old party over the issue of "vote theft" whereas it was questioning the polling through ballot papers in Punjab.

Mann also highlighted the Congress' defeat in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and bypolls in Punjab and asserted that where they register victory in polls, then voting process is right and where they lose, they start "crying".

Addressing the media here, Mann lambasted Channi, saying he made an "irresponsible" statement and also spoke four colloquial Punjabi phrases including 'Hath na pahunche, thoo kori' (which means out of reach) to lash out at the Congress. These four idioms are suitable for Congress which lose because of their "misdeeds" and blame others, he said.

"Charanjit Singh Channi who was the chief minister for 111 days made an irresponsible statement that AAP printed 100 ballot papers each with AAP symbol printed on them at each polling booth. If you analyze it then it shows, actually they have accepted their defeat," said Mann.

"Both the Congress and Akali Dal have accepted their defeat in the rural polls but are ac-



curring the AAP government of high-handedness against opposition candidates," the chief minister claimed. Giving details of the zila parishad and panchayat samiti polls, Mann said out of 2,833 zones of block samitis, 340 AAP candidates, three Congress nominees and eight Independents have been elected unopposed.

"If the Congress and independent candidates were elected unopposed, then wasn't there any high-handedness in these seats?" Mann asked.

He said AAP's 2,771 candidates, Congress' 2,433, SAD's 1,814, BJP's 1,127, BSP's 195, SAD (Amritsar)'s three and 686 others are fighting the panchayat samiti polls. "How were the nomination papers of opposition candidates found to be correct?" he asked rhetorically.

Opposition parties had earlier targeted the ruling AAP, accusing it of misusing official machinery in preventing their candidates from filing their nomination papers and rejecting their candidature.

He said there are a total of 347 Zila Parishad zones. For these zones, Congress is fighting 331

Avg age of school-going children picking up drugs, smoking habit in 10 Indian cities around 13 yrs: Study

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: School-going children are picking up drug and smoking habits and engaging in consumption of alcohol, with the average age of introduction to such harmful substances found to be around 13 years, suggesting a need for earlier interventions as early as primary school, a multi-city survey by AIIMS-Delhi said.

The findings also showed substance use increased in higher grades, with grade XI/XII students two times more likely to report use of substances when compared with grade VIII students. This emphasised the importance of continued prevention and intervention through middle and high school.

The study led by Dr Anju Dhawan of AIIMS's National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, published in the National Medical Journal of India this month, looks at adolescent substance use across diverse regions.

The survey included 5,920 students from classes 8, 9, 11 and 12 in urban government, private and rural schools across 10 cities -- Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Delhi, Dibrugarh, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jammu, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Ranchi. The data were collected between May 2018 and June 2019.



The average age of initiation for any substance was 12.9 (2.8) years. It was lowest for inhalants (11.3 years) followed by heroin (12.3 years) and opioid pharmaceuticals (without prescription: 12.5 years).

Overall, 15.1 per cent of participants reported lifetime use, 10.3 per cent reported past year use, and 7.2 per cent reported use in the past month of any substance, the study found.

The most common substances used in the past year, after tobacco (4 per cent) and alcohol (3.8 per cent), were opioids (2.8 per cent), followed by cannabis (2 per cent) and inhalants (1.9 per cent). Use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids was most common

among opioid users (90.2 per cent).

On being asked, 'Do you think this substance is easily available for a person of your age' separately for each substance category, nearly half the students (46.3 per cent) endorsed that tobacco products and more than one-third of the students (36.5 per cent) agreed that a person of their age can easily procure alcohol products.

Similarly, for Bhang (21.9 per cent), ganja/charas (16.1 per cent), inhalants (15.2 per cent), sedatives (13.7 per cent), opium and heroin (10 per cent each), the students endorsed that these can be easily procured.

About 95 per cent of the children, irrespective of their grade, agreed with the statement that 'drug use is harmful'.

The rates of substance use (any) among boys were significantly higher than those of girls for substance use (ever), use in the past year and use in the past 30 days. Compared to grade VIII students, grade IX students were more likely, and grade XI/XII students were twice as likely to have used any substance (ever).

The likelihood of past-year use of any substance

was also higher for grade IX students and for grade XI/XII students as compared to grade VIII students.

About 40 per cent of students mentioned that they had a family member who used tobacco or alcohol each. The use of cannabis (any product) and opioid (any product) by a family member was reported by 8.2 per cent and 3.9 per cent of students, respectively, while the use of other substances, such as inhalants/sedatives by family was 2-3 per cent, the study found.

A relatively smaller percentage of students reported use of tobacco or alcohol among peers as compared to among family members, while a higher percentage reported inhalants, sedatives, cannabis or opioid use among peers.

Children using substances (past year) compared to non-users reported significantly higher any substance use by their family members and peers.

There were 25.7 per cent students who replied 'yes' to the question 'conflicts/fights often occur in your family'. Most students also replied affirmatively to 'family members are aware of how their time is being spent' and 'family members are aware of with whom they spend their time'. (PTI)

CM Khandu reviews BRO Road Projects in Tawang

Progress of strategic border infrastructure discussed with DGBR



ITANAGAR, Dec 13: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday met

Director General Border Roads (DGBR) Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan and reviewed the progress of key road projects in the strategically important Tawang sector.

Describing it as a "productive morning interaction", Khandu said a comprehensive review was undertaken on ongoing BRO projects, alongside discussions on several critical ground-level challenges affecting execution in the high-altitude border district.

Tawang deputy commissioner Namgyal Angmo was also present during the interaction.

"The Border Roads Organisation continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening national security while making significant contributions to the socio-economic development of people living in border regions," the chief minister said in a post on X, acknowledging the organisation's sustained efforts in difficult conditions.

Highlighting the operational challenges faced by BRO, Khandu noted that the agency carries out its work despite operating in extremely challenging terrains, underscoring the importance of timely completion of road connectivity projects for both strategic preparedness and civilian mobility.

Road infrastructure in border areas like Tawang is considered crucial for enhancing defence logistics, improving disaster response capabilities and boosting local economic activities, particularly tourism and trade, officials said. (PTI)

Chowna Mein cautions youth against misinformation ahead of civic polls

Arunachal Dy CM urges first-time voters to exercise their franchise without fear



ITANAGAR, Dec 13: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein has urged first-time voters in the state to exercise their franchise without fear and doubt in the upcoming panchayat and municipal elections.

He cautioned them against misinformation and appealed to them for the preservation of social harmony.

He called upon the youth to recognise the responsibility that comes with the right to vote, describing them as "the future of the society".

"The state government is committed to creating opportunities for the youths and empower them," Mein said in a social media post after an interaction with

first-time voters from Lekang in Namsai district at his residence on Friday evening.

The deputy chief minister pointed out various youth-centric initiatives launched by the state government and the declaration of 2024-25 as the 'year of youths'.

He advised the young electors to respect elders and "keep the legacy of maintaining good relations between different communities in the region", underlining the importance of shared history, culture and peaceful co-existence.

Highlighting the growing influence of digital platforms, the deputy chief minister warned that while today's youths are empowered with technology, they must be careful not to be swayed away by propaganda and false narratives carried out by some.

He encouraged them to seek guidance from elders to better understand social values and community bonds. Extending his best wishes, Mein said he was confident that the first-time voters would exercise their adult franchise responsibly and with a positive mindset.

Arunachal Pradesh will hold simultaneous municipal and panchayat elections on December 15, with political parties intensifying voter outreach programmes across the state to boost participation, particularly among first-time voters, in the grassroots democratic process. (PTI)

Suspected spy apprehended from trade fair in Aalo



HT Correspondent
WEST SIANG, Dec 13: A suspected spy, identified as Hilal Ahmed (26), son of late Mohd Sadiq Mir and a resident of village Dardsun, PO Kralpora, PS Kralpora in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir, was apprehended from Aalo in West Siang district on 11 December. The suspect was detained from a shop operating at the trade fair in Old Market, Aalo.

According to police sources, Hilal Ahmed had arrived in Aalo on 25 November 2025 and was running a cloth shop at the trade fair in Old Market, Aalo, reportedly from Naharlagun. The apprehension followed a specific input from Itanagar Police regarding the possible presence of a suspect linked to Chimpu Police Station Case No 81/2025, in which two suspected spies had earlier been arrested.

Acting swiftly on the information, a team of Aalo Police activated its local sources and detained the suspect. After preliminary verification and as directed by the competent authority, Hilal Ahmed was formally handed over to Chimpu Police on 12 December 2025 for further investigation.

DGBR calls on Governor, reviews strategic road connectivity

Focus on border infrastructure, maintenance and swift restoration mechanisms

HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Dec 13: The Director General, Border Roads (DGBR), Lt General Raghu Srinivasan, PVSM, VSM, called on the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar, on Saturday. During the meeting, they discussed the need for strengthening strategic road connectivity to border areas, ensuring regular maintenance and establishing effective mechanisms for swift restoration whenever road communication is disrupted.

The Governor, on behalf of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, conveyed his gratitude to the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) for the successful execution of ten strategically vital roads and twenty-two bridges under the Arunank, Udayak, Vartak and Brahmanak Projects. These important infrastructure assets were virtually inaugurated on 7 December 2025 by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, marking a significant milestone in the State's infrastructure development.

The Governor stated that these na-



tional security infrastructure projects will greatly enhance military mobility, ensure year-round access to remote and sensitive regions and improve the operational readiness of the armed forces for quick response. He also noted that improved connectivity would bring substantial socio-economic benefits to local communities, fostering growth and improving livelihoods across Arunachal Pradesh.

He further commended the BRO for its humanitarian and community-oriented initiatives, including medical outreach camps in remote villages and

the establishment of Play and Learning Rooms for the children of casual labourers engaged in road construction. Such initiatives, he said, reflect the BRO's commitment not only to national security but also to the welfare of the people it serves.

The Director General of Border Roads briefed the Governor on the progress and challenges of ongoing strategic projects and assured him that the BRO remains committed to delivering high-quality road and infrastructure development in Arunachal Pradesh.

186 CRPF Battalion organises Swachhata drive at Namsai School

HT Correspondent
NAMSAI, Dec 13: As part of Swachhata Pakhwada being observed from December 1 to 15, 186 Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) conducted a comprehensive cleanliness drive on Satur-



day at the playground of Government Higher Secondary School, Namsai.

Under the leadership of Commandant DK Singh, personnel actively participated in cleaning the playground, systematically removing garbage, plastic waste and other

refuse, restoring the area to a hygienic condition. The drive aimed to spread awareness about cleanliness, environmental protection and public hygiene among students, local residents and the wider community, reinforcing the 186 Bn CRPF's commitment to supporting national campaigns like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

The programme was conducted under the supervision of DK Singh, with participation from AA Maheo, Second-in-Command (2IC), Sandip Sharma, Second-in-Command (2IC), Deputy Commandant Sourabh Somvanshi and Assistant Commandant Amit Verma. Their involvement motivated the troops and highlighted the importance of civic responsibility.

The initiative concluded with a strong message emphasising collective responsibility and sustained efforts to maintain cleanliness in public spaces, earning appreciation from local administration, youths and members of the public.

11 more bodies retrieved from Arunachal accident site

ITANAGAR, Dec 13: Eleven more bodies were retrieved on Saturday from the deep gorge in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district, where a mini-truck on which 22 labourers from Assam were travelling fell, an official said.

With this, 17 bodies have been recovered from the accident site, Anjaw's deputy commissioner Milo Kojin said.

He said three more bodies will be brought out on Sunday.

The operation, being conducted by a joint team of the NDRF and Army, resumed at 6 AM.

"The retrieval process was extremely difficult because of the treacherous terrain, and the gorge is very deep," Kojin said.

The operation was suspended around 4 pm due to low visibility and will be resumed on Sunday morning, he said. (PTI)

Campaign ends for Arunachal civic, rural polls

HT Correspondent

DBRUGARH, ITANAGAR, Dec 13: Our Dibrugarh Correspondent adds: Campaigning for Arunachal Pradesh's municipal and panchayat elections concluded at 4 PM on Saturday, setting the stage for polling this Monday, December 15. The final day saw intense political activity, with Lekang Assembly Constituency's NCP MLA, Likha Soni, leading a robust push for his party's candidates.

Expressing optimism for the upcoming results, MLA Soni stated, "We have run a strong, focused campaign connecting directly with the people and addressing their local needs. I expect a good performance from our NCP candidates across the wards and constituencies."

Polling is scheduled to begin at 7 AM on Monday and will conclude at 4 PM. A total of

to the death of a validly nominated candidate.

The counting of votes for all elections will take place on December 20.

Campaigning for the December 15 municipal and panchayat elections in Arunachal Pradesh ended on Saturday.

Panchayat and civic elections to Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) and Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) will be held on December 15.

The polling, which will begin at 7 AM on Monday, will end at 4 PM. State Election Commissioner (SEC) Rinchin Tashi said.

The campaigning for the polls ended at 4 PM on Saturday.

Tashi, in an order, said that no person shall convene, hold or attend any public meeting relating to panchayat and municipal elections in the state in the next 48 hours.

As many as 63 candidates have already been elected uncontested in municipal and rural elections in the state.

The ruling BJP won unopposed in 58 Zilla Parishad constituencies, besides one candidate from the National People's Party (NPP).

A total of 5,037 BJP candidates for gram panchayat member seats have also been declared elected without contest.

Four BJP candidates were also elected unopposed for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC).

A total of 440 candidates will contest 186 Zilla Parishad seats, along with 39 candidates for 16 IMC wards and 21 candidates for eight PMC wards.

The SEC said that a total of 13 gram panchayat constituencies received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny. Polling in the Dumba Singpho gram panchayat constituency has been countermanded due to the death of a validly nominated candidate.

A total of 8,31,648 voters -- including 7,59,210 for rural polls and 72,438 for civic polls are eligible to cast their ballots across 2,171 polling stations for panchayat elections, 67 for IMC and 12 for PMC polling stations.

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) will be used for municipal polls, while ballot boxes will be deployed for panchayat elections. The counting of votes will be held on December 20. (With inputs from PTI)

Preparatory meeting held for 'Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore' 2025 in Ziro

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, Dec 13: A preparatory meeting for the nationwide campaign 'Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore' 2025, to be observed during Good Governance Week from December 19 to 25, was convened on 12 December by Deputy Commissioner of Lower Subansiri District, Oli Perme, at the District Secretariat, Ziro.

Chairing the meeting, the DC highlighted the aims and objectives of the campaign, emphasising the government's commitment to responsive, transparent and citizen-friendly governance. She informed that the district administration will organise special camps across the district to resolve public grievances and ensure improved service delivery at the grassroots level.

District Planning Officer Joram Tatum presented a detailed layout of the week-long programme. For efficient coordination, related departments were grouped for joint activities. The Department of Education will work with the Department of Tax, Excise & Narcotics to conduct drug awareness programmes among students, while the Department of PHED and DUDA will focus on garbage management and sanitation awareness campaigns. Departments of Skill Development, Industry, Textile & Handicrafts and ArSRLM will collaborate to promote skill development and entrepreneurship among rural youth. Banks and the Post Office will create awareness about savings and insurance schemes to encourage financial literacy and security among rural citizens.

The meeting was attended by Superintendent of Police Keni Bagra, administrative officers and Heads of Departments, who assured full cooperation and active participation. The district administration aims to ensure that Good Governance Week 2025 delivers tangible benefits to citizens and strengthens service delivery mechanisms across Lower Subansiri District.

Discussions focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and ecological conservation

IIM Ahmedabad Shodhyatra team meets KT Parnaik



HT Correspondent
NAHARLAGUN, Dec 13: A delegation of the IIM Ahmedabad Shodhyatra, led by Prof Anil K Gupta, called on the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar, on 12 December. Prof Gupta, who undertook the Shodhyatra in the State,

shared his observations on the ecological, cultural and innovation potential of Arunachal Pradesh based on his interactions with farmers, knowledge holders, artisans, youth, traditional healers and community leaders.

The delegation narrated their experiences of visiting several villages in East Kameng

district and highlighted issues related to government schools, existing farming patterns and the need to better harness traditional knowledge of medicinal plants.

The Governor, while appreciating the enterprising and forward-looking nature of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, encouraged Prof Gupta to develop practical business,

marketing and financial models to guide aspiring entrepreneurs and support the growing ambitions of the State's youth. He said such frameworks would empower young people to convert their ideas into sustainable ventures and contribute meaningfully to economic growth.

Referring to his interaction with more than 100 Self-Help Groups at Lok Bhavan, the Governor said that many community members, particularly women, possess strong skills in agriculture, horticulture, handloom and handicrafts. However, he noted that focused support in branding, packaging and market linkage is essential to help their products reach wider markets and secure fair returns. Strengthening these capacities, he said, would uplift thousands of families and foster a vibrant local economy.

Highlighting the rich ecological wealth of the State, the Governor urged the visiting experts to contribute their knowledge towards strategic ecological conservation. He emphasised that protecting Arunachal Pradesh's pristine environment is both a responsibility and a crucial investment in the well-being of future generations.

Prof Anamika Dey, Deepak Sharma, PhD research scholar and other selected research scholars accompanied Prof Gupta during the meeting.

3rd T20I: A three-match 'audition' starts for Gill to find his game back



DHARAMSALA, Dec 13: The countdown to save his place in the playing XI begins for a beleaguered Shubman Gill, who is likely to get three matches against South Africa to prove his worth before the Indian team management switches to a 'Plan B' ahead of the T20 World Cup, starting in six weeks.

As India gear up to play the third T20I against the Proteas on Sunday in sub-10-degree temperatures in the lap of the ice-clad Dhuladhara range, things are suddenly heating up in the Indian dressing room, with the prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner.

Worse, his deputy Shubman Gill, who was pushed into the XI at the expense of a settled Sanju Samson, is not inspiring much confidence.

The South African pace attack featuring Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen, Lungi Ngidi, Othniel Baartman and Lutho Sipamla — has shown how to bowl on Indian tracks, and the HPCA Stadium strip, offering extra bounce and some movement off the surface, will certainly keep them interested.

Among all T20 sides, South Africa, in terms of personnel, appears to have the requisite balance to win the trophy in the Indian subcontinent this time. Quinton de Kock's return, along with the likes of Aiden Markram, Dewald Brevis, Donovan Ferreira, David Miller and all-rounder Jansen, gives their batting an intimidating look.

With only eight games, starting from the third T20I, left before the start of the T20 World Cup title defence, India's under-fire head coach Gautam Gambhir won't be able to afford, two out-of-form top-order batters in the starting line-up.

Being the skipper of the side, Surya will certainly have immunity going into the T20 World Cup despite being completely out of form for the past one year but same can't be said about Gill, who wasn't the original choice as an opener.

Gill's entry into the T20 set-up was a classic case of trying to fix something that ain't broken and things haven't looked good so far.

In this backdrop, Gill would need to bat out of his skin to prove that Ajit Agarkar-led committee wasn't wrong in throwing Samson under the bus for one bad series against England.

The stylish Indian Test and ODI skipper will have to find his

T20 game and at least score in two of the three matches if he doesn't want Samson to get his rightful place back or for that matter, find Yashasvi Jaiswal, with a fabulous T20I strike-rate of 165, enter the fray during New Zealand series.

Lack of clarity
While head coach Gambhir is too proud a person to admit but sending Axar Patel as a one drop batter during the second T20I was a "tactical brain fade" from the team's think-tank.

The kind misstep that was taken with Axar's promotion is unlikely to be repeated in the third game where skipper is expected to go back to No.3 where he has got a lot of success in his first few years at the international level.

Similarly, Shivam Dube being sent at number eight due to the shuffling of batting order was another poor call which would need course correction in the next game.

Is there a place for Kuldeep Yadav?

Kuldeep Yadav is one bowler who has consistently troubled the Proteas batter but in an Indian team where batting till No. 8 is non-negotiable, the left-arm wrist spinner often finds himself getting the rough end of the stick.

At Dharamsala too, he might have to sit out as Kuldeep and Varun Chakravarthy, two non-batters can't be clubbed in the same T20 playing eleven as that would lead to compromise in batting depth.

While Arshdeep hasn't had a good series so far, it will be interesting to find if team management can find a place for Kuldeep in the playing eleven with Hardik Pandya sharing the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah.

The five-match series is currently tied 1-1.

Teams:
India: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, NT Tilak Verma, Axar Patel, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Varun Chakravarthy, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Sanju Samson (wk), Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock, Reeza Hendricks, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Lutho Sipamla, Othniel Baartman, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, Corbin Bosch, Keshav Maharaj, George Linde.
Match Starts at 7 pm. (PTI)

Fans go on rampage as Messi's Kolkata tour turns 'Messy'

KOLKATA, Dec 13: Lionel Messi's much-hyped visit to the Salt Lake Stadium here on Saturday lasted 22 minutes, just enough to underline everything that is wrong in Indian football and the state administration's mismanagement.

What was billed as a historic celebration of the game's greatest icon degenerated into a spectacular breakdown of planning, policing and priorities, as angry fans ran riot at the venue after failing to get even a glimpse of their favourite superstar from Argentina.

The chaos was almost ironic. Messi's second visit to Kolkata -- part of a four-city India tour with Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi to follow -- came against the backdrop of the Indian football team's alarming slide to 142nd in the latest FIFA rankings, its lowest since October 2016.

Arguably the greatest player of all time, Messi arrived just as the sport in the country hit rock bottom, with the domestic calendar in limbo and governance in disarray, and the events at the Salt Lake Stadium summed it up better than any ranking ever could.

What was meant to be a red-letter day for the City of Joy turned into a nightmare by noon.

About 50,000 spectators, many of whom had paid ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 12,000 -- and in some cases up to ₹ 20,000 in the black market -- watched helplessly as a swarm of politicians, VVIPs, security personnel, and assorted hangers more interested in selfies than crowd control surrounded Messi.

The build-up had been electrifying with fans spending sleepless nights to catch his midnight arrival and then making a beeline to the stadium from early morning. The gates were opened at 8am.

Over 50,000 fans packed the stadium, chanting 'Messi, Messi' as former foot-



ballers from Mohun Bagan and Diamond Harbour FC -- all sporting No.10 jerseys -- played a 35-minute exhibition match.

At 11.30am, the GOAT arrived dressed in black, and stepped out of a white Audi to a thunderous applause, and the stadium literally shook. Messi was flanked by longtime Barcelona teammate Luis Suarez and Argentina World Cup winner Rodrigo De Paul.

Then it all began to unravel. Within minutes, Messi was surrounded by a bevy of politicians, police officers, VVIPs and their aides, forming a human blockade that ensured the paying public saw everything except Messi.

Messi looked confused and bemused, gamely signing autographs for former players while attempting a slow circuit of the ground. The situation only worsened.

Promoter Satadru Dutta, his voice choking, repeatedly pleaded over the public address system: "Please leave him alone.

Please vacate the ground."

The appeals fell on deaf ears as dignitaries continued to pile on, and Messi was virtually camouflaged amid a swarm of bodyguards and officials.

Ironically, the easiest way to locate him was by first spotting state sports minister Arup Biswas -- clad in a white kurta-pyjama and Jawahar coat -- whose attire made him visible from afar.

As word spread that the 'Prince of Kolkata' Sourav Ganguly has arrived, tensions escalated further.

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, waiting outside near the Vivekananda statue, eventually abandoned his plans altogether.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee who had already started from her residence for the venue had to make a U-turn and change her plans.

Messi was finally escorted out well before his scheduled one-hour stay, leaving the sta-

dium after spending just 22 minutes, and all hell broke loose thereafter.

Angry fans started with hurling bottles -- banned items in an otherwise sporting venue. It was baffling how they were allowed to enter with these objects, which also included food packets. Chairs were then ripped out and thrown.

Fibreglass seats lay smashed across the pitch and the synthetic track.

Two canopies erected for Messi and the chief minister's enclosure were torn apart, with attempts even made to set parts of them on fire before police intervened.

Gates were battered, the players' tunnel roof was hammered, and posters torn down. Some spectators fled clutching broken chairs as trophies of disorder, resembling the political scenes of Bangladesh some months back. The mayhem continued for nearly 90 minutes.

To their credit, the police showed remarkable restraint, repeatedly pleading with the crowd and resorting only to mild charges in what could easily have spiralled into a stampede.

"This is a complete failure," said Ajay Saha, who came with his 12-year-old son. "Cold drinks cost ₹ 150-200, water was ₹ 200, and we didn't even see Messi. We spent a month's salary to watch football, not politicians taking selfies."

The scenes inevitably evoked Kolkata's darker sporting memories -- the 1996 cricket World Cup semifinal at Eden Gardens, abandoned amid fires and flying bottles, and the 1980 Kolkata Derby stampede, which claimed 16 lives.

Messi came and left. The GOAT's visit was meant to inspire. Instead, it served as a mirror reflecting a game, and an administration, in profound disarray. (PTI)

Odisha Masters: Hooda, Isharani reach women's final



CUTTACK, Dec 13: Top seed Unnati Hooda and compatriot Isharani Baruah set up a women's singles final clash at the Odisha Masters Super 100 after registering contrasting semifinal victories here on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Hooda, a winner of the 2022 edition and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters, was stretched by former junior world No. 1 Tasnim Mir before prevailing 18-21, 21-16, 21-16 in a hard-fought encounter that lasted an hour.

After conceding the opening game, Hooda raised her intensity, controlled the rallies better and showed superior temperament in the closing stages of the next two games to book her place in the final.

In the other semifinal, Assam's Isharani produced a strong comeback to defeat Tanvi Hemanth 18-21, 21-7, 21-7.

In the men's singles, second seed Kiran George and Rounak Chouhan, who were part of India's historic World Junior Championships medal-winning squad, will clash in the semifinal to decide the finalist.

In the mixed doubles semifinals, India's S. Kanapuram and R. Uthayasooriyar bowed out after going down 16-21, 19-21 to fifth seeds Dejan Ferdinansyah and B. Wardana of Indonesia.

The Indonesian pair kept their composure in both games, handling pressure situations better to seal a straight-game victory and progress to the final. (PTI)

Lindsey Vonn places 2nd in a World Cup downhill a day after becoming oldest winner at age 41

ST MORITZ (SWITZERLAND), Dec 13: Lindsey Vonn nearly did it again. The 41-year-old American finished second in a World Cup downhill on Saturday, a day after becoming the oldest winner in the circuit's history.

After winning the season's opening downhill by nearly a full second on Friday, Vonn was beaten by only one racer this time: Emma Aicher of Germany was 0.24 seconds faster.

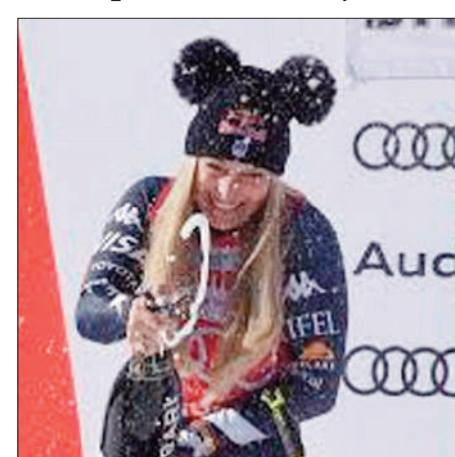
Vonn attributed a mistake landing a jump midway down her run for the gap, when she nearly lost her balance for an instant and leaned heavily on her left leg to raise herself back up.

"I'm a little bit tired from yesterday, there was a lot of emotion," Vonn told Swiss broadcaster RTS. "I thought I skied pretty well on top then I was just out of balance. I fell on my hip. Yeah, didn't ski the bottom the way I wanted to."

Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic champion from Italy, finished third, 0.29 behind, and Breezy Johnson, the American world champion, was fourth, 0.40 back.

Vonn, who is preparing for the Milan Cortina Olympics, went into first position with her run down the sun-drenched Corviglia course. But the 22-year-old Aicher came down next and quickly pushed Vonn out of the leader's seat.

Vonn returned to skiing last season after nearly six years of retirement -- following a



partial replacement surgery on her right knee, which included inserting two pieces of titanium.

Vonn's results are shaping up to make her a top medal contender at the Olympics -- and able to compete with skiers half her age. Women's Alpine skiing at the Feb. 6-22 Winter Games will be contested at Cortina d'Ampezzo, where Vonn holds the record of 12 World Cup wins.

Vonn registered the top speed of 102.45 kph (64 mph) on the top section; increased her speed to 110.02 kph (68 mph) on the bottom and flew

a massive 41 meters (yards) off a jump toward the end of her run

Vonn also clocked the fastest time in the final sector -- a sign of her increased fitness this season. She said earlier this week that she added 12 pounds (5.5 kilograms) of muscle during dry-land training over the summer and followed a rigid diet.

When Vonn crossed the finish line and saw that she was ahead of Goggia, Vonn celebrated thinking that she had won. She let out a scream, punched the air with one of her poles and then raised her arms over her head, shaking her head in apparent disbelief.

It was Vonn's 140th podium result and it came in a record-breaking 410th World Cup race. Former Austrian skier Renate Götschl held the previous record with 409 races.

It was Aicher's third World Cup victory and second in downhill. She's a rare all-around skier capable of being competitive in all four disciplines -- like Vonn at the height of her career. Aicher also finished on the podium in a slalom this season, placing third in Levi, Finland.

Vonn could aim for another victory in a super-G in St. Moritz on Sunday -- in a race that fellow American standout Mikaela Shiffrin is also expected to compete in.

Shiffrin has not been racing downhill. (AP)

Uthappa flags lack of role clarity in India's batting during big chase



NEW DELHI, Dec 13: Former India batter Rohit Uthappa has flagged a lack of role clarity in India's batting approach during a big chase, saying excessive flexibility early in the innings made run-scoring more complicated.

India suffered a 51-run loss in the second T20I against South

Africa after following for 162 in 19.1 overs while chasing a target of 214 at Mullanpur on Thursday.

Uthappa said the issue was not the loss of early wickets but the strategy adopted after Shubman Gill's dismissal, particularly with a deep batting line-up at India's disposal.

"When Shubman Gill got out, Axar Patel walked in with plenty of batting still to come. At that stage, he had to play the role of a pinch-hitter -- someone you are willing to risk early to get quick runs and take pressure off Abhishek Sharma," Uthappa said on Jio Hotstar.

Instead, Uthappa felt Axar's cautious run-a-ball 21 failed to ease the pressure, forcing a shift in

approach as wickets fell around him and slowing the chase further.

"At the international level, batters need clear roles and a clear idea of how they're going to construct an innings," he said.

"Flexibility with match-ups after the first six to eight overs is fine, but you still need a solid foundation before you can chase a big score -- you can't build a skyscraper without a base.

"Asking players to prepare for multiple roles in the same game makes run-scoring more complicated, and that's where India are missing a trick. I don't agree with being overly flexible so early in the innings beyond the openers," said the key member of the 2007 T20 World Cup winning side. (PTI)

AIFF expresses concerns after Messi event descends into chaos

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Saturday expressed concerns after the much-anticipated Lionel Messi event in Kolkata was marred by chaos due to poor crowd management and security lapses.

About 50,000 spectators, many of whom had paid ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 12,000 -- and in some cases up to ₹ 20,000 in the black market -- watched helplessly as a swarm of politicians, VVIPs, security personnel, and assorted hangers more interested in selfies than crowd control surrounded Messi, leaving the fans at the Salt Lake Stadium angry.

"The All India Football Federation is deeply concerned by the events that transpired at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krangan, where thousands of fans gathered to witness world football stars Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez, and Rodrigo de Paul.

"This was a private event organised by a PR agency. The AIFF was not involved in the organisation, planning, or execution of this event in any capacity," the AIFF said in a statement. Within minutes of his arrival at the venue, Messi was surrounded by a bevy of politicians, police officers, VVIPs and their aides, forming a human blockade that ensured the paying public saw everything except Messi.

The AIFF said it was not involved in the organisation, planning, or execution of the event in any capacity.

"This was a private event organised by a PR agency. Furthermore, the details of the event were neither communicated to the AIFF, nor was any clearance sought from the federation," the AIFF said.

"We urge all attendees to extend their full cooperation with the relevant authorities and to maintain order. The safety and security of all individuals involved must remain the paramount priority," the apex body said in the statement. (PTI)

For Noah Lyles, all-or-nothing mentality is way forward

PUNE, Dec 13: For Olympics 100m gold medallist and multiple-time world champion American sprinter Noah Lyles, 2026 season and beyond will be about having an "all-or-nothing" mentality.

Lyles, who aims to beat the legendary Usain Bolt's records in 100m and 200m events, says his new approach would demand his body to produce something never happened before as he looks to make the most of the home Olympics -- LA28 Games.

"I would say I'm starting 2026 with a jump-off-the-cliff mentality. If I had to give a little more detail, it's all or nothing. There's no in-between," Lyles, a brand ambassador for the Bajaj Pune Marathon, told PTI in an exclusive interview here on Saturday.

"There's no one foot in, one foot out. It's all or nothing. That's the type of mentality that I'm coming into 2026 with."

Lyles said the new approach will push him to reach those limits in training and beyond which he never has been through.

"I'm still the same person. Of course, I'm going to keep growing and keep trying to be better," he said.

"But I'm going to have such an all-or-nothing mentality in my training that it's going to demand something from my body, that it has not had produced before."

The 28-year-old flamboyant sprinter said he has not yet confirmed his participation in the inaugural edition of the Ultimate Championship, a biennial track and field event to be held by World Athletics next September in Budapest.

"No, I haven't confirmed my participation as of now.



That's kind of just where it's standing until we have a better understanding and a better working concept with World Athletics," he said.

"I'm an all-or-nothing person, so if I'm showing up to an event, you're getting my all. I don't want to show up anywhere that I can't give my everything and my all and my showmanship and my excitement to."

"If you're limiting me in doing that, then I can't give myself nor the fans what I believe would be the best performance," he added.

Lyles, who became the first sprinter since Bolt to record a treble in 2023 World Championships (100m, 200m and 4x100m relay), said Los Angeles is a "perfect

place for great things to happen" when asked if breaking the Jamaican legend's record is on his list of goals.

"I would say that LA is a perfect place for great races to happen and I'm very blessed to be able to have the Olympics show up in my lifetime on home soil," he said.

"I'm not going to let that opportunity go by without taking advantage of it and yes, the all-or-nothing mentality is something that I plan to continuously push forward," Lyles added.

"Can we give the greatest events to be seen?" Lyles said his decision in finalising participation in Ultimate Championships will also be swayed with what he can offer as an athlete.

"I constantly think about, 'can we give everybody the greatest events they've ever seen? How do we constantly recreate that or create it in a new light? If it's something that's never been done before, let's do that,'" he said.

"If it's something that has (been done before), let's figure out how to go even further this time. That's my thought process when it comes to major champs, how to structure the season, and what I want to do," he added.

Lyles said he will look to remain flexible in terms of his preparation and participation in events but would want to follow the routines he did ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics, where he won a gold in 100m and a bronze in 200m.

"... because everything is subject to change. We're in 2025, about to go into 2026, so that would technically be almost two years away (from LA28)," he said.