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- Ukraine can hold elections within months if security is ensured, Zelenskyy says
- Dozens killed in Haiti's capital following internal clashes within a powerful gang coalition

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- Congress' defeat in polls due to its leadership, not EVMs or 'vote chori': Shah
- DGCA to deploy staff inside IndiGo HQ amid tightening oversight of airline

Vol. No. II Issue No. 275 RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

Swahid Smarak Kshetra inaugurated at Paschim Boragaon
Tributes paid to martyrs of Assam Movement
State faces challenge of demographic pattern change: CM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Amidst the melody of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's timeless creation Swahid Pranamu Tumak reverberating through the air, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday inaugurated the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Paschim Boragaon on the occasion of Swahid Divas.

The Smarak Kshetra has been built as a heartfelt tribute to the sons and daughters of Assam who laid down their lives to protect the identity of the state.

The chief minister offered shradhdhanjali to the Bir Swahids of the Assam Movement at the Swahid Pranam Jyoti and interacted with the families of the martyrs.

Speaking on the occasion, chief minister Sarma said that the historic Assam Movement, which focussed on the expulsion of foreigners, began during a difficult period for Assam.

The movement has held a decisive place in the history of the state for many years, expressing the patriotism and sacrifice of the



people of Assam and marking a major struggle to protect identity, pride, language, culture and heritage. He said that each martyr who gave his life

dom of Khargeswar Talukdar during the Assam Movement, the chief minister said that on 2 December 1979, the chief election commissioner decided to move ahead with elections in Assam and began accepting nominations despite the opposition of the people.

The people of Assam had resolved that they would not allow elections to take place until the names of foreign nationals were removed from the electoral rolls and urged all political parties and potential candidates to stay away from the election.

Ignoring this appeal, on the morning of 10 December, the Congress candidate for the Barpeta constituency, Begum Abida Ahmed, wife of former President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, left Guwahati for Barpeta to file her nomination.

Sarma recalled how, as a fifth-grade student, he joined the protest along with the people to resist her journey to Barpeta.

He narrated how Abida Ahmed faced resistance along the . (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Do not sell land to unknown individuals, CM to public
'Assam govt has intensified drive to reclaim forest lands'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that the state government has intensified its drive to reclaim forest lands and public property allegedly encroached upon over the years, asserting that decisive steps have been taken to "push back" infiltrators and protect Assam's territorial and demographic integrity.

Speaking at the public event of Swahid Divas here, Sarma said the government has "started reclaiming lands from those who plundered Assam's forest resources and grabbed land", adding that in Bayadrava, authorities acted promptly against those who had "entered Assam illegally".

"Today, if anyone attempts to infiltrate Assam, this government and Assamese society have begun the process of sending them back

within two hours of their arrival," he said, stressing that public cooperation has strengthened administrative action.

Sarma said Assamese society is becoming economically self-reliant, enabling the collective aspiration over the years, asserting that this vision is rooted in the sacrifices of over 860 martyrs, whose role in safeguarding the state's identity and interests, he said, remains foundational.

"An Assam built on their sacrifices will be beautiful in every aspect—an Assam full of self-respect," he said.

He added that the state is "moving forward as our martyrs dreamed", citing the end of rhino poaching incidents, recovery of encroached forests, and what he described as firm action against infiltration. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Fire breaks out at commercial complex in Guwahati



GUWAHATI, Dec 10: A major fire broke out at a commercial complex, housing several offices of State Bank of India, in Assam's Guwahati, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Fire tenders have been trying to douse the flame for more than 15 hours, he said.

One fire fighter has suffered a minor injury so far, the official of the Fire & Emergency Services told PTI.

"The fire broke out at Swagata Square complex in ABC Point around midnight. Our personnel immediately responded to the call and reached the spot within 15 minutes. We managed to stop the

fire from spreading," he said.

The multi-storey building houses SBI's Zonal Office, commercial branch and the premium banking branch, besides a shopping mall.

"The fire originated at the godown of the mall on the second floor. As a lot of inflammable materials and clothes were stored, it turned into a massive blaze. We have contained it in the rest of the building, though the fire is still raging in one corner of the godown," he said.

"We have pressed into service 22 fire tenders in the operation. We also received prompt support from the Air Force, Indian Army and Guwahati Refinery," the official said.

Apart from Guwahati, fire tenders arrived from Morigaon and Nalbari districts as well, while more were on the way from Darang district, he said.

The NDRF was also called in to assist with its high-tech smoke reduction machine. "We hope that the fire (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

No complaint lodged; police seek details
Travel vlogger alleges harassment at Post Malone's concert in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Two foreigners were allegedly harassed and "touched without consent" at American rapper Post Malone's first Indian concert in Guwahati two days ago, one of them claimed in her social media account.

Guwahati Police said the victims have filed no complaint, but the force is trying to contact the women through their social media platforms for more details about the incident.

Emma, who described herself as a backpacking travel vlogger across South East Asia, in a video post on Instagram, claimed that she and her friend were harassed and "touched without consent" in the concert held at Veterinary College Playground in Khanapara.

Malone had his debut Indian concert in Guwahati on Monday as part of the Assam government's 'Policy for Concert Tourism'. More than 20,000 tickets were sold for the programme.

"Do you think concerts are a safe place for women in India? Last night at the Post Malone concert in Guwahati, things turned serious very quickly. As two women in the crowd, both me and @amina, finds were touched without consent within minutes of entering the

packed area," Emma said in her post on Tuesday.

After just 10 minutes, they had to force their way out and move to the back near the vendors because they no longer "felt safe", she added.

"Sadly, because of what happened, we were no longer able to enjoy the concert. This isn't normal crowd pushing. It's part of a wider issue of violence against women and the way harassment is minimised in public spaces," said the woman, who seems to be from Bangkok as per her social media account.

"No concert, no matter how big, should make women choose between enjoying the music and guarding their bodies," she added.

Emma, however, asserted that the incident is not a reflection of Guwahati as a whole, as throughout their time in the city, they experienced much kindness, warmth and genuine hospitality.

"We met countless people last night who were lovely, respectful, and excited to share the moment. But it only takes a small number of men acting without respect or consent to ruin an entire experience and create an environment of fear.

"Women deserve to feel safe. Not just

at concerts, but everywhere," she added.

When contacted, Deputy Commissioner (East) of Guwahati Police Mrinal Deka told PTI that no complaint has been filed with the police so far.

"We are looking into the matter. However, there is a point. There were hundreds of police personnel present inside the venue. In fact, our senior officials met her there. Why did she not inform them about the incident then itself?" he asked.

Deka said police are now taking the matter seriously and exploring all angles as alleged in the social media post.

Addressing a press conference, Guwahati Police Joint Commissioner Ankur Jain said they have sent a message to the victim women and requested them to provide details.

"After we saw the Insta reel about the incident in the morning, we immediately sent messages to the two victims on their X accounts, asking them for more details about the incident. We have not got any reply yet," he added.

The Guwahati Police gives the highest priority to women's safety, and there will be no compromise on it, Jain stressed.

"The video that she shared on Instagram is in reel (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

CM reviews preparations for PM Modi's Namrup visit

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 10: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday reviewed preparations at the Namrup venue ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the state later this month, during which he will lay the foundation stone of a landmark ₹ 11,000-crore Ammonia-Urea fertilizer project on December 21.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of the large industrial complex — expected to be a game-changer for the North East's agricultural sector — before addressing a major public rally at the site.

Sarma inspected the preparations along with State Power Minister and Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Naharkatia MLA Taranga Gogoi, Dulaijan MLA Terosh Gowala, Dibrugarh DC Bikram Kairi and senior officials.

The venue is being readied to host thousands of attendees for the high-profile ceremony and the rally that will follow.

Officials briefed the chief minister on key aspects of the event, including security arrangements, infrastructure readiness, logistical support and crowd management protocols required for the smooth conduct of the Prime Minister's programme.

The Ammonia-Urea complex, to be developed by AVFCCCL, is a major collaborative venture aimed at boosting regional industrial growth.

The Government of Assam holds the largest equity stake at 40%, alongside partners (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Five arrested for hunting wild birds in Kaziranga

GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Five people have been arrested for allegedly hunting wild birds in the northern range of Kaziranga National Park in Assam's Biswanath district, an official said on Wednesday.

Acting on specific inputs that some persons were setting up nets to trap wild birds at Bholakata Beel, a team of forest officials reached the spot and caught the five accused, he said.

A living wild bird, suspected to be Cotton Pygmy Goose (which is a Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972), a fishing net, two mobile phones, a torch and two white bags were seized from their possession, the official added. (PTI)

Historic Assam movement immortalised through Martyrs column: Sonowal

GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday said that the historic Assam movement against infiltrators has been immortalised by the 'Shaheed Smarak' (Martyrs' Column), inaugurated during the day, and its spirit will guide the state in its enduring pledge to safeguard identity, culture, and existence.

Sonowal, along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, dedicated the memorial site to the public and paid floral tributes to the martyrs of the Assam Movement, a six-year-long violent anti-foreigner agitation that began in 1979. On this day in that year, the agitation claimed its first victim.

Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal said the unparalleled sacrifice and courage of the martyrs would forever inspire generations to contribute meaningfully to the journey of nation-building while safeguarding land, language, culture, and identity.



"The Assam Movement united the greater Assamese society for a national cause, and its spirit lives on today as an unending pledge to safeguard identity and existence," the Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways said.

Sonowal said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken decisive steps to curb illegal infiltration—an issue that lay at the heart of the Assam Movement and posed a direct threat to India's sovereignty and the state's demographic identity.

He recalled his visit in September 2016 to the India-Bangladesh border at South Salmara-Mankachar with AASU leaders, MLAs, and senior officials, undertaken under the Prime Minister's guidance to assess border conditions firsthand.

Sonowal referred to key initiatives taken during his tenure as the chief minister of the state, including the provision of one-time financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh each to families of the martyrs in December 2016, and Rs 2 lakh each to those injured or persecuted during the movement, in March 2019.

"The Assam Movement is not just a historical chapter; it is the consciousness of identity and rights," he said.

"With deep commitment to its sentiment, we are determined to build a new, secure, and developed Assam. The legacy of the Movement will remain far-reaching in safeguarding national unity, integrity, and the future of the state," Sonowal added. (PTI)

Modi, Shah extends wishes on Swahid Divas

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Prime minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister extended their heart felt wishes on Swahid Divas on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled the valour of those who were part of the Assam Movement on the occasion of Swahid Divas.

"Today, on Swahid Divas, we recall the valour of all those who were a part of the Assam Movement," PM Modi said in a post on X.

"The Movement will always have a prime place in our history. We reiterate our commitment to fulfilling the dreams of those who participated in the Assam Movement, notably the strengthening of Assam's culture and the all-round progress of the state," the prime minister said.

The people of Assam faced the odds and shaped the history of the state, creating a

peerless example of patriotism during the Assam movement, Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

In a message posted on X, Shah said, "On Swahid Divas, remembering the sacrifices made by the people of Assam during the Assam Movement. They faced the odds and shaped the history of Assam, creating a peerless example of patriotism."

He emphasised that the NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is ensuring that their aspirations are fulfilled and is leading the state on the path of peace, progress, and growth.

The Assam Movement led by All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) from 1979 to 1985 was aimed against illegal migrants residing in the state and demanded that the Union government detect, disenfranchise and deport them. (With inputs from PTI)

US receives best ever offers from India, says USTR; two-day talks begin

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer has said the US has received "best" ever offers from India on the proposed trade agreement amid commencement of two-day talks here between the two countries.

Speaking at a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on Tuesday in Washington, Greer said that there is resistance in India to certain row crops and other meat and products. Row crops in the US include corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

"They have been very difficult nut to crack...but they have been quite forward leaning...the type of offers that they have been talking to us about ...have been the best, we have ever received as a country, so I think that is a viable alternative market," he said.

These remarks are important as both sides are trying to conclude the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

He said that the US team is in India for the trade talks.

US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer is leading the US team here for the negotiations. On the first day here on Wednesday he held discussions with Commerce Secretary

Rajesh Agrawal.

Both reviewed the ongoing negotiations for the agreement. The talks are aimed at finalising a mutually beneficial trade pact.

"The two sides exchanged views on matters related to India-US trade and economic ties, including on the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial Bilateral Trade Agreement," the department of commerce said in a social media post.

The talks are important as the Trump administration has imposed a steep 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods entering American markets.

The Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for conclusion of the negotiations and announcement of the deal as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

Though they are exploring other markets to maintain their export profits, the US is a key destination for them as it accounts for about 18 per cent of the country's exports.

First, the US imposed 25 per cent duty on Indian goods stating trade deficit concerns with India, which stood at around USD 46 billion in 2024-25. Additional 25 per cent penalty was imposed later on (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Increase in the number of bachelor's degree holders reported
Women's share in civil services up from 24% to 35% in 5 years; engineers over 50%: Govt data

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: The proportion of women qualifying for the Civil Services Examination (CSE) has increased from 24 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2023, the government told Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Engineering graduates consistently accounted for more than 50 per cent of successful candidates, data presented by Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Jitenendra Singh showed.

Responding to a question, the minister presented five-year data showing a steady rise in the number of female candidates in the final merit list — from 220 out of 922 candidates in 2019 to 397 out of 1,132 in 2023.

At the same time, engineering stream candidates continued to dominate the merit list, with 554 engineers recommended in 2023, far outnumbering those from humanities (368), science (137), and medical science (73).



The data shows that engineering graduates formed the largest cohort every

year from 2019 to 2023.

The government also reported an increase in the number of bachelor's degree holders selected, rising from 672 in 2019 to 848 in 2023.

According to the answer, "Details with regard to CSE-2024 is under compilation as Reserve List has been declared on October 28, 2025 and result of CSE 2025 is not yet declared."

The Civil Services Examination (CSE) is an exam conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to recruit candidates for All India Services like the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), and various other government services.

It is a three-stage process that includes a preliminary exam, a main examination (written), and a personality test (interview). (PTI)

Amazon pledges USD 35 bn investment in India by 2030

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: Amazon plans to invest USD 35 billion in India over the next five years to expand its businesses from quick commerce to cloud computing and artificial intelligence, as the global supermajor doubles down on its presence in the world's fastest-growing economy.

The investment by the US e-commerce giant comes a day after Microsoft pledged USD 17.5 billion in India for data centres, AI and cloud infrastructure by 2030. Previously, Google had committed USD 15 billion over the next five years to building AI data centres.

Amazon said its investments in areas such as artificial intelligence and logistics infrastructure through 2030 will help create an additional 1 million jobs in India.

The e-commerce giant is ramping up investment to compete with Walmart-backed Flipkart as well as homegrown giants like those of billionaire Mukesh Ambani and near-instant delivery firms like Eternal Ltd's Blinkit, Swiggy Ltd's Instamart and Zepto.

Amazon has invested USD 40 billion in India since 2010. In 2023, it announced a USD 26 billion investment.

The fresh investment will help increase exports for sellers in India to USD 80 billion by 2030 from USD 20 billion.

The investments, it said, are



"strategically aligned with India's national priorities and will focus on expanding AI capabilities, enhancing logistics infrastructure, supporting small business growth and creating jobs."

"We're excited to continue being a catalyst for India's growth, as we democratize access to AI for millions of Indians," said Amit Agarwal, head of emerging markets at Amazon.

Making the announcement during the Amazon Smbhav Summit, Agarwal said the company has set a target to quadruple exports from India to USD 80 billion from about USD 20 billion it has facilitated as of now and create an additional one million direct,

indirect, induced and seasonal jobs by 2030.

"Amazon to date has invested USD 40 billion in India since 2010. Now we will invest another USD 35 billion by 2030 across all our businesses in India," Agarwal said.

Agarwal said the company has invested USD 40 billion in India to date and is the largest foreign investor in India, according to a Keystone report compiled from publicly available data.

In May 2023, Amazon announced plans to invest USD 12.7 billion in India by 2030 into its local cloud and AI infrastructure across Telangana and Maharashtra.

The company has already invested USD 3.7 billion in India between 2016 and 2022.

Agarwal said that the company has invested at scale towards building physical and digital infrastructure, including fulfilment centres, transportation networks, data centres, digital payments infrastructure and technology development.

According to the Keystone report, Amazon has digitized over 12 million small businesses and enabled USD 20 billion in cumulative e-commerce exports, while supporting approximately 2.8 million direct, indirect, induced and seasonal jobs across industries in India in 2024.

To push export growth from India, Amazon launched a manufacturing-focused initiative, "Accelerate Exports", designed to connect digital entrepreneurs with trusted manufacturers while enabling manufacturers to become successful global sellers.

As part of the program, Amazon will host on-ground onboarding drives in over 10 manufacturing clusters across India, including Tirupur, Kanpur, and Surat.

At the Smbhav summit, Amazon announced a key partnership with the Apparel Export Promotion Council of India to expand and scale the program nationwide. (PTI)

Telangana, Google launch startup hub to boost AI innovation

HYDERABAD, Dec 10: The Telangana government and Google on Wednesday launched the Google for Startups Hub at the T-Hub startup incubator here.

The hub, inaugurated by Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Minister for IT and Industries D Sridhar Babu, is a dedicated Google-branded space aimed at supporting the state's growing startup ecosystem and helping it scale to deliver world-class innovations.

According to a release, this is the first such Google for Startups Hub to be launched as part of Telangana's broader incubation and innovation ecosystem.

Google plans to engage regional startups through the hub, offering free, year-long dedicated coworking seats for selected AI-first startups and access to a curated network of venture investors, the release said.

The Telangana government and Google will jointly support AI-first startups, nurture talent, and build direct links to international markets, it added.

As part of the global Google for Startups network, the hub will support founders throughout their journey—from incubation to innovation—by providing physical infrastructure, hands-on mentoring, AI expertise, and global visibility.

Startups will receive support from early product ideation to scaling AI-first businesses responsibly across India and global markets.

Founders will also gain access to Google experts in AI/ML, product, UX, and go-to-market strategies, along with programmes for women entrepreneurs, tier-2 innovators and university talent.

The hub will feature dedicated infrastructure and technology resources for startups jointly selected by Google and the Telangana government.

It will also include networking zones and event spaces for workshops, market-access programmes, founder-focused sessions and community events.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said, "By welcoming Google for Startups into Telangana's innovation and startup ecosystem, and allocating a sprawling campus to the hub, we are laying the foundation for a globally competitive innovation ecosystem right here in Telangana."

Google India Country Manager Preeti Lobana said the hub in Hyderabad will nurture talent and serve as an "innovation flywheel" for startups, helping the next generation of founders use AI to solve real-world challenges, build deep-tech solutions and innovate responsibly for India and the world. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

US receives best

India for buying Russian crude. India has stated that resolution of these tariffs would be key to firm up the first phase of the trade deal.

As part of the pact, the US is seeking duty concessions on agri products like almonds, corn and apples, and industrial goods. India has strongly opposed any concessions on agri and dairy sectors. India has stated that it will not compromise the interests of farmers and MSMEs.

Speaking on the sidelines of Pravasi Rajasthani Divas in Jaipur, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said talks with the US on the proposed bilateral trade agreement are progressing.

"Talks are continuously progressing with them. We are moving forward towards a bilateral trade agreement," Goyal told reporters.

The US' chief negotiator for the pact, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch is also part of the US delegation. India's chief negotiator is Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce, Darpan Jain. This is the US officials' second trip since the imposition of high tariffs. They last visited India on September 16.

While noting that the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) will take time, Agrawal had earlier said that India is engaged in protracted negotiations with the US on a framework trade deal that will address the reciprocal tariff challenge faced by Indian exporters.

India and the US are having two parallel negotiations - one on a framework trade deal to address tariffs and another on a comprehensive trade deal. In February, leaders of the two countries directed officials to negotiate an agreement.

It was planned to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall of 2025. So far, six rounds of negotiations have been held. The agreement aims to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030, from the current USD 191 billion.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports).

The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its total merchandise trade.

India's merchandise exports to the US declined for the second consecutive month in October, falling by 8.58 per cent to USD 6.3 billion. (PTI)

Fire breaks out

will be fully doused within the next one hour. The entire structure is huge, which is why it is taking longer," the senior IPS officer said. (PTI)

No complaint lodged

format. We can see the crowd, but the person who harassed the women is not clearly visible. So, we have asked for details. We will definitely investigate the matter," he added. (PTI)

CM reviews preparations

such as National Fertilizers Limited (NFL), Oil India Limited (OIL), Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL) and Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Limited (BVFCL).

Do not sell land

Reiterating concerns over the alleged sale of land to outsiders, Sarma appealed to the Assamese community not to sell land to unknown individuals due to economic hardship, warning that such trends could lead to "loss of land to infiltrators".

He further urged local business owners to avoid appointing people whose identity and background are not known.

The chief minister said Assam today stands at an important juncture, with improved security, stronger social confidence and renewed determination.

"We march towards a new Assam built on the sacrifices of more than 850 martyrs," he said, calling for collective vigilance and unity in preserving the state's cultural and territorial heritage.

State faces challenge

entire route from Guwahati to Barpeta. Police caught hold of Khargeswar Talukdar, a first-year Arts student of Howly College from Uzanbarbari village in Bhawanipur, and threw him into a roadside canal. He died later that night.

Inspired by his sacrifice and courage, 860 brave Assamese youth gave their lives during the Assam Movement, he said.

On the sacred day of Swahid Divas, the chief minister said, the grateful people of Assam remember the sacrifice of the martyrs with deep respect and take a renewed resolve.

He noted that construction of the Swahid Smarak Kshetra began in Guwahati on 10 December 2019. The memorial, built on 150 bighas of land at a cost of ₹170 crore, stands as a lasting tribute. This year's observance of Swahid Divas carries special significance, he said.

Sarma stated that long after the Assam Movement, the people lacked security and fresh threats loomed against the land and identity of Assam.

Assamese people felt unsafe in their own state. The lack of courage to implement the provisions of the Assam Accord weakened the society, he said.

Strangers entered Assam illegally, encroached upon the land of namghars and satras, and even targeted the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardev at Bardowa.

They infiltrated Kaziranga, killed rhinos and threatened the pride of the Assamese people.

Cultural heritage was attacked, economic independence was targeted, forest resources were looted, and even Assamese girls were assaulted.

These incidents created despair in the minds of the people, the chief minister remarked.

He said that during this period of crisis, the people of Assam drew strength from the sacrifices of the 860 martyrs of the Assam Movement and prepared to fight back.

In the elections of 2014, 2019 and 2021, people took a firm resolve not to hand Assam's political future to anyone other than the Assamese.

They united to fight on political, cultural and economic fronts.

After ten years of steady effort, the Assamese people grew stronger and more confident.

"Today", Sarma said, "if anyone dares to challenge the state, the people of Assam are prepared to respond appropriately."

Appealing for vigilance, Sarma urged people not to sell land to outsiders even during financial hardship, not to engage outsiders in trade or industry, not to employ outsiders in farms or gardens, not to recruit outsiders as drivers and not to allow strangers to run businesses on city footpaths.

He said that during the past five years, the state has freed lakhs of bighas of land from encroachers and created a system preventing outsiders from securing government jobs in Assam.

He informed that the government is considering a law that will bar anyone from buying land in areas where Assamese people have become a minority unless the buyer belongs to a family that has lived in Assam for three generations.

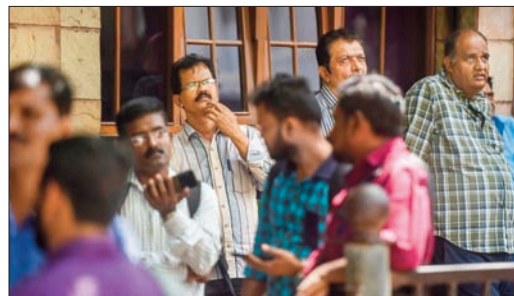
He called upon the people to protect namghars, satras and forest land. Recalling the days of the Assam Movement, the chief minister urged the people of the state to join a new struggle—political, cultural and economic—to defend Assamese pride and identity.

On the sacred occasion of Swahid Divas, he appealed to every Assamese to resolve to protect their community and refuse to surrender to outsiders.

He also called upon people to visit the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Boragaon and take a pledge to safeguard the state and the nation.

Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways Sarbananda Sonowal; minister for implementation of assam accord Atul Bora; water resources minister Pijush Hazarika; environment and forests minister Chandramohan Patowary; revenue minister Keshab Mahanta; MP Bijuli Kalita Medhi; deputy speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Numal Momin; chief secretary Ravi Kota; director general of police Harmeet Singh; several legislators; members of martyr families; and many distinguished guests were present on the occasion.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses for 3rd day as fag-end selloff erases gains



MUMBAI, Dec 10: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined for the third straight day on Wednesday to close at a nearly month's low, dragged by a last-hour selloff in consumer durables, private banks and IT shares.

In a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 275.01 points, or 0.32 per cent, to settle at 84,391.27, a level not seen since November 11. During the day, it hit an intraday high of 85,020.34 and a low of 84,313.62.

The 50-share NSE Nifty fell by 81.65 points, or 0.32 per cent, to close at a month's low of 25,758. In the intraday session, it hit a high of 25,947.65 and a low of 25,734.55.

Among the Sensex constituents, Eternal, Trent, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finance, Tata Consultancy Services, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Larsen & Toubro and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles were the laggards.

However, Tata Steel, Sun Pharmaceuticals, ITC, NTPC, Reliance Industries, HCL Technologies, PowerGrid, and Asian Paints were among the gainers.

"Indian markets mirrored global caution, weighed down by persistent FII outflows, INR weakness, and uncertainty surrounding US-India trade negotiations despite ongoing discussions. In the near term, market direction will be influenced by central bank cues and clarity on trade developments," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, Japan's Nikkei 225, and South Korea's KOSPI settled lower while Hong Kong's Hang Seng finished in the green territory.

Nair added that global equity markets experienced

continued volatility due to rising Japanese bond yields and indications of Bank of Japan monetary tightening, which are fostering risk-off sentiments in emerging markets.

"Focus now shifts to the upcoming U.S. Fed meeting, where a 25 basis points rate cut is widely expected. However, internal divisions and mixed economic indicators may temper expectations for further rate cuts in 2026," he said.

Broader markets also ended lower, with the BSE midcap gauge falling 1.08 per cent and the smallcap index slipping 0.58 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Services and Consumer Durables declined the most by 1.18 per cent each, Capital Goods by 0.99 per cent, Focused IT by 0.94 per cent, Information Technology by 0.90 per cent, Tech by 0.87 per cent, Industrials by 0.76 per cent, Consumer Discretionary by 0.72 per cent, and Telecommunication by 0.69 per cent.

On the other hand, Commodities, Energy, Utilities, Metal, Oil & Gas, ended in the green while FMCG settled flat.

As many as 2,332 stocks declined, while 1,857 advanced and 148 remain unchanged on the BSE.

European markets are broadly trading lower. Wall Street broadly ended lower in overnight deals on Tuesday.

"Markets remained volatile and ended lower, extending the cautious sentiment ahead of the US Federal Reserve's policy outcome," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"Indian equities ended Wednesday on a weak note as benchmark indices extended their losing streak amid global uncertainty, persistent profit-booking, and the absence of meaningful domestic triggers," Akash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking Pvt Ltd, said.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained the net sellers of equities worth ₹ 3,760.08 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 6,224.89 crore.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, slipped 0.03 per cent to USD 61.92 per barrel.

On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 436.41 points to close at a nearly two-week low of 84,666.28. The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped by 120.90 points to settle at 25,839.65. (PTI)

Meesho's shares list at over 53 pc premium; market valuation hits ₹77,000 cr

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: E-commerce firm Meesho made a strong debut on the stock exchanges on Wednesday and listed at over a 53 per cent premium against the issue price of ₹ 111, taking the company's market valuation to ₹ 77,000 crore.

The stock opened trading at ₹ 162.50, up 46.40 per cent from the issue price on the NSE. During the day, it surged by 59.90 per cent to hit a high of ₹ 177.49 apiece. The scrip ended the session at ₹ 170.45 apiece, up by 53.56 per cent.

On the BSE, Meesho's shares made a debut at ₹ 161.20, registering a jump of 45.22 per cent. In the intraday session, the stock climbed 59.95 per cent to hit a high of ₹ 177.55 before closing at ₹ 170.20 apiece, up by 53.33 per cent. At the end of the session, the company's market valuation stood at ₹ 76,926.32 crore and ₹ 76,813.49 crore on the NSE and BSE, respectively.

The robust listing came despite weak broader market sentiment. The 30-share benchmark, BSE Sensex, dropped by 275.01 points or 0.32 per cent to settle at 84,391.27, while the 50-share NSE Nifty fell by 81.65 points or 0.32 per cent to close at 25,758. The Initial Public Offer (IPO) of Meesho received 79.02 times subscription on the final day of share sale on Friday. The ₹ 5,421-crore IPO had a price band of ₹ 105-111 per share.

The IPO is a mix of fresh issue of shares worth ₹ 4,250 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 10.55 crore shares valued at ₹ 1,171 crore at the upper band, taking the total issue size to ₹ 5,421 crore. Meesho plans to utilise proceeds for investment in cloud infrastructure, marketing and brand initiatives, as well as funding inorganic growth through acquisitions and other strategic initiatives, and general corporate purposes. (PTI)

HDFC Bank Group concludes fourth edition of HDFC Tech Innovators 2025

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 10: The HDFC Bank Group has concluded the fourth edition of HDFC Tech Innovators 2025, selecting 10 winning startups across six sectors and conferring two special awards on emerging women founders.

The programme, organised by HDFC Bank, HDFC Capital and HDFC AMC with support from other Group companies,

drew over 1,600 applications from more than 290 cities, reflecting its growing reach within India's startup ecosystem.

The initiative, conceived to support early-stage innovators, enables startups to gain recognition and explore opportunities for product development with Group companies.

It aligns with HDFC Bank's sustained engagement with new-age enterprises, including its recent investment in quantum-safe cybersecurity firm QNu Labs and its CSR initiative Parivartan, which partners incubators across the country.

HDFC Bank's Group Head Ashish Parthasarthy said the programme reinforces the Bank's commitment to nurturing future-ready enterprises, highlighting offerings under the StartUp BuildUp programme such as customised current accounts, group health cover, commercial cards and regula-

tory support for FDI and ODI filings.

HDFC AMC MD & CEO Navneet Munot said innovation is reshaping every frontier of progress and affirmed the Group's role as a long-term partner in India's innovation journey. HDFC Capital CEO Vipul Roongta noted that technology-led innovation would be central to the transformation of the built-world value chain and stressed the Group's commitment to future-ready business models.

This year, the programme expanded beyond its earlier focus areas — PropTech, FinTech, Sustainability Tech, Consumer Tech and New-Age Tech — to include Defence & Space Tech, alongside a new award category for women entrepreneurs.

Key speakers included Deepak Parekh, Chairman of HDFC Capital and HDFC AMC, and Sashidhar Jagdishan, MD & CEO of HDFC Bank, along with

senior Group leaders.

A panel discussion on the evolving startup landscape featured DPIIT Joint Secretary Sanjit, IN-SPACE's Air Vice Marshal Dhananjay V Khot (retd), Razorpay Founder Shashank Kumar, A91 Partners' Gautam Mago, IvyCap Ventures' Vikram Gupta and HDFC Bank's Sunali Rohra. The winners of HDFC Tech Innovators 2025 were NewSpace Research & Technologies, Enlite Research, PadCare Labs, OrbitAID Aerospace, Wankel Energy Systems, Mindweave Transformers, Dvara E-Registry, Navana Tech, Hecta PropTech and Tech UniApps.

Richa Hukumchand of Pramatra Space Technology and Gouthami T S of Aquairx Autonomous Systems were recognised under the Emerging Women Founder category.

The 12 winning startups will receive year-long mentorship from senior HDFC Bank Group leaders.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Mohammed Fakharul Islam / Md Fakharul Islam (old name) SO-Akher Uddin Ahmed (father's name) residing at Vill.- Jogipara, PO- Balabari, PS-Dhula, Dist- Darrang (Assam), Pin-784146 shall henceforth be known as Fakharul Islam (New Name) as declared before the Notary Public, Darrang, Mangaldai vide SI No. 4116/25 dated: 13/09/2025 that Mohammed Fakharul Islam / Md Fakharul Islam and Fakharul Islam both are same and identical person.

Sd/-
Fakharul Islam
SO-Akher Uddin Ahmed
RO- Jogipara, PO- Balabari
Dist- Darrang (Assam)

E-AUCTION FOR COMMERCIAL ADVERTISEMENT AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Auction invited for commercial advertisement at various place on railway land at Tinsukia Town Over Tinsukia Division. Auction Catalogue No.: ADVT-TSK-2025-1. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Days: 1096; Auction Start Date & Time : At 11:00 hrs. on 29-12-2025.

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Lot End Date & Time
AA/1	ADVT-TSK-NTSK-OH-224-25-1 (Advertising-Out of Home)	At 11:30 hrs. on 29-12-2025.

Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Lot-wise closing time can be view in e-auction module of IREPS. Note : Prospective bidder are requested to visit e-auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.

Sr. DCM, Tinsukia
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Tributes paid to martyrs of the Assam Movement Swahid Divas observed across state

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 10: Swahid Divas, the solemn day dedicated to honouring the martyrs of the historic Assam Movement (1979-1985), was observed on Wednesday at the District Commissioner's Conference Hall in Haflong with heartfelt reverence and patriotic spirit. The programme was graced by District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS, who attended as the Chief Guest. He was joined by the NCHAC Deputy Secretary, Additional Deputy Commissioner and other senior officials and dignitaries from various departments. The ceremony began with the lighting of lamps and the offering of floral tributes to commemorate the more than 800 martyrs who laid down their lives during the six-year-long mass movement. In his address, District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS, reflected on the profound significance of the day. He noted that Swahid Divas is a reminder of the supreme sacrifices made by hundreds of youths and citizens who fought under the leadership of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Their struggle centred on the demand for the detection, deletion and deportation of illegal immigrants, a movement that ultimately shaped the political and social landscape of Assam and led to the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. He added that the observance of Swahid Divas serves not only as a tribute to the martyrs but also as a powerful reminder of the continued need to preserve the cultural identity, language and heritage of the Assamese people. The day, he said, reinforces the values of unity, civic responsibility and collective consciousness across the state.

The programme concluded with renewed calls for upholding the spirit of the Assam Movement and ensuring that the sacrifices of the martyrs continue to inspire future generations.

Our Sivasagar Correspondent adds: Attending the massive gathering at the Swahid Divas programme held at Boarding Field on Wednesday, Minister for Cultural Affairs Bimal Bora paid glowing tributes to eight Assam Movement martyrs from the district — Binu Das, Akash Baruah, Nekibuddin Ahmed, Keshov Saikia, Chandra Buragohain, Satyajit Hazarika, Prabhat Chetia and Hareswar Phukan.

In his speech, the minister referred to what he described as a conspiracy by the Sir Sadulla government on the eve of Independence to include Assam in Pakistan, stating that the 'Grow More Food' scheme had opened the floodgates for

migrants from East Bengal in an attempt to alter the state's demography. He said the plan eventually failed due to the resistance led by Bhimbor Deori, Gopinath Bordoloi and others.

Bora further remarked that 860 Assamese martyrs had sacrificed their lives during the Assam Movement, which, he noted was sparked by Begum Abida Ahmed's bid to file nomination papers in Barpeta, leading to the martyrdom of young Khargeswar Talukdar.

The Sivasagar District Administration felicitated several individuals who had actively participated in the Movement. The meeting was attended by Kushal Duwori, Chairperson of the Urban Swage Board, Mrinali Konwar, Chairperson of Sivasagar Municipality Board and Debashis Baruah, SP, Sivasagar.

Our Jagoiroad Correspondent adds: The Martyrs' Memorial Day was observed at the Jagoiroad multipurpose auditorium on Wednesday, under the Jagoiroad Co-District Commissioner office. The programme began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by Co-District Commissioner Hriday Kumar Das. The 856 martyrs of the Assam Movement were commemorated with a chorus composed by legendary singer Dr Bhupen Hazarika. The song 'Swahid pramo tumak...' was performed by 107 students of Jagoiroad College. The meeting was also attended by the Chief Executive Officer of Morigaon Zila Parishad Ananta Kumar Gogoi, Mayang Anchalik Panchayat president Debashis Das, Jagoiroad Development Authority Chairman Dibyajit Neog, Jagoiroad College Principal Dr Bhaben Chandra Neog and many other dignitaries.

Our Margherita Correspondent adds: Swahid Divas was observed on Wednesday with solemn respect and patriotic fervour at PM Shri Town High School, Margherita, under the aegis of the Margherita Co-District Administration as the programme was organised in accordance with the state-level observance held at Guwahati.

As part of the observance, floral tributes were offered and ceremonial lighting of the lamp at the Swahid Bedi was carried out by Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma in the presence of Rahul Doley, Co-District Commissioner, Margherita, along with other senior officers, representatives of educational institutions, students and members of the public.

Following the tributes and lamp-lighting, participants at Margherita joined the live webcast of the central state-level programme held at Guwahati, during which



Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma addressed the gathering, paid rich tributes to the 860 martyrs of the Assam Movement and called upon the youth to uphold the ideals of unity, integrity, patriotism and responsible citizenship.

After the live webcast of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma's address, Gyanjyoti Dutta, Circle Officer, Margherita, delivered the welcome speech, setting the tone for the local observance and reflecting on the sacrifices of the martyrs.

During the programme, Dr Amarjyoti Saikia, Principal of Bir Raghav Moran College, addressed the gathering, sharing insights on the historic struggle and his personal role in the Assam Movement. He also highlighted the sacrifices and hardships endured by the youth of the state during the agitation, urging the younger generation to remember their courage and dedication in defending the rights and identity of Assam.

Rupam Baruah, Literary Secretary, Tinsukia District Students' Union, also addressed the gathering and paid reverence to the martyrs of the Assam Move-

ment, inspiring the audience, especially the youth, to uphold the ideals and legacy of those who laid down their lives for the cause of Assam.

A melodious chorus on Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika's composition "Swahid Pronami Tumak" was performed by Bornali Borthakur and her team, and "Diga Naam" was rendered by Ritusna Konwar and her team, adding a musical tribute to the martyrs and creating a solemn and patriotic atmosphere during the programme.

Students and teachers participated wholeheartedly in paying homage to the martyrs through patriotic songs and brief local addresses. The programme concluded with a collective pledge to uphold the ideals for which the martyrs laid down their lives and to contribute towards building a strong, united and progressive nation.

Our Kokrajhar Correspondent adds: Along with the rest of the state, Swahid Divas was observed in Kokrajhar on Wednesday at the Kokrajhar Govt HS & MP School Playground, in solemn remembrance of the martyrs of the

Assam Movement. The programme was graced by BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary as Chief Guest, alongside senior officials, dignitaries and the families of martyrs.

The event, organised by the District Administration, Kokrajhar, began with floral tributes to the martyrs, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by the BTC Chief and other dignitaries. As part of the programme, six martyr families of Kokrajhar were felicitated, honouring their sacrifice and recognising their enduring contribution to the State's history and identity. A serene Naam Prasanga set a reflective tone, followed by a deeply moving moment as more than 4,000 participants joined in the collective rendition of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's "Swahid Pranamo Tumak".

Addressing the gathering, the BTC Chief lauded the Assam Government's initiative to observe Swahid Divas across all districts and expressed happiness to be part of Kokrajhar's commemoration. Reflecting on the sacrifices of the Assam Movement's martyrs, he noted that the state's progress in education, culture, language, development and institu-

tional growth has been made possible because of the courage and contributions of the Swahids. He urged that their legacy must remain alive in the conscience of every citizen of the state.

The programme was attended by BTC EM Derhasat Basumatary, Prakash Basumatary and Moon Moon Brahma, District Commissioner Masanda Pertin, Assistant Commissioners, officials of the District Administration and students, among others.

Our Jorhat Correspondent adds: Along with the rest of the state, Shaheed Divas was observed in Jorhat, where the district administration organised a commemorative event at the Jorhat Stadium. The programme began with the lighting of lamps and was followed by paying tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives to protect the identity of the Assamese people during the historic Assam Movement.

State Minister of Sports & Youth Welfare and Minority Welfare & Development Nandita Garlosa, MLA of Jorhat constituency Hitendra Nath Goswami, Chairman of the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council Pratap Kachari, Chairman of Assam Urban Water Supply & Sewerage Board Rana Goswami, Chairperson of Jorhat Municipal Board Lakhmi Khargaria, president of Jorhat Zila Parishad Surajit Saikia, Jorhat Deputy Commissioner Jay Shiwani, along with several other dignitaries, offered their deep respects to all the great martyrs of the Assam Movement.

Minister Nandita Garlosa, as the chief guest, paid a profound tribute to the martyrs, who sacrificed their lives to protect the identity of the Assamese during the historic movement. In her address, she remarked that the historic Shaheed Divas was associated with the sacrifices, offerings and patriotism of thousands of people. "The day reminds us of the struggle and sacrifices of the martyrs of the Assam Movement," she said.

Praising the initiative of the state government under the leadership of the Chief Minister to construct the Shaheed Memorial Complex at West Boragoan, she stated that this memorial will forever remind us of the martyrs' contributions and keep the flame of their sacrifice burning brightly in the hearts of future generations.

Meanwhile, Chandra Kanta Handique Bhawan, the headquarters of Assam Sahitya Sabha, was lit with earthen lamps in memory of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the six-year Assam Movement.

Air Chief Marshal witnesses Vijay Diwas aerial display at Mohanbari

IAF showcases strength; says fully prepared for two-front war



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 10: India, particularly the Indian Air Force, is totally prepared to fight a two-front war if such a situation ever arises. This was stated by Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, Chief of the Indian Air Force, during a media interaction at IAF Station Mohanbari, Dibrugarh on Wednesday.

The IAF Chief was in Mohanbari to attend the Vijay Diwas function, which marks India's spectacular victory over Pakistan in the 1971 Indo-Pak War that led to the birth of Bangladesh. "We are totally prepared to give

them (our enemy nations) a bloody nose if they go for any kind of misadventure," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Indian Air Force commemorated its historic 1971 war victory with a spectacular aerial display at Air Force Station Mohanbari as part of the Vijay Diwas Celebration 2025. Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh graced the event, which showcased the formidable power and precision of the IAF's fleet.

The day-long celebration, organised by Headquarters Eastern Air Command, captivated a massive audience, including military and civil

dignitaries, air veterans and hundreds of enthusiastic schoolchildren. The awe-inspiring flying display featured Sukhoi Su-30 fighters, Dornier Do-228 surveillance aircraft, Antonov An-32 transport planes and Chinook heavy-lift and Mi-17 helicopters. Running from 9 AM to 2:30 PM, the aerial demonstration highlighted the operational proficiency of the Indian Air Force.

Along with the flying display, the event included an exhibition and a special movie release dedicated to commemorating the 1971 war, which culminated in the liberation of Bangladesh. The commemoration carries deep significance for the Eastern Air Command, which played a decisive role by mounting crucial air operations from bases like Mohanbari.

Air Chief Marshal Singh also reflected warmly on the IAF's contribution during the historic war, stressing the importance of jointmanship. He recalled how the Indian Armed Forces delivered decisive blows, including the attack on the Governor's House in Bangladesh, leading to Pakistan seeking a ceasefire after 13 days of swift Indian action.

Highlighting the coordination between services, he noted that major operations, including river crossings and airdrops, were successful due to close cooperation between the Army and Air Force, with the Navy also playing a key role in the Western Sector. He added that the IAF continues to train and equip itself based on the valuable lessons learned from the war.

Awareness programme on Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 10: An awareness and sensitisation programme on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 was conducted on Wednesday at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's office in Dima Hasao. The event aimed to enhance understanding of disability rights, promote inclusive governance and strengthen the implementation of provisions under the Act at the district level.

The programme was jointly organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Assam in collaboration with the Office of the District Commissioner, Dima Hasao.

District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS, chaired the session, which was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Sangita Devi, heads of various government departments, representatives from the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and other officials.

Resource person Rajeev Bhardwaj delivered an in-depth presentation on the key features of the RPwD Act, emphasising equal rights, accessibility, government responsibilities and the importance of inter-departmental coordination to ensure disability-inclusive development.

Officials noted that such programmes play a crucial role in building awareness among administrators and frontline officers, paving the way for better service delivery and stronger protection of rights for persons with disabilities across the district.

Sivasagar mourns passing of activist Lina Borkotoky

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Dec 10: Popular socio-cultural activist of Sivasagar, Lina Borkotoky (54), passed away after a prolonged illness at a Guwahati hospital on Tuesday. Her body was brought to her Gohain Chuka Bisnu



Path residence on Wednesday and her last rites were performed at the Thanapatty crematorium in the presence of a large number of admirers and relatives.

She is survived by her husband Prayagn Borkotoky and son Prabhanshu Sekhar. A host of organisations, including Nityapith, Sivasagar Barowari Puja Committee, Brihatar Sivasagar Press Club and the All Assam United Brahmin Council have condoled the untimely death of the valiant woman who fought cancer for over ten years.

Asam Sahitya Sabha Chief criticises Cabinet circular on language policy

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Dec 10: President of Asam Sahitya Sabha, Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, has condemned a circular issued by the Home Department following a recent state Cabinet decision instructing that, starting from April 1, all official documents should be published in Assamese alongside English.

Dr Goswami, in a press statement, said the circular violates or nullifies the Assam Official Language Act of 1960, as it gives precedence to English over Assamese. "What steps will the Home Department take in regard to the circular issued following the State Cabinet's decision? The question naturally arises: 'Is English the mother tongue of the Assamese people?' Certainly not. Yet English is now being placed on an equal footing with Assamese in administrative and political matters. The Cabinet's decision has now formally put this on record for the future," he said.

Dr Goswami further criticised the administrative bureaucracy, stating that it had failed to understand the emotions of the Assamese people, the aspirations of indigenous communities and their deep attachment to the Assamese language. He added that this prompted him to ask, "When will English begin to overshadow Assamese?"

Seminars, awards and cultural programs highlight the importance of child rights and human dignity Human Rights Day 2025 observed

HT Correspondent
MANGALDAI, Dec 10: Mangaldai College (Autonomous) observed International Human Rights Day on Wednesday with a thought-provoking seminar titled "Child Rights: Protection and Care," organised by the Department of Political Science. The virtual session, attended by over 100 participants including faculty members, students and invited guests, featured child rights activist and senior journalist Mayukh Goswami as the resource person.

In his insightful address, Goswami underscored the critical importance of child rights in contemporary society. He explored the legal, social and moral dimensions of child protection, stressing that ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for every child is a shared societal responsibility. Drawing on data and real-life field experiences, he highlighted pressing issues such as child labour, child marriage, trafficking and various forms of abuse, emphasising the urgent need for greater awareness, timely intervention and active community participation.

The presentation resonated strongly with the audience, many of whom shared personal reflections and real-life examples during a lively question-and-answer session.



The programme began with Dr Barnali Deka, Head of the Department of Political Science, explaining the significance of International Human Rights Day. Associate Professor Anupam Thakuria delivered the welcome address, while Associate Professor Issa Ram Nath proposed the vote of thanks, bringing the event to a meaningful close.

Our Nagaon Correspondent adds: International Human Rights Day was observed with great significance in Nagaon, where the In-

ternational Human Rights Ambassadors Organisation organised a special programme to commemorate the occasion. The event took place at the Sankar Mission Eye Hospital Hall, drawing dignitaries, participants and members of the organisation from various regions.

The programme's highlight was the presence of the International Secretary General, who delivered an impactful speech stressing the importance of human rights, global

awareness and the collective responsibility to uphold human dignity. He emphasised unity, justice and active participation in safeguarding human rights across all communities.

As part of the celebration, certificates were provided to Naren Deka, Ajit Chandra Bora and Apurba Kr Das, honouring their dedicated efforts and contributions to society. Their work in community development and human welfare was highly appreciated.

Besides, diploma certificates in Human Rights were formally handed over to Haridev Bordoloi, Sekhar Jyoti Bora, Parikhit Bordoloi and Joydev Bordoloi, who successfully completed the course. Their achievement encourages them to continue advocating for justice and equality in the future.

The event also showcased vibrant cultural performances, including dance presentations by participants, adding colour and enthusiasm to the occasion. Members of the organisation, along with invited guests, actively took part in the programme.

The celebration concluded with a collective message of solidarity and a renewed commitment to promoting and protecting human rights for all.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

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

Execution of labour codes

The Union Minister of Labour and Employment Dr Mansukh Mandaviya announced implementation of the four controversial labour codes on November 21, 2025, and the government said that the codes are made "effective". Twelve days after, on December 3, 2025, he said while addressing CII IndiaEdge 2025 event in New Delhi that the Codes are likely to be fully operational from April, 2026. In between the times, the government has realized that it was easier said than done. The country is not prepared to implement the codes right now which is creating numerous hurdles in the way of implementation, apart from stiff resistance from the Central Trade Unions and unwillingness of certain states to implement them without further consultations with them. As many as seven States and UTs are delaying it. With the four labour codes — Code on Wages, 2019, Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 - notified on November 21, 2025, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has begun the process for enforcing rules, and stumbling on every step. To make "law on paper" into "law in practice" is obviously going to take months, even beyond the "transition window" from November 21, 2025 to April 1, 2026, presumed by the Centre, since full implementation would require finalisation of rules, making administrative machinery ready, compliance by employers, social security enrolments, inspection and enforcement mechanisms, workers acceptance, and convergence across states.

As of now, few states and UTs have either formally refused to implement the new notified labour codes or have not completed necessary rule-framing which effectively stalls implementation. They have actually signalled non-implementation or delays, and that is what "not implementing" means in their case. Kerala government has explicitly stated that it will not implement the central labour codes. The Minister of Labour of the state has said that they will not implement it before a further consultation with CTUs. As per the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment data, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Lakshadweep (UT) have not pre-published draft "rules" required under at least one of the four codes. Without these state-level rules, operationalising the codes in those states/UTs remains incomplete.

Until recently NCT of New Delhi has pre-published only the draft rules under the "Code on Wages, 2019". The other codes (Industrial Relations; Social Security; OSH) either lack rules or are not fully notified. As for Tamil Nadu, it has not yet pre-published draft rules under one of the four codes (the Code on Social Security, 2020), which means full implementation remains pending there. Because labour is on the Concurrent List under India's Constitution, both central and state governments need to notify implementing rules under the new Codes. States/UTs that don't pre-publish draft rules, or refuse to implement, effectively block many provisions of the Codes from operating for workers/employers in that region.

Stranded in the Sky: IndiGo's Great Failure

It was supposed to be the busiest, happiest travel month of the year in India, with weddings in full swing, school holidays starting, and millions of people rushing home or heading to the hills, but instead December 2025 has turned into a nightmare for anyone trying to fly with IndiGo Airlines. Over 2,100 flights canceled in a single week, thousands of passengers left in limbo at major airports from Delhi to Mumbai, Bengaluru to Hyderabad, and the ripple effects cascading into skyrocketing fares and governmental interventions. This is not merely a logistical hiccup; it is a crisis born of complacency, regulatory blind spots, and a high-stakes gamble with public trust that has exposed deep fissures in one of the world's fastest-growing aviation sectors.

The genesis of this chaos traces back to a seemingly benign policy shift, one designed to safeguard lives against the invisible peril of pilot fatigue. In January 2024, India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) unveiled comprehensive revisions to the Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms, a framework aimed at curbing exhaustion among aviators who navigate the relentless rhythm of commercial flying. These updates, rolled out in two phases, mandated an increase in mandatory weekly rest for pilots from 36 to 48 hours, redefined "night duties" to span from midnight to 6 a.m. (up from 5 a.m.), and capped night landings at just two per week per pilot, down from six. The intent was noble: aviation experts have long warned that fatigue contributes to up to 20 percent of incidents in the sector, and India's burgeoning air traffic—projected to triple by 2030—demanded proactive measures. The first phase took effect on July 1, 2025, giving airlines a full year to recalibrate rosters and bolster crew numbers. The second, more stringent provisions on night operations, followed on November 1.

IndiGo, with its fleet of over 400 Airbus A320s and a daily schedule of 2,300 flights ferrying 118 million passengers annually, appeared well-positioned to adapt. As the low-cost carrier that revolutionized Indian skies with affordable tickets and punctuality rates hovering above 85 percent, the airline had built an empire on efficiency. Yet, beneath this veneer lay a lean operational model predicated on razor-thin margins and minimal buffers. Reports from aviation insiders reveal that IndiGo maintained only a 4 percent surplus in pilot staffing, far below the 10 to 15 percent recommended for contingencies in high-density networks. Despite explicit DGCA notifications urging hiring ramps as early as January 2024, the airline delayed aggressive recruitment, banking perhaps on a policy reversal or the entry of new entrants like Akasa Air to dilute the pressure. Competitors such as Air India and SpiceJet, though not unscathed, navigated the transition without mass can-

cellations, underscoring that preparation was possible. The powder keg ignited in late November, when an Airbus software advisory for A320 fleets—intended to mitigate solar radiation interference with flight controls—grounded hundreds of aircraft temporarily for updates. IndiGo swiftly rectified the issue across 200 planes in under 24 hours, but the delays it caused pushed flights into the wee hours, triggering FDTL violations. Pilots, clocking out after mandatory rest thresholds, left gaping holes in rosters. What began as isolated delays snowballed into a cascade: a single late arrival in Delhi could domino into missed connections across the network, as IndiGo's hub-and-spoke model relies on synchronized precision. By December 2, cancellations ticked upward, with 73 flights axed at Bengaluru alone. Passengers, many en route to winter holidays or family weddings, started voicing bewilderment on social media, sharing videos of interminable queues and unheeded pleas at counters.

The dam broke on December 5, a day that will etch itself into the annals of Indian aviation as Black Friday in the skies. IndiGo announced the cancellation of all domestic departures from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport until midnight—over 500 flights in one fell swoop. Nationwide, the tally exceeded 1,000, representing more than half of the airline's scheduled operations. Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport reported 109 disruptions by mid-morning the next day, while Hyderabad and Lucknow saw dozens more grounded. Travelers flooded terminals, only to confront digital boards flashing "canceled" and counters overwhelmed by desperate inquiries. Eyewitness accounts paint a tableau of human anguish: a young professional from Ahmedabad, delayed 20 hours en route to Bengaluru, slumped against a pillar after missing a critical business meeting; a family in Kolkata, tears streaming as their child's medical transfer fell through; elderly passengers in Pune, abandoned with unclaimed luggage trolleys under harsh fluorescent lights. Social media erupted with raw fury—hashtags like #IndiGoCrisis and #IndiGoShame trended, amassing millions of views, as videos captured chants of "IndiGo, shame!" echoing through arrivals halls.

The human toll extended far beyond immediate inconvenience. For many, December is sacrosanct, a season of Diwali afterglow blending into Christmas preparations and matrimonial extravaganzas. Weddings, costing families lakhs in planning, unraveled as grooms and brides-to-be scrambled for alternatives, some resorting to overnight trains that sold out instantaneously. Medical emergencies compounded the tragedy: a diplomat's spouse, Singa-

pore's High Commissioner Simon Wong, missed his staffer's wedding in Deogarh, joining virtually in a poignant nod to resilience amid ruin. Job interviews evaporated for fresh graduates; exams were forfeited by students; reunions dissolved into recriminations. Stranded for up to 48 hours without adequate refreshments or accommodations—IndiGo's initial response was perfunctory, offering vouchers that proved insufficient amid surging demand—passengers slept on airport floors, their plight amplified by winter chills seeping through glass facades.

Economically, the fallout was seismic. IndiGo's near-monopoly on routes like Delhi to Goa or Mumbai to Srinagar meant alternatives were scarce, driving fares on surviving flights to dizzying heights. Same-day tickets from Delhi to Bengaluru, ordinarily Rs 4,000, ballooned to Rs 12,000 or more, according to aggregator data from MakeMyTrip. The Ministry of Civil Aviation, sensing a profiteering spiral, imposed emergency fare caps on December 6: economy class tickets now ceilinged between Rs 7,500 and Rs 18,000 based on distance, with real-time monitoring to enforce compliance. Air India and its low-cost arm, Air India Express, proactively matched these limits on non-stop domestics since

December 4, a gesture of corporate empathy amid the melee. Travel platforms like ixigo waived convenience fees for affected bookings from December 3 to 8, refunding sums to ease the sting. Yet, for small businesses reliant on just-in-time logistics or tourism operators in Goa and Kerala, the disruptions translated to tangible losses—canceled honeymooners, forfeited conference deals, and a projected Rs 500 crore hit to ancillary sectors in the crisis week alone.

IndiGo's leadership, caught off-guard by the scale, scrambled to contain the blaze. CEO Pieter Elbers, the Dutch expatriate at the helm since 2022, broke his silence with a video apology on X, his tone measured yet contrite: "I do understand that these disruptions have caused immense inconvenience... We will ensure refunds are processed automatically." The airline pledged full waivers on rescheduling and cancellations for bookings through December 15, alongside provisions for meals, hotels, and baggage reunification within 48 hours. Internally, a "reboot" of scheduling systems was underway, with Elbers forecasting progressive stabilization by December 10 to 15 and full normalcy by February 10, 2026. By December 6, operations limped back, with 95 percent of the network restored—1,500 flights airborne to 135 of 138 destinations—and cancellations dipping below 850. Mumbai saw 109 axed by noon, but Delhi's advisory heralded a "steady resumption."

The government's response was swift and multifaceted, blending carrot with stick. The DGCA, after convening emergency meetings with IndiGo executives, granted temporary exemptions from key FDTL clauses—no substitution of leave for weekly rest and night duty caps—effective immediately, a concession to avert total paralysis. Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu issued directives for refunds by 8 p.m. on December 7, barring rescheduling fees, and mandated dedicated passenger support cells at airports. Indian Railways mobilized 89 special trains over three days to ferry the stranded, a logistical lifeline that evoked memories of pandemic-era synergies. Yet, accountability loomed large: a show-cause notice to Elbers demanded explanations within 24 hours, with sources whispering of potential CEO ouster and steep penalties. A high-level committee was formed to probe the lapses, scrutinizing why IndiGo, forewarned for 18 months, failed to hire the requisite 200 pilots. Opposition voices, from NCP's Supriya Sule to Congress's Karti Chidambaram, decried the monopoly's perils, urging parliamentary inquiries and antitrust scrutiny by the Competition Commission.

At its core, this crisis unmask the perils of unchecked consolidation in Indian aviation, where IndiGo and Air India command 85 percent of the pie. The duopoly stifles competition, leaving consumers vulnerable to such implosions. While IndiGo's cost-cutting ethos fueled its ascent—low fares democratizing travel for millions—it now invites reckoning. Pilots' unions, like the Federation of Indian Pilots, lambasted "years of lean manpower planning," absolving the new norms and pinning blame on non-poaching pacts and delayed training pipelines. Broader implications ripple outward: investor confidence in IndiGo's stock (INGL.NS) wavers, with shares dipping 5 percent in early trading post-chaos. Globally, it tarnishes India's Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) vision, as foreign carriers eye the lucrative market warily.

As the dust settles, questions linger like contrails in a hazy dawn. Will IndiGo emerge leaner, with bolstered buffers and a humbled ethos? Can regulators enforce FDTL without buckling to industry pleas, prioritizing safety over schedules? For passengers, the scars run deep—trust eroded, plans upended, wallets lighter. Yet, in this tumult lies opportunity: a clarion call for diversified fleets, accelerated pilot academies, and fare equity that shields the common traveler. India's skies, vast and vibrant, demand more than apologies; they crave resilience. By February, when full recovery dawns, the nation must vow never again to let a single carrier's misstep ground an entire dream. For in aviation, as in life, the journey is collective, and no one flies alone.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

The habit of reading books and the relevance of Book Fairs

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The intellectual standard of a society can be sufficiently determined by the environment of its love for books and literary practice. Food, clothing, and shelter may be the primary necessities for human survival, but merely surviving is not the ultimate fulfillment of human life. When a person rises above the struggle for existence and seeks nourishment for the soul, that is precisely when the need for books arises. The pursuit of knowledge is an eternal human instinct. Books are the most reliable charioteers in humanity's journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom. It is generally believed that in recent times, the rapidly changing technological environment worldwide and the aggression of mechanization have somewhat affected this eternal habit of humankind.

Reading a book is in reality an extremely active mental process. When a reader opens the pages of a book, he actually enters another world. Although this world is born from the author's thoughts, the reader's imagination gives it a new form. What a viewer sees on a cinema or television screen is only the scene the director wishes to show; there is no room for the viewer's own imagination. But in the world created through the black letters of a book, the reader has to paint pictures with the colours of his own mind. What the characters look like, what the real form of the described nature is—these are constructed by the reader from his own experience and imagination. This mental exercise keeps the creative cells of the human brain active. The depth of study not only makes a person knowledgeable, but also renders him more empathetic and sensitive. When we read about the joys and sorrows, conflicts, and sufferings of various characters in novels or stories, we learn to step beyond the boundaries of our own lives and feel the emotions of others. Thus, books open the doors of the human heart and liberate it from narrowness.

The present era is called the age of information-technology explosion. Through a small device held in the palm, all the information of the world can be obtained in an instant. Yet there is a vast difference between information and knowledge. What we read on the internet or social media is mostly information. This information may keep us temporarily updated, but it does little to develop our wisdom. On the other hand, reading a book allows us to delve deeply into a subject. The continuity of analysis, philosophy, and

reasoning found there sharpens our thinking power. Nowadays, the habit of reading on digital media has reduced people's attention span. People have lost the patience to read long texts; they start commenting after merely reading a headline and a couple of lines. This superficial mentality has increased intolerance and the circulation of half-truths in society. In contrast, the habit of reading books teaches patience. The time and concentration required to finish a good book make a person calm and steady in thought. Such steadiness is extremely necessary in today's fast-moving world. For mental peace and stability, choosing the company of books is one of the best means.

In modern lifestyle, people are gradually becoming more isolated. Even in crowds, people feel loneliness. The role of books in removing this mental solitude is immense. Books are called man's best friend because a book never betrays and its companionship never annoys. In moments of despair or sadness, an inspirational book can change the course of life. Reading biographies of great people helps us realise that we are not the only ones struggling on life's path; the greatest individuals of the world have also advanced through extreme adversity. This realisation gives us mental strength. Moreover, the habit of reading books before sleep at night improves the quality of sleep. The blue light of mobiles disturbs the brain's rest, whereas the process of reading a book relaxes the brain and helps bring peaceful sleep. Therefore, studying printed books is like a great medicine for both physical and mental health.

In taking the immense importance of books to every level of society, the contribution of book fairs is undeniable. To describe a book fair merely as a market for books would be wrong. It is truly a place of pilgrimage for knowledge, where authors, readers, and thinkers meet in a grand confluence. Held at a specific time each year, this fair brings an intellectual tide throughout society. The joy of walking among book stalls, smelling new books, and searching for one's chosen volume among thousands of books is something that can never be experienced when buying books online. The sensation of holding a book in hand and touching it at a book fair is an emotional experience for the reader. Here, books are not mere commodities; each one presents itself to the reader as a living entity. The very atmosphere of a book fair naturally awakens respect for knowledge in the mind of every visitor.



Another aspect of the social importance of book fairs is that they serve as the best platform to introduce the new generation to the world of books. Today's children and adolescents are confined to video games and mobiles. Book fairs can play a crucial role in bringing them back from this virtual world to reality. When parents take their children to a book fair, a vast storehouse of knowledge opens before the child's eyes. Books filled with colourful pictures, the huge collection of children's literature, and the festive atmosphere of the fair attract children. They learn to choose books of their own liking. Thus, from an early age, a longing for books is born in their minds, which helps shape them into good citizens in the future. The culture of gifting books also grows through book fairs. Gifting a book instead of clothes or other items carries many times more value. Book fairs remind us that when knowledge is distributed, it does not diminish; rather, it increases.

The role of book fairs is also immense in the development of language and literature. The identity of every nation lies hidden in its language and literature. Book fairs provide a platform for local authors and publishers. New writers get the opportunity to present their creations before readers. The response and criticism from readers inspire authors to improve their writing. Especially for the cultivation of literature in the mother tongue, book fairs act as a life-giving elixir. Not only books by famous authors are sold here, but works by many unknown yet talented writers also come to the notice of readers. The discussion circles, book launch events, and poets' gather-

ings held at book fairs keep the intellectual environment alive. Current social issues, the nature and direction of literature, and future visions are discussed in these programmes. As a result, the horizon of readers' thoughts expands.

From an economic perspective too, a book fair is a profitable enterprise. From the printing of books to reaching the hands of readers, the livelihoods of many people are involved in this entire process. Paper industry, printing presses, binders, cover artists, proof-readers, editors, and sellers—for all of them, the book fair is the most important time of the year. A successful book fair keeps this entire economic cycle dynamic. Many small publishing houses survive solely on the sales from book fairs. Therefore, a book fair is not only a festival of literature; it is also an economic activity. Through it, the publishing industry of the state or country gains new energy.

In recent times, many people express apprehension that digital books or e-books will take the place of printed books. Yet this fear has already proved baseless. E-books certainly have convenience, especially during travel or for instant information. But the permanence and emotional value that printed books possess can never be provided by e-books. Maintaining a small library at home is not merely decoration; it reflects the taste and culture of the people living there. A bookshelf passes the light of knowledge from generation to generation. When a book read by a grandfather reaches his grandson, it ceases to be merely a book; it becomes a hereditary legacy of knowledge. Book fairs keep alive this attachment to printed books. See-

ing the crowds at fairs, one understands that the glitter of screens has not been able to dim the glory of paper.

There is a deep mutual relationship between the habit of reading books and the culture of book fairs. The more people read books, the greater the importance of book fairs will become; and the more popular events like book fairs become, the more an environment for reading books will be created. Yet merely organising book fairs is not enough. Conscious citizens, teachers, and parents of society must work together. The use of libraries at school and college levels should be made compulsory. Students must be encouraged to read books beyond textbooks. Literature must be taught not merely as a means to obtain marks, but to savour its essence. Special competitions, quizzes, or extempore speeches for students can be arranged at book fairs to ensure their participation.

Care must be taken that book fairs do not remain confined only to cities. Even small book fairs organised in rural areas or small towns would benefit rural readers. A large section of our society lives in villages, and they too have immense interest in knowledge. But due to lack of opportunity, they cannot collect good books. Mobile book fairs or district-level fairs can fill this gap. Taking books to people's doorsteps is our responsibility. The more books spread, the more superstition, blind belief, and narrowness will be removed from society. There is no alternative to books for building an educated and rational society.

Among our young generation, a wrong notion has taken root that studying is necessary only to build a career or pass examinations. This notion is damaging our intellectual world. Books are not only for examinations; books are for life. Whether literature, philosophy, history, or science—books on any subject broaden our perspective. A good novel teaches us the complexity of the human mind, a history book inspires us to learn from the mistakes of the past, and a science book helps us become rational. The only place where all kinds of books are found together is a book fair. Therefore, book fairs should be accepted not merely as fairs, but as an intellectual movement.

When assessing the relevance of book fairs, we must note another aspect—the direct connection between authors and readers. After reading a book, curiosity arises in the reader's mind about the author. The reader becomes eager to know in what environment and mental state the author wrote the book. Book fairs provide this op-

portunity. When a reader sees his favourite author in person and exchanges a few words with him, his joy knows no bounds. When the author signs the book, it becomes a priceless treasure for the reader. This intimacy doubles the reader's love and longing for literature. For the author too, it is great inspiration. Hearing praise or constructive criticism directly from readers encourages them for future creations.

In the present time of mechanical noise and social decay, the habit of reading books can teach people human values. One major reason for the increase in criminal tendencies, violence, and hatred in today's society is mental degradation. Due to the absence of good thoughts and noble feelings, people are being led astray. Books awaken human conscience. A person who regularly reads good books generally cannot engage in wrongdoing, because books teach him to judge right and wrong, good and bad. Therefore, the propagation and expansion of books is essential for social reform. The government and various social organisations should give importance to this direction. Increasing government grants for book fairs, modernising libraries, and arranging books at low prices would benefit ordinary people.

In conclusion, the discussion about the habit of reading books and the relevance of book fairs is endless. No matter how far human civilisation advances, the power of words will never diminish. As long as people think, dream, and seek knowledge, books will remain, and the need for book fairs will remain. Technological change may alter the form of books, but it can never destroy the soul of books. Book fairs are the guardians of our cultural heritage. They remind us that we are not merely bodies of flesh and blood; we have a mind, and that mind too has hunger. Books satisfy that hunger. Come, let us all together build a book-reading society. Let us place a book instead of a mobile in our children's hands. Let us gift books instead of expensive presents on birthdays. And at least once a year, let us visit a book fair and immerse ourselves in the ocean of knowledge. Because a house without books is like a room without windows, where light cannot enter. To keep the windows of our minds open, to make our thoughts as vast as the sky, and to keep our consciousness awake, there is no alternative to taking refuge in books and book fairs. The sooner we realise this truth, the more auspicious it will be for us and for our society.

Earth's Ancient Fever, Nature's Broken Thermostat

By: Satyabrata Borah

Fifty-six million years ago, Earth experienced one of the most abrupt and intense episodes of global warming in its entire geological history. Known to scientists as the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum, or PETM, this event saw average global temperatures rise by approximately six degrees Celsius in a geologically brief span, probably no more than five to ten thousand years. Vast quantities of carbon, equivalent to several times the amount humans have released since the Industrial Revolution, flooded the atmosphere and oceans, driving a hyperthermal state that lasted over 150,000 years. What makes the PETM especially relevant today is not only the scale of the warming but also the discovery, published in 2024 in *Nature Communications*, that the world's vegetation played a critical and previously underestimated role in prolonging the crisis.

Plants are among the planet's most powerful natural mechanisms for removing carbon dioxide from the air. Through photosynthesis they draw down CO₂, convert it into sugars and structural tissues, and lock carbon away in leaves, trunks, roots, and soils for decades, centuries, or even millennia. In normal times this process acts as a thermostat, dampening the effects of carbon releases from volcanoes or other natural sources. During the PETM, however, that thermostat appears to have broken down, at least across large parts of the globe, turning a potential buffer into an amplifier of warming.

To understand what happened, researchers built a sophisticated Earth-system model that couples plant evolution, migration, physiology, and carbon cycling. They then tested the model against an extraordinary archive: fossil pollen preserved in ancient sediments from three very different locations. The Bighorn Basin in Wyoming, a mid-latitude continental interior site; the North Sea region, representing northern Europe; and a high-latitude site near the Arctic Circle. Pollen is ideal for this kind of work because plants produce it in enormous quantities, it travels long distances on wind and water, and its tough outer wall survives millions of years of burial. By identifying which species were dominant before, during, and after the PETM, and by measuring traits such as leaf



mass per area in fossil leaves, the team could reconstruct how vegetation changed and how those changes affected the carbon cycle.

The results revealed a stark north-south divide. In the mid-latitudes, the story was one of collapse. Before the PETM, the Bighorn Basin supported diverse forests with many deciduous broad-leaved trees. As temperatures soared and rainfall patterns shifted toward greater seasonality, these forests gave way to very different plant communities. Pollen records show a sharp increase in palms, ferns, and other small, drought-tolerant species. Leaf fossils reveal that surviving plants developed thicker, denser leaves, an adaptation that reduces water loss but also reduces the surface area available for photosynthesis per unit of carbon invested. At the same time, soil carbon stocks plummeted. The large, long-lived trees that had once stored massive amounts of carbon in their trunks and root systems were replaced by shorter-lived, lower-biomass vegetation that locked away far less carbon both above and below ground. In effect, the mid-latitude land surface switched from being a strong carbon sink to something closer to carbon-neutral or even a weak source.

In the high latitudes, by contrast, the re-

sponse was almost the opposite. The Arctic, once clothed in cool-temperate conifer forests, warmed dramatically and became wetter. Pollen assemblages document the arrival of broad-leaved swamp forests and even subtropical elements such as palms that briefly flourished near the North Pole. Plant height and overall biomass increased, and the new vegetation appears to have photosynthesized more vigorously than what it replaced. For a time, the high latitudes compensated for some of the carbon-storage losses farther south, but the area of land capable of this enhanced uptake was limited. The vast tropical and temperate zones, where most terrestrial carbon is normally stored, had largely stopped functioning as effective sinks.

The consequences were profound. Model simulations suggest that the widespread failure of mid-latitude vegetation reduced global terrestrial carbon sequestration by a significant fraction for seventy to one hundred thousand years. Because less carbon was being pulled out of the atmosphere, excess CO₂ lingered far longer than it otherwise would have, stretching what might have been a shorter-lived warming event into a prolonged hothouse episode. Only

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after tens of thousands of years, as new plant communities slowly re-evolved or migrated and soil carbon pools began to rebuild, did the biosphere regain its capacity to draw down carbon at pre-PETM rates. By then, the oceans had absorbed most of the excess carbon through silicate weathering, a much slower geological process that eventually restored cooler conditions. The PETM is often described as the closest geological analogue to modern anthropogenic warming, and the parallels are unsettling. The amount of carbon released during the PETM was larger than our current fossil-fuel reserves, but the rate of release appears to have been slower, perhaps ten times slower than the rate at which we are emitting CO₂ today. During the PETM, six degrees of warming over several thousand years was enough to push much of the world's vegetation beyond its adaptive limits. Today we are approaching two degrees of warming in little more than a century, with projections of four degrees or more by 2100 under high-emission scenarios. Plants can migrate and evolve, but not at anything like the speed required to keep pace with twenty-first-century rates of change.

Modern observations already hint at the kind of disruption seen in the PETM fossil record. Satellite data show that while some regions, especially boreal forests, have greened in recent decades because of longer growing seasons, many tropical forests are losing biomass and shifting toward faster-growing, lower-density species. Drought stress in the Amazon, prolonged heat in Mediterranean ecosystems, and repeated wildfires in Australia and western North America are all pushing plant communities toward compositions that store less carbon.

Experiments that expose forests to elevated CO₂ and temperature suggest that the initial boost in photosynthesis often fades within years as nutrients become limiting and heat stress takes its toll.

The PETM teaches us that vegetation is not simply a passive victim of climate change; it can become an active participant in a feedback loop that makes warming worse and longer-lasting. When forests are replaced by scrub or grassland, not only is less carbon stored in living biomass, but vast amounts of soil carbon built up over millennia become vulnerable to decomposition and release. The loss is double: less uptake in the future and more emission from the past. Breaking that feedback requires preserving existing carbon-rich ecosystems and allowing damaged ones enough time and connectivity to recover. Yet time is the one thing rapid modern warming denies them.

Fifty-six million years ago, Earth eventually cooled again, but it took over 150,000 years, far longer than the lifespan of any human civilization. The organisms that lived through the PETM, including early primates that were our distant ancestors, endured a world of strange warmth, acidified oceans, and shifting continents of vegetation. Many lineages went extinct; others radiated into newly opened niches once the crisis passed. Today we have the power to influence whether our own species faces a similar trial by heat. The pollen grains locked in ancient rocks carry a clear message: if we push the planet's vegetation past its breaking point, the climate will not simply return to normal once we stop adding carbon. The green world that has sustained us may take far longer to heal than we can afford to wait.

Water warriors lead the water revolution in countryside

By: VK Bahuguna

Amidst when the world climate change negotiators are busy pulling wires in Brazil at the UNFCCC COP 30 summit, the world, especially those suffering most from climatic vagaries, is watching to see if there is a thaw between the divergent positions of developed and developing countries, especially in truly adhering to the cardinal principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. But this is a matter to be dealt with separately.

As this writer has been repeatedly warning government negotiators and policy makers about charting out South-South climate-resilient developmental planning to ward off the deleterious effects of climate change on the environment, especially on food, nutrition and water security of billions of people, Brazil's Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) climate change fund of \$125 billion to support tropical forests through government and private contributions, spending \$4 per hectare on improving forests, is a welcome move. Brazil herself has committed \$1 billion to this fund. India has supported it in principle. The fund may help in water and biodiversity conservation.

However, India should take the lead in focusing on creating a fund in collaboration with China and the Group of 77 to conserve and manage water for better climate management, as the temperature has already crossed the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold this year, as reported by Carlo Buontempo, the Director of the European Climate Agency Copernicus, and this is going to severely impact world hydrology. If India can take a lead as it did in creating the 'Solar Alliance' by creating a water conservation fund, forests will automatically be taken care of.

As the world is literally sitting on a hot spot, notwithstanding these CoPs, which are hilariously optimistic without any substance of change, we in India need to take drastic action at the level of civil society as well as in government, with a bottom-up innovative approach from the village level to the national level.

Already, the Water for Every Household scheme launched in 2019 by the Prime Minister is a resounding success with community participation and has provided almost 78.58 per cent (15.56 crore out of 18 crore) households access to tap water connections, compared to around 7 crore earlier, before 2019. Let us substantiate water conservation from the examples



created by our civil society.

The water availability study done by the Central Water Commission using space inputs (2019) assessed the average annual per capita water availability for the years 2021 and 2031 as 1,486 cubic metres and 1,367 cubic metres respectively. Annual per-capita water availability of less than 1,700 cubic metres is considered a water-stressed condition, whereas annual per-capita water availability below 1,000 cubic metres is considered a water-scarcity condition. The country's rivers run dry, aquifers deplete, and millions face seasonal scarcity, underscoring the urgency of sustainable practices.

So, we need to look into our countryside to search for water warriors beyond government programmes. The country has shown time and again that our society produces leaders from the grassroots level, from the freedom struggle to tree conservation through the world-famous Chipko Movement, to now "sow seed to get water" (pani bao pani pao) launched successfully in Uttarakhand by Mr Mohan Kandpal and others elsewhere in the country. This has become amply clear in the 2025 Water Awards announced by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. These water warriors brought to fame this year have shown how a public movement can change the countryside scenario drastically.

This writer, while in the Planning Commission, had in 2010 assessed the great work done by Popat Pawar in the Hiwari Bazar village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, turning a ghost village into one bubbling with prosperity solely due to water harvesting in adjoining forests under the Joint Forest Management programme, resulting in huge agricultural and milk production.

In this context, water conservation awards serve as beacons of hope, spotlighting grassroots

innovators, communities and institutions that transform despair into resilience. These examples celebrate individual and collective triumphs but also produce scalable models, fostering a culture of stewardship. The National Water Awards, recognising innovations, have galvanised action, proving that local ingenuity can recharge ecosystems and empower marginalised sections who have been facing acute water stress.

This year's awards were announced and conferred by President Droupadi Murmu on November 18, 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, and honoured 46 winners — a 30 per cent increase from prior years. These honours were backed by field verifications from the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board.

At the heart of this narrative stands Mohan Chandra Kandpal, a 59-year-old chemistry teacher from Kande village in Uttarakhand's Almora district, whose lifelong crusade earned him the Best Individual (North Zone) award. For 36 years, Kandpal has traversed the fragile Himalayan foothills, where deforestation and erratic monsoons have rendered ancient springs and traditional stone reservoirs dry. Fate struck him in 1990 when he observed the Riskan River's tributaries dwindling amid drought coupled with soil erosion. He resolved to act and launched "Pani Bao-Pani Uggao" (Sow Water-Grow Water), a masterstroke that charged women and youth into action, blending this rhetoric with indigenous community wisdom and mobilisation.

Kandpal's strategy hinges on khals and chaals—shallow percolation pits that capture runoff, allowing rainwater to recharge aquifers. Between 1990 and 2012, he spearheaded the digging of thousands, coupled with afforestation drives planting over 100,000 saplings of native

species like oak and rhododendron. People changed ploughing techniques in agricultural fields to till perpendicular to slopes, creating furrows that channel water deeper into the earth rather than letting it run off. This low-cost tweak, disseminated through farmer workshops, amplified recharge efficiency. By 2025, over 5,000 such structures dotted 40 villages, reviving 27 depleted sources in hamlets like Valna, Bitholi, Kande and Ganoli. Complementing this is the "Woh Pani Hoga" (That Water Will Be There) initiative, which has bolstered the Riskan River's flow, turning seasonal streams perennial. It was purely a public programme, though MGNREGA funds might have been dovetailed.

Another well-known example is Dr Rajendra Singh, the original "Waterman of India", whose 50-year odyssey in Rajasthan's arid heartland earned the 2001 Ramon Magsaysay Award and the 2015 Stockholm Water Prize—the "Nobel of Water". Singh revived over 1,000 villages by resurrecting more than 8,600 johads (earthen check dams) and bamboo drip systems in the Aravalli hills, and by targeting the parched Alwar district he started "Pani Panchayats" — village water parliaments—thus democratising resource governance. The results are visible: five rivers now flow perennially across 6,500 sq km, enabling afforestation of 1.5 million trees and the repopulation of ghost villages.

Yet another example is from Bihar's flood-prone plains, where Kishore Jaiswal, a Munger-based activist, bagged the Best Individual (Eastern Zone) award for desilting the Ganga's tributaries. He, with the NGO Jalsrot Vikas Sansthan, mobilised 20,000 volunteers to remove five lakh cubic metres of silt from the Chandan River, restoring flow to 100 villages.

In another example of social institutions, the Art of Living Social Projects received two awards for reviving more than 50 lakes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu through yoga-integrated clean-ups, impacting one million lives. The Barmer district administration also bagged the rainwater harvesting award, which was received by the District Collector, Tina Dabi. If each block of the country does this, prosperity and progress with climatic adaptation will be at our doors and happiness on the faces of millions of rural masses. These people have shown, in a much better manner, how to tackle climate change in tandem with communities than the big CoPs of the UNFCCC. (Courtesy: *The Pioneer*)

Heat stress, rare disease wipe out Goniopora coral colonies on Great Barrier Reef



By: Himanshu Nitnaware

A combination of extreme heat stress and a rare coral disease has wiped out 75 per cent of Goniopora colonies at a site on the Great Barrier Reef, scientists have reported, raising fresh alarms over the accelerating impacts of climate change on coral ecosystems.

The findings come as the world experiences its fourth global mass bleaching event, with nearly 84 per cent of coral reefs worldwide now affected — the worst and most extensive bleaching on record. Researchers inspecting 112 colonies at One Tree Reef (OTR), off Queensland, found that severe bleaching triggered by extreme ocean temperatures was followed by an unprecedented outbreak of black band disease (BBD), a rare but aggressive bacterial infection that kills coral tissue as it spreads across a colony.

Heat stress fuels mass mortality

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* on December 10, 2025, reports that OTR has not seen bleaching of this severity for decades. The large, long-lived Goniopora, also known as flowerpot or daisy corals typically inhabit lagoons and turbid reefs and are considered thermally tolerant, making the scale of mortality especially alarming.

"Increased temperature is also linked to outbreaks of coral disease. Other adverse environmental stressors, especially high light levels and decreased salinity, also cause bleaching," the authors noted.

Scientists said bleached corals were left in a weakened state, making them highly susceptible to disease, while warm conditions increased the virulence of pathogens. Although corals can recover once temperatures fall, their compromised health leaves them vulnerable to infection.

"While the relationship between coral bleaching and disease is not clear, the strong relationship between heat stress and disease outbreaks emphasises the increased risk of coral disease due to climate change," it said.

Rapid spread of disease and record-breaking heat

Black band disease, common in the Caribbean but historically rare in the southern Great Barrier Reef, appeared in a few colonies in February 2024. By April, 61 per cent of bleached colonies were infected, and the disease spread in an epizootic-like manner, the authors noted.

Population surveys of more than 700 Goniopora colonies revealed the same pattern: widespread

bleaching, rapid disease progression and high mortality. The disease occurred only on corals that had bleached.

Temperatures at OTR between December 2023 and February 2025 were extreme, with mean, minimum and maximum daily temperatures above 28 degrees Celsius (°C), 29°C and 30°C respectively. During the bleaching event, water temperatures exceeded 28°C for 74 consecutive days. Temperatures were above 29°C for 21 days in January-February 2024, and peaked at 34-35°C during the year.

Researchers noted that while BBD is often associated with pollution and nutrient loading, OTR's offshore location means it is largely sheltered from such coastal stressors. Although the lagoon can experience slightly elevated nutrient levels, Goniopora corals are typically found on turbid inshore reefs, making this an unlikely trigger.

"Rather than recovering from bleaching as the water cooled, as might be expected if temperature was the main stressor, survival plummeted. Clearly, BBD was a major driver of mortality as the aggressive black band invaded the tissue," the scientists concluded.

Surveys in the northern Great Barrier Reef during 2024 recorded very low BBD incidence, affecting only 1-2 per cent of Acropora and Montipora corals, with no coincident bleaching.

"The question arises as to why this relatively rare coral disease appeared in the Goniopora colonies at OTR. No other coral genera that bleached in the 2024 event at OTR developed the disease," researchers wrote.

Urgent global warning

The authors warned that the event underscores the accelerating risks to coral reefs as climate change intensifies.

"The current trajectory of climate change is progressing too quickly for corals to adjust," they said. "Coral reefs are in danger, with recurrent anomalous heatwaves and mass bleaching being the greatest threat to their survival."

Maria Byrne, professor of marine biology in the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Sydney, said the loss of these large, structure-forming corals would have long-term repercussions on reef biodiversity, coastal protection and food security. "Coral reefs support more than a billion people worldwide. What we're witnessing is a collapse in the natural resilience of these ecosystems. Ambitious global action to reduce emissions is now the only path to their survival," she said. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

India has historically been challenging yet fantastic mkt for airlines: IATA



GENEVA, Dec 10: India, which has historically been a challenging market for airlines to succeed, has all the ingredients to become a fantastic market, and some of the issues being seen now are temporary, according to IATA chief Willie Walsh.

With considerable growth potential and rising air traffic demand, Indian carriers are looking to expand capacity, and over 1,500 planes are on order. More airports are also coming up.

Welcoming investments in airport infrastructure and by airlines in additional aircraft, Walsh said India's domestic market is now 32 per cent larger in 2025 than in 2020.

"It (Indian domestic market) has increased by more than a third in terms of revenue passenger kilometres... That growth does not come without

challenges... India has facilitated that growth, which has been a great example... It is one of the most exciting global markets," Walsh said.

Against the backdrop of IndiGo flight disruptions and other challenges, the IATA chief said he sees some of the issues being faced in the Indian market as temporary.

Walsh is the Director General of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a global grouping of nearly 360 airlines that account for over 80 per cent of the global air traffic. IATA members include Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet.

At a media roundtable in Geneva on Tuesday, Walsh noted that all the ingredients for a fantastic market exist in India.

"I don't think we would be critical of them for the fact that other airlines have not entered the market, or where we are today as well. They have survived and continue to operate well. So, I think the market will change over time," he said.

The response came in to a query on duopolistic tendencies in the fast-growing Indian market, where IndiGo and the Air India Group hold over 90 per cent of the domestic market share.

"I think with the expansion of airport capacity, we will facilitate new entrants into the market. And that's something that we will witness over the coming years as well," he said.

Over the years, many airlines have been shuttered in India after taking off with ambitious plans and even flying for decades.

Acknowledging that India has historically been a challenging market for airlines to succeed in, the IATA DG said many airlines have grown, then struggled financially and disappeared.

"Jet Airways and Kingfisher being two very obvious examples of what we saw as global carriers with global ambitions, which made big investments and sought to grow but struggled to be financially viable and, regrettably, have disappeared," he said.

Walsh also mentioned that the privatisation of Air India has been a very positive development, as the airline's state ownership had distorted its commercial operating environment.

Tatas acquired loss-making Air India from the Indian government in January 2022. (PTT)

Ukraine can hold elections within months if security is ensured, Zelenskyy says

KYIV (UKRAINE), Dec 10: Ukrainian officials were expected to hand their latest peace proposals to United States negotiators Wednesday, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who also said Ukraine would be ready for elections within three months if partners can guarantee a safe vote during wartime and if its electoral law can be altered.

Zelenskyy was responding to comments by US President Donald Trump in which he questioned Ukraine's democracy and suggested the Ukrainian leader was using the war as an excuse not to hold an election.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Tuesday that he is "ready" for an election but would need help from the US and possibly Europe to ensure security for a vote to happen. He suggested that Ukraine could be ready to hold balloting in 60 to 90 days if that proviso is met.

"To hold elections, two issues must be addressed: primarily, security — how to conduct them, how to do it under strikes, under missile attacks; and a question regarding our military — how they would vote," Zelenskyy said.



"And the second issue is the legislative framework required to ensure the legitimacy of elections," he said.

Previously, Zelenskyy had pointed out that a ballot can't legally take place while martial law imposed due to Russia's invasion nearly four years ago is in place. He has also asked how a vote could happen when civilian areas of Ukraine are being bombed by Russia and almost 20 per cent of the country is under Russian occupation.

Zelenskyy said he has asked lawmakers from his party in Par-

liament to draw up legislative proposals that would allow elections while Ukraine is under martial law.

Ukrainians have on the whole supported Zelenskyy's arguments, and there has been no clamor in Ukraine for an election. Under the Ukrainian law that is in force, Zelenskyy's rule is legitimate.

But with Trump pressing hard for a deal between Kyiv and Moscow, Zelenskyy is walking a tightrope between defending Ukrainian interests and showing the American president that he is willing to make some compro-

misses. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly complained that Zelenskyy can't legitimately negotiate a peace settlement because his five-year term in office that began in 2019 has expired.

"I think it's an important time to hold an election. They're using war not to hold an election," Trump said in an interview with Politico, echoing Moscow's stance.

US, Russia seek closer ties. A new US national security strategy released last Friday made it clear that Trump wants to improve America's relationship with Moscow and "reestablish strategic stability with Russia."

The document also portrays European allies as weak.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday praised Trump's role in the Ukraine peace effort, saying in a speech at the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's Parliament, that Moscow appreciates his "commitment to dialogue." Trump, Lavrov said, is "the only Western leader" who shows "an understanding of the reasons that made war in Ukraine inevitable." (AP)

Dozens killed in Haiti's capital following internal clashes within a powerful gang coalition

SAN JUAN, Dec 10: Dozens of people in Haiti's capital have been killed following violent clashes within a powerful gang coalition, with 10 children among the victims, a local human rights group said Tuesday.

Among those killed was Dédé, one of the highest ranking gang members in the Bel-Air slum of Port-au-Prince. He was beheaded, while powerful gang leader Kempès Sanon, a former police officer, was injured, according to the Committee for Peace and Development.

It was not immediately clear how seriously Sanon was injured, although many worry the clashes that began in recent days could unleash even more violence in a city already 90 per cent controlled by gangs.

Sanon has been replaced while receiving treatment for his injuries by two men who go by the names of Jamesly and Ti Gason, according to the human rights group.

The ongoing violence is unusual because a large number of gangs banded together in September 2023 and announced the formation of Viv Ansanm, or "Live Together," a coalition that led to a drop in violence after armed groups agreed to no longer fight each other.

Sanon and his gang are part of the Viv Ansanm coalition, which the US has designated as a foreign terrorist organisation.

So far, the human rights group has counted at least 49 people killed, burned and mutilated since Monday. Among them are 19 gang members, 10 children recruited by gangs and a man in his 60s who was struck by a stray bullet.

Nineteen women whose partners were gang mem-



bers also were killed by the Krache Dife gang as they sought medical attention for the men at a clinic, the group said.

Krache Dife, which means "Spit Fire," is believed to be an ally of Sanon and a member of the Viv Ansanm gang coalition.

The number of people killed is expected to rise since the clashes are ongoing and no authorities or human rights groups have been able to access the area.

After the outbreak, Jimmy Chérisier, a former elite police officer best known as Barbécue and one of the leaders of Viv Ansanm, published a video surrounded by several people he claimed had been kidnapped and were released in Bel-Air by him.

Chérisier said Viv Ansanm had demanded that all kidnappings stop, but that some members refused to do so.

"They won't be kidnapping ever again. ... This is a message for all the generals," he said, referring to members of Viv Ansanm. (AP)

European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules

BRUSSELS, Dec 10: European leaders will call for a toughening of migration policies on Wednesday in a move critics say bends to pressure from far-right groups and harms basic human rights protections for vulnerable people.

Ministers from 27 EU member nations are meeting in Brussels to discuss countering migrant smuggling, with a keynote speech by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. In Strasbourg, France, representatives from the Council of Europe — 46 countries from Iceland to Azerbaijan — are expected to debate making deporting migrants easier for signatories to key treaties.

Denmark was part of a nine-nation attempt last year to curtail the power of the European Court of Human Rights, the independent legal arm of the Council of Europe. Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland argued that the court's interpretation of rights obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes. That effort ultimately failed, but support for its basic tenets has since grown.

The European Court of Human Rights handles complaints against the Council of Europe, under the European Convention on Human Rights, including many cases involving migrants and asylum-seekers. The intergovernmental organisation is not an EU institution and was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy. (AP)

Renewed Thailand-Cambodia border fighting displaces hundreds of thousands

SURIN, Dec 10: Renewed border fighting between Thailand and Cambodia showed no signs of abating Wednesday, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced people in both countries living in strained conditions as more flooded into temporary shelters.

Associated Press reporters on the Thai side of the border heard sounds of outgoing, indirect fire on Wednesday.

About 400,000 people have been evacuated from affected areas in Thailand, and around 700 schools closed while fighting was ongoing in four border provinces, Thai military spokesperson Rear Adm. Surasant Kongsiri said Wednesday. Cambodia evacuated more than 127,000 villagers, and hundreds of schools closed, the defence ministry said.

Thailand's military announced that casualties this week include five soldiers killed and dozens wounded. Cambodia said seven civilians died and 20 others were wounded, though it did not update those figures on Wednesday.

There is not yet a clear path to peace as Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul vowed to continue to fight, and Cambodia's powerful Senate President Hun Sen promised a fierce response.

A knock-on effect of the fighting and bad blood between the nations was Cambodia's withdrawal of its entire team from the 33rd Southeast Asian Games, which began Tuesday in Thailand. A Wednesday announcement from the National Olympic Committee of Cambodia said it regretted the action, but the families of competitors were concerned about their safety.

Trump says he will return sides to peace. The new, widespread fighting followed a skirmish on Sunday that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire pushed by US President Donald Trump that ended armed combat in July.

The five days of fighting over territorial disputes left dozens dead on both sides and forced the evacuation of thousands of civilians. The ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges from the two nations unless they agreed.

Late Tuesday at a Pennsylvania political event,



Trump said he would use his way to end the renewed combat.

"Tomorrow I'll have to make a phone call," Trump said. "Who else could say, I'm going to make a phone call and stop a war between two very powerful countries, Thailand and Cambodia?"

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier called on the two sides to live up to the commitments made at an October meeting in Malaysia that reaffirmed the July ceasefire and called for removing heavy weapons from the border, coordinating the removal of land mines and other steps.

Thai foreign ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Wednesday that there had not yet been any contact with the United States on the matter. He added that Thailand will not likely accept if another third party proposes to mediate since "the line has been crossed."

The ceasefire was fragile from the start as both nations carried on a bitter propaganda war, and minor incidents of cross-border violence continued.

Shelters provide a safe haven, but concerns remain.

Away from the battlefronts, anxious evacuees are the most visible sign of the crisis. In a gymnasium in the northeastern Thai city of Surin, around 550 people are waiting out the combat, many having hurriedly fled after the first shots were fired Sunday.

Officials have provided food and diversions for children. The cooler, winter temperatures have kept the situation in the shelter bearable, but there is inevitable boredom and concern about what they left behind, including homes, valuables and animals. (AP)

B'desh to continue diplomatic efforts to bring back Sheikh Hasina from India: Foreign Adviser

DHAKA, Dec 10: Bangladesh's interim government on Wednesday said it will continue diplomatic efforts to bring back from India deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been convicted and sentenced in multiple cases.

The 78-year-old Awami League leader has been living in India since she fled Bangladesh on August 5 last year in the face of the massive protests.

"We will try to convince India to send her back to Dhaka," Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain was quoted as saying by the state-run BSS news agency. Touhid noted that Hasina's repatriation ultimately depends on India's decision.

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Hasina came to India "in a certain circumstance and I think that circumstance clearly sort of is a factor in what happens to her. But again, that is something which she has to make up her mind."

Responding to reports suggesting possible third-country resettlement for the former premier, Touhid said he had only seen such claims in media coverage.

"I did not receive any information through diplomatic channels," he added. Touhid had earlier said Bangladesh was not ruling out a response from India.

On November 17, the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for "crimes against humanity" committed during the July-August mass uprising last year. (PTT)

Social media ban for children under 16 starts in Australia

MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA), Dec 10: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese welcomed a world-first social media ban for children younger than 16 that took effect Wednesday as families taking back power from tech giants but warned the implementation would be difficult.

Parents reported distraught children discovering they'd been shut out of platforms as the landmark law took effect. Some young children reported fooling the platforms' age estimation technology by drawing on facial hair. Parents and older siblings are also expected to help some children circumvent the restrictions.

"This is the day when Australian families are taking back power from these big tech companies and they're asserting the right of kids to be kids and for parents to have greater peace of mind," Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"This reform will change lives. For Australian kids ... allowing them to just have their childhood. For Australian parents, enabling them to have greater peace of mind. But also for the global community, who are looking at Australia and saying: well, if Australia can do it, why can't we?" Albanese later told a Sydney gathering of reform supporters, including parents who blame social media for a child's suicide.

Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube and Twitch face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (USD 32.9 million) from Wednesday if they fail to take reasonable steps to remove the accounts of Australian children younger than 16.

Australia to report by Christmas if social media ban is working

The ban will be enforced by Australia's eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant. She said the platforms already had the technology and personal data about their users to enforce the age restriction with precision.

She would send the 10 targeted platforms on Thursday notices demanding information on how the age restriction was being implemented and how many accounts had been closed.

"We will provide information to the public before Christmas on how these age restrictions are being implemented and whether preliminarily we see them working," Inman Grant said.

"The responses to these notices will form the baseline against which we will measure compliance," she added.

Communications Minister Anika Wells said the age-restricted platforms "may not agree with the



law and that's their right — we don't expect 100 per cent universal support," but that all had undertaken to comply with the Australian law. She said more than 200,000 TikTok accounts in Australia had already been deactivated by Wednesday.

Wells also warned young children who had so far evaded detection that they would eventually be caught. A child who used a virtual private network to appear to be in Norway would be caught out if they were routinely posting images of Australian beaches, Wells said.

"Just because they might have avoided it (detection) today doesn't mean they will be able to avoid it in a week's time or a month's time because social media platforms have to go back and routinely check under-16 accounts," Wells said.

"These social media platforms have so much data on us because we choose to give it to them because we like social media and because you've had your older brother scan their face for you today, which has bought you a bit of time, doesn't mean that these accounts aren't going to see you talking to other 14-year-olds tonight about the under-16 soccer carnival on weekend, about your upcoming school holidays and what your Year 10 teacher is next year," she added.

Albanese said the implementation would be difficult and "won't be perfect."

"This is about, importantly, pushing back against big tech, saying that social media companies have a social responsibility," he said.

Father of sextortion scam victim says social media ban is a start

Wayne Holdsworth, who became an age restriction advocate because his son Mac took his own life after falling victim to an online sextortion scam, described the new law as a start. Children must now be educated about online dangers before they turn 16.

"Our kids that we've lost haven't died in vain because today they'll be looking down very proud of the work that we've all done," Holdsworth told the Sydney gathering.

Flossie Brodribb, a 12-year-old advocate for a social media ban for young children, told the gathering she hoped other countries would follow Australia's lead. (AP)

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado will miss Nobel Peace Prize ceremony



OSLO, Dec 10: Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado will miss the ceremony to award her the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on Wednesday, the head of the Norwegian Nobel Institute said.

Machado last appeared in public 11 months ago. Nobel Institute director Kristian Berg Harpviken told public broadcaster NRK the Venezuelan opposition leader was not in the Norwegian capital on the day of the ceremony, and her daughter will accept the prize on Machado's behalf.

"We confirm that she will not attend the Nobel ceremony, but we are optimistic about her presence on the rest of the day's agenda," said Machado's spokesperson, Claudia Macero. She did not give information on Machado's current location.

Prominent Latin American figures planned to attend Wednesday's ceremony in a signal of solidarity with Machado, including Argentine President Javier Milei, Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa, Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino and Paraguayan President Santiago Pena.

Machado has been living in hiding and had not been seen in public since Jan. 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas,

Venezuela's capital.

The 58-year-old's win for her struggle to achieve a democratic transition in her South American nation was announced on Oct. 10, and she was described as a woman "who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness."

Machado won an opposition primary election and intended to challenge President Nicolas Maduro in last year's presidential election, but the government barred her from running for office. Retired diplomat Edmundo Gonzalez took her place.

The lead-up to the July 28, 2024, election saw widespread repression, including disqualifications, arrests and human rights violations. That increased after the country's National Electoral Council, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, declared the incumbent the winner.

Gonzalez sought asylum in Spain last year after a Venezuelan court issued a warrant for his arrest.

UN human rights officials and many in-

dependent rights groups have expressed concerns about the situation in Venezuela and called for Maduro to be held accountable for the crackdown on dissent.

Five past Nobel Peace Prize laureates were detained or imprisoned at the time of the award, according to the prize's official website, most recently Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi in 2023 and Belarusian human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski in 2022.

The others were Liu Xiaobo of China in 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar in 1991 and Carl von Ossietzky of Germany in 1935.

"There is a long tradition that when a Peace Prize laureate cannot be present, close family members represent them," Harpviken said. "That happened with Narges Mohammadi, and with Ales Bialiatski; both were imprisoned at the time. And the same will happen with Maria Corina Machado today. The daughter will deliver the statement her mother has written." (AP)

Khandu pays tribute to Dalai Lama on Nobel Anniversary

Dalai Lama a 'true beacon of peace': Arunachal CM

ITANAGAR, Dec 10: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday paid glowing tributes to the Tibetan spiritual leader, the 14th Dalai Lama, describing him as a 'true beacon of peace' whose message of compassion, harmony and non-violence continues to inspire the world.

The day marked the 36th anniversary of the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize on the 14th Dalai Lama.

Khandu said the anniversary was being celebrated at Chamlang, Tawang Monastery and reflected on the enduring global relevance of the Dalai Lama's teachings.

"Celebrating the 36th Anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize conferred on His Holiness the Great 14th Dalai Lama at Chamlang, Tawang Monastery," the chief minister said in a post on X.

He underscored the deep spiritual and cultural connection between Arunachal Pradesh and the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Calling the Dalai Lama a guiding light for humanity, Khandu



said, "A true beacon of peace, may His Holiness's timeless message of compassion and harmony continue to spread across the world."

The chief minister emphasised

that the values espoused by the Tibetan spiritual leader transcend borders and religions, offering a moral compass in an increasingly divided world.

Khandu further invoked the principle of non-violence, stating that the anniversary was a moment for collective introspection.

"On this sacred day marking the 36th Anniversary of the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize to His Holiness the Great 14th Dalai Lama, may we allow the spirit of Ahimsa to settle within us," he said.

The chief minister added that this spirit should guide "our thoughts, shaping our actions and reminding us that peace truly begins with how we treat one another".

The Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 in recognition of his unwavering commitment to non-violence, compassion and peaceful dialogue.

The anniversary holds special significance in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in Tawang, which is one of the most important centres of Tibetan Buddhism in India and has long shared close spiritual and cultural ties with the Tibetan spiritual leader. (PTI)

GCF demands SIT probe into Bili village attack on Christians

Galo Christian Federation condemns violence during pre-Christmas celebration in West Siang, alleges targeted persecution



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 10: The Galo Christian Federation (GCF) has urged the Arunachal Pradesh government to conduct a thorough investigation, preferably by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) or a magistrate, into the incidents that occurred on December 6 at Bili village in West Siang district, targeting the Christian community during pre-Christmas celebrations.

Addressing the media at the Arunachal Press Club, Tojom Koyu, General Secretary of GCF, described a series of unprecedented incidents of religious in-

tolerance in Aalo, West Siang, which undermine the constitutional values of secularism, equality and freedom of faith. He said that Christians were being obstructed from conducting their festive activities.

On December 6, groups of people reportedly attempted to disrupt a community pre-Christmas celebration in Bili village. The attackers allegedly threw stones, injuring several participants and destroyed fencing around the pandal. Koyu termed this humiliation of religious freedom "beyond human tolerance" and strongly condemned the acts. He de-

manded a proper inquiry into the matter.

The GCF also recalled earlier incidents in the district, including the October 2025 Sesi-Likar incident, where a missionary from Tura, Goera Sangma was prevented from conducting a crusade—a practice long conducted peacefully by the Christian community. Koyu emphasised that targeting Christians in such a manner is "unhealthy for a civilized and secular society."

Furthermore, GCF alleged that the Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP) has been spreading misinformation regarding the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978, which has not yet been finalised by the state government. According to GCF, these actions have incited hostility against Christians.

In addition, GCF claimed it received a letter from the president and secretary of the Donyi Polo Ganggi of Logum Jini village, asking the community to stop their carol candle march. GCF condemned the circular and called upon the authorities of Donyi Polo Logum Jini Ganggi to withdraw it immediately.

GCF reaffirmed its demand for immediate action and a proper SIT-led investigation to ensure justice and protect religious freedom in West Siang.

Ex-Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly to attend Tripura tourism festival

AGARTALA, Dec 10: Former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly, who is the brand ambassador of Tripura tourism, is scheduled to attend the closing ceremony of Unity Promo Fest-2025 to be held at here on December 12, a minister on Wednesday. The festival is an annual initiative by the Tripura government to promote the state's tourism potential to the global stage.

"The Unity Promo Fest-2025 began in Dhalai district on November 8 and has so far gained a good response from the people. Sourav Ganguly is set to attend the closing ceremony of the programme on December 12," Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said at a press conference.

He said Chief Minister Manik Saha will inaugurate the closing ceremony while Bollywood singer Jubin Nautiyal will perform at the event at Swami Vivekananda Ground. A total of 122 tour operators from 28 states will also join the event of the Unity Promo Fest-2025, he said, adding that 48 such operators attended the programme last year and held a session with the chief minister.

"This time, tour operators from Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan and Malaysia will be attending the programme. All of them will have a meeting with the chief minister," he said.

Chowdhury said the government has been trying to make a mark in the international tourism map by promoting the state's natural beauty, culture and tradition. He added that the state recorded the second highest footfall of foreign tourists last year after Sikkim in the Northeastern region, quoting data of the Ministry of Tourism. (PTI)

AAPLU mourns demise of Shi Yomi district president Situ Kotin

Labour leader remembered for dedication, integrity and unwavering service to workers' welfare



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 10: The Central Executive Members of the All Arunachal Pradesh Labour Union (AAPLU) have expressed profound sorrow over the untimely demise of Late Situ Kotin, president of the Shi Yomi District AAPLU Unit.

Situ Kotin was widely respected for his steadfast commitment to the labour community, serving with sincerity, integrity and tireless dedication. His efforts in strengthening the AAPLU organisation and championing the rights and welfare of workers earned him admiration and respect across the state.

"We have lost a sincere leader and a compassionate human being. The void left by his departure will be deeply felt," the AAPLU statement read.

The Central Executive Members have extended their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and loved ones, praying for strength during this difficult time and for the departed soul to rest in eternal peace.

National integration tour launched for students of Tuting

Indian Army initiative aims to inspire young minds and nurture future leaders



HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, Dec 10: The Indian Army is conducting a motivational and educational tour for students from government schools of the remote border village of Tuting. The initiative aims to provide adolescents from geographically isolated areas with meaningful exposure to premier national institutions and aspirational career pathways, reflecting the Army's commitment to youth empowerment and national

integration.

Students aged 13 to 17 years from Secondary School and Government Higher Secondary School, Tuting, will visit leading institutions in Dehradun including the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC), Forest Research Institute (FRI) and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) to gain insights into leadership, discipline, scientific re-

search, public service and academic excellence. The event, which was flagged off at Likabali Military Station, also includes visits to cultural sites and marketplaces, enabling students to experience social diversity and build confidence beyond their traditional environment.

The Indian Army remains dedicated to initiatives that strengthen the Army-civil connect and foster holistic development in remote border regions.

Strengthening human rights requires strong democratic pillars: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 10: Tripura Chief Minister Prof Dr Manik Saha on Wednesday said that to further strengthen human rights, it is essential that all four pillars of democracy including Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and Media continue to grow stronger and more accountable.

He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been steadfast in his commitment to protecting the rights of every citizen.

"Our government, too, remains deeply sensitive and dedicated to ensuring justice, dignity and equal opportunities for all," said Dr Saha.

Dr Saha said this while addressing the observance of International Human Rights Day organized by THRC at Prajna Bhavan, Agartala.

"Today we are celebrating International Human Rights Day. We all know that law is nothing but common sense. Even human rights are also a matter of common sense. The laws that were made are all inherent in human rights, and if we violate them, we violate human rights. There are family disputes and what they do is visit the Human Rights Commission; if child-related issues arise, they go



to the Child Rights Commission. From such things we can learn what is right and wrong. In democracy, there are four pillars. If we want to strengthen human rights, then the Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and Media must be strengthened," said Dr. Saha.

He said that PM Modi has good knowledge about everyone's rights as he came after a long struggle.

"Human rights are essential. Our government is aware and sensitive of every matter. Before doing anything, our government works and tries to solve the matter. Govern-

ment and THRC have to maintain a coordinated relationship and believe in each other. When any journalist comes under attack, we immediately take steps. This government is a pro-people government," he said.

Dr Saha said that earlier, the North East was neglected, and now due to PM Modi, the Northeast has witnessed massive development starting from communication, internet and more.

"If we want to maintain human rights, we must maintain law and order," said Dr Saha.

39 IndiGo flights cancelled at MBB Airport; authorities step up passenger support

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 10: Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport Director Krishan Mohan Mehra on Wednesday said that from 29th November to 9th December, a total of 39 IndiGo flights were cancelled from MBB Airport in Agartala, causing significant inconvenience to passengers.

The Airport Director informed that the MBB Airport authority has taken several steps to minimise the inconvenience faced by travellers due to these cancellations.

"The airport team, along with CISF, other airlines, and stakeholders, increased the additional seating capacity in the terminal building especially outside the building as many passengers were unable to return home after their flights were cancelled. Food, drinking water and other basic support were arranged for affected passen-

gers. The airport also increased the cleanliness and maintenance of toilets to handle the situation more efficiently," he said.

the official said that according to the information shared by IndiGo Airlines, refunds for all cancelled flights up to 9th December have been processed, and passengers' luggage has been returned to them at their homes. The airline confirmed that no baggage was left behind in Agartala.

Mehra further stated that the On-Time Performance (OTP) of the flights currently operating has been 100% as of 7th December.

"On 10th December, IndiGo also introduced additional flights from Agartala to Delhi to meet demand", the Airport official said.

He added that the airport team worked 24x7 during the disruption and also extended ATC watch hours to accommodate delayed flights.

Digital Agriculture to reach new heights with mandatory farmers registry: Minister

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 10: Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath on Wednesday said that the Farmers Registry is a unique and integrated database of every farmer in India, as it is not just a record; it is the foundation of a modern, efficient and transparent agricultural system.

The Minister said this after he chaired an important meeting with all the officials, including the Secretary of Agriculture, Agriculture Director, Horticulture Director etc. and with other BAC chairman, Sector officers on video conferencing at Secretariat.

The Minister informed that one of the important aspects of this registry is that it is mandatory for availing any government benefits, especially the PM-KISAN scheme.

"By registering, farmers are assured that the benefits earmarked for them will reach their bank accounts directly, without any delay or risk of intermediaries. This ensures that the aid reaches the right farmer at the right time. Through the Farmers Registry, we can create a verified identity for each farmer, which is linked to their land information and Aadhaar. This not only prevents duplication, but also helps in targeting the right subsidy, crop insurance, loans, and agricultural inputs," said the Minister.

The Agriculture Minister said that, more importantly, the registry forms the foundation of the digital agriculture ecosystem.

"It facilitates integration with soil health cards, digital crop surveys, market connectivity, and advisory services. This means that farmers will now have easy access to all the information and services they need, and will be able to make better decisions. By using digital tools, we are reducing the administrative burden on farmers and government officials, while ensuring transparency and accountability in every scheme. It



also opens the door to new innovations in the agri-tech sector, which helps in increasing the production and income of our farmers," he said.

He said that, in short, the Farmers Registry is not just about digitalization; it is about empowering our farmers, ensuring that they get all the benefits properly, and preparing for the future of modern agriculture.

"Through the Farmers Registry, we can create a unique Farmer ID for each farmer, get accurate information about land and crops, and help the government set the right plans and targets," said the Minister.

The Minister said that farmers will get all the information and benefits in one system, which saves both time and cost.

"Digital agriculture is not only simplifying administrative work; it is also empowering farmers, helping them increase their income using innovative technologies, and making our agriculture sector more modern and strong. I request all the farmers to register quickly, especially to avail PM-KISAN benefits, so that you do not miss out on this opportunity. Let us together embrace digital agriculture and take our agriculture sector to new heights," he said.

India is Italy's 'long-trusted friend', a 'priority': Deputy PM Tajani

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: Italy can contribute significantly to the India growth story and is looking at shoring up industrial collaborations, joint ventures and co-development projects to advance the bilateral economic ties, Italian Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani said.

Tajani, who is also the foreign minister, is on a three-day visit to India to further reinvigorate the economic partnership between the two countries against the backdrop of the reshaping of trade relationships around the world in view of Washington's sweeping policies on tariffs.

In an article written exclusively for PTI, the deputy prime minister said the Italian foreign ministry has launched a dedicated financing line to India of Euro 500 million to support Italian companies entering the local market and creating joint ventures.

"With my visit, I intend to bring more Italy to India and more India to Italy. India is a large market, an economic power growing rapidly and dynamically. It boasts remarkable achievements in various sectors: from infrastructure to new technologies, from IT services to space," he said.

"Italian companies are increasingly interested in this extraordinary and opportunity-rich country. My main goal is to help them achieve ambitious and concrete results," he added.

Tajani described India as a "long-trusted friend" and a "priority" for Italy.

India is a "strategic partner" on major international issues and a privileged interlocutor in the fields of economy, trade, investment and innovation, he noted.

Italy is a key partner of India in Europe and there has been a significant upswing in their bi-

lateral relations in the last few years.

In November last year, the two sides unveiled an ambitious five-year strategic action plan outlining specific initiatives in key sectors of defence, trade, clean energy and connectivity.

At present, the volume of annual bilateral trade between the two countries is around Euro 14 billion and both sides are eyeing to increase it under a robust trading framework.

In the piece, the deputy prime minister said he also recently launched a 'Plan on Export' to promote Italian know-how worldwide. "India is one of the priority countries of our strategy." "Over the course of the year, Euro 500 million additional Italian investments in India are a tangible sign of the commitment of our companies," he said.

The deputy prime minister said Italy's export credit agency has also increased its exposure to

the country by about Euro 200 million in local currency, on top of more than Euro 2 billion of guarantees already issued.

Tajani said Italy not only wants to export more but also aims at increasing industrial collaborations, joint ventures, co-development and co-production projects.

"I believe that more trade also means more investments, both ways. After two Business Forums in April and June, we now want to focus on key specific sectors and turn contacts into contracts. The timing is right." The deputy prime minister also said that Italy fully backs the much-awaited India-EU free trade agreement.

"We are close to the conclusion of a long-awaited EU-India FTA. Italy has always supported an ambitious, balanced and mutually beneficial agreement. We believe it can provide

better and greater opportunities for our entrepreneurs and companies, particularly SMEs -- the backbone of our economy," he said.

Tajani said there is scope for expanding India-Italy trade ties. "We can increase and balance our trade and investment exchanges -- including from India to Italy."

"We are a stable country, the second-largest manufacturer in Europe, and we can offer significant contributions to the growth trajectory of Indian industry and manufacturing, particularly in machinery and industry. It is not just a matter of products, but technological solutions," he said.

Tajani said Italian companies are leaders in many cutting-edge fields: from design to advanced manufacturing, from agricultural machinery to engineering services, from the defence industry to renewable energy and recycling. (PTI)

DGCA to deploy staff inside IndiGo HQ amid tightening oversight of airline

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, Dec 10: Aviation watchdog DGCA will station its personnel at IndiGo's headquarters as it steps up oversight on India's largest airline, which continues to cancel dozens of flights despite saying operations have stabilised.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has formed an oversight team of eight senior captains, and two of them, along with two government officials, will be stationed at IndiGo's Gurgaon headquarters to monitor cancellation status, crew deployment, unplanned leave, and routes hit by staff shortages.

"Both these teams will submit a daily report," the DGCA said in the two page order.

DGCA also summoned IndiGo Chief Executive Pieter Elbers to appear at its office on Thursday and submit a complete report, along with comprehensive data and updates, relating to the recent operational disruptions, according to a statement.

Meanwhile, DGCA has decided to carry out immediate on-site inspections to assess IndiGo's operations across 11 domestic airports, according to an official order on Wednesday.

All assigned officers will visit their respective airports in the next 2-3 days, and submit a comprehensive report to the Director of Operations for the flight safety department at the DGCA in New Delhi within 24 hours of their visit, the order said.

IndiGo has already submitted its revised flight schedule to DGCA after the government slashed its winter schedule by 10 per cent.

Since last week, IndiGo cancelled thousands of flights nationwide after failing to plan for tighter safety regulations. The cancellations peaked on December 5 and have declined since. The airline on Tuesday said its operations have stabilised and were back to normal levels. But the cancellations continued with nearly 220 flights at three major airports, including Delhi and Mumbai, cancelled.

As part of the winter schedule for 2025-26, the airline has been operating over 2,200 flights per day.

The latest order is part of a suite of actions by authorities that followed IndiGo, which controls over 65 per cent of the market share, cancelling more than 4,000 flights since December 2 that left tens of thousands of passengers stranded, upending their vacation plans, important meetings, and weddings.



Separately, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday questioned the central government for not taking timely action to check the crisis, asking why the situation was allowed to precipitate.

"The question is why, at all, this crisis arose and what have you been doing?" a bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said and directed the government and the airline to take steps to adequately compensate the affected persons.

The bench directed that by January 22, the next date of hearing, if the inquiry initiated by a committee into the disruption in flight operations over the past week is complete, its report should be submitted to the court in a sealed cover.

DGCA, which previously issued a show cause notice to IndiGo's CEO and chief operating officer to explain the disruptions, has set up a four-member panel to probe the lapses. Civil Aviation Minister Rammoohan Naidu has ordered a 10 per cent cut in planned flights of the airline to help match schedule with pilots available. The personnel deployed at IndiGo's corporate office will monitor "cancellation status - domestic and international, refund status, on time performance, compensation to passengers and baggage return", the DGCA order said.

The two captains deployed at IndiGo's corporate office will on a daily basis look into the airline's total fleet, average stage length, total number of pilots, network details, crew utilisation in hours, all unplanned leaves per day (like sick leave, casual leave and emergency leave), flights per day and available crew, total number of sectors affected on account of crew shortage and standby crew per day per base (cockpit and cabin). (PTI)

Congress' defeat in polls due to its leadership, not EVMs or 'vote chori': Shah

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: A combative Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday hit out at the opposition in the Lok Sabha for its campaign against SIR, saying the issue has been raked up as it can no longer win elections by "corrupt practices", and asserted that the reason for Congress' defeat in polls was its leadership, not EVMs or "vote chori".

In his intervention in the debate on election reforms, Shah alleged that the opposition wanted to keep the "avaidh ghushpathiye" (illegal immigrants) in the voter list and hence the SIR issue was raised, but the Narendra Modi government's policy is clear -- detect all aliens, delete their names from the voters list and throw them out of the country. Shah gave a point-by-point rebuttal to the opposition's charges on SIR during his 90-minute speech, which also saw Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi interrupting the home minister to challenge him to debate with him on his three press conferences on "vote chori", leading to heated exchanges between the two leaders, and a walkout by the opposition some time later.

Seeking to corner the Congress, Shah claimed that there were three instances of "vote chori" by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. "Post Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was backed by 28 persons, while Jawaharlal Nehru was supported by two persons and yet Nehru became the prime minister, this was vote chori," he said.



Shah said the second "vote chori" was by Indira Gandhi, when she granted herself immunity after the court set aside her election.

He said the dispute of the third "vote chori" has just reached the civil courts on how Sonia Gandhi "became a voter before becoming a citizen of India", a remark that invited sharp reactions from the Congress benches. Targeting the Congress, Shah said the reason for its poll losses was its leadership.

"If someone asks a question in a presser, he is dubbed as a BJP agent, if they lose a case, they accuse the judge, if they lose an election, they blame EVMs. Now, when the EVM blame does not hold, they brought up vote chori... still, they lost Bihar. Now the reason for your defeat is your leadership and not EVM or voters' list," the home minister said.

"They think no one holds them accountable, 'bhagwan kare', I am

proved wrong and one day Congress workers seek their accountability," he said. Shah also accused the opposition of spreading falsehoods on Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and launched a strong defence of the exercise, asking whether democracy can be safe when the prime minister and the chief ministers are decided by 'ghushpathiye'.

Interrupting his speech, Rahul Gandhi challenged the home minister to debate with him on his three press conferences in which the Congress leader alleged "vote chori" by the BJP in collusion with the Election Commission.

Fiery exchanges were witnessed with Shah and Gandhi trading barbs. "Let us have a debate on my press conference. Amit Shah ji, I challenge you to have a debate on the three press conferences," the Congress leader said.

Shah shot back that he will not

proved wrong and one day Congress workers seek their accountability," he said. Shah also accused the opposition of spreading falsehoods on Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and launched a strong defence of the exercise, asking whether democracy can be safe when the prime minister and the chief ministers are decided by 'ghushpathiye'.

He also told the members of TMC and DMK that if they continue to oppose SIR in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, they will be wiped out in the next year's assembly polls.

Shah said no party opposed SIR between 1952 and 2004. The home minister said the first SIR was conducted in 1952, when Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime minister and the Congress was in power. "Then it happened in 1957 when Nehru was there, the third happened in 1961 and Nehru was there.

"Then it happened during Lal Bahadur Shastri's time, then again during Indira Gandhi's time, Rajiv Gandhi's time, Narasimha Rao's time, and then in 2002 during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's time which continued till Manmohan Singh's time," he said. (PTI)

Higher payouts to farmers: Expect SIT to also probe past CEOs of NOIDA, says SC

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: The Supreme Court Wednesday said the SIT constituted by it to probe higher payment of compensation to farmers for their land allegedly in "connivance" and "collusion" of officials from NOIDA must also investigate the chief executive officers and others at helm of the authority for the past 10-15 years.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Ujjal Bhuyan and N Kottiswar Singh also gave the Special Investigation Team (SIT) two more months to complete the investigation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for NOIDA, said he wants to file an affidavit to put forward the view of the authority in the matter. The top court clarified that farmers who have been given higher payments will not be penalised and no coercive action will be taken against them. Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for one of the farmers who has allegedly got higher payment for his land, said that he has been receiving

ing notices from the SIT to come and record his statement. "Kindly protect the farmers, as it is not their fault," he urged the bench.

The bench said it has already clarified in its earlier orders that investigation is not to harass the farmers but to probe the connivance and collusion of officials, who indulged in higher payments.

It took on record the status report filed by the SIT in which three months time has been sought to complete the investigation. On August 13, the top court ordered an SIT probe against NOIDA officials for allegedly colluding with builders to pay compensations to land owners beyond their entitlement. It had accepted the findings of the SIT which found prima facie substance in the allegations and asked the recommendations of the SIT headed by senior IPS officer S B Shiradkar to be given to Uttar Pradesh chief secretary who was asked to place it before the council of ministers to consider converting Noida into a "metropolitan council". (PTI)

India harbouring big and bold dreams in space sector: Shubhanshu Shukla

KOLKATA, Dec 10: Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the first Indian astronaut to go to the International Space Station, on Wednesday said the country is harbouring "big and bold dreams", foraying into human spaceflight after a hiatus of 41 years.

Shukla was the first Indian to visit the International Space Station as part of the Axiom-4 mission. He returned to India from the US on August 17, 2025, after the 18-day mission.

The space is a "great place to be", marked by deep peace and an "amazing view" that becomes more captivating with time, he said, interacting with schoolchildren at an event organised by the Indian Centre for Space Physics here.

"The longer you stay, the more you enjoy it," Shukla said, adding on a lighter note that he "actually kind of did not want to come back".

Shukla said the hands-on experience in space was very different from what he had learnt during training.

He said the future of India's space science was "very bright", with the country harbouring "very big and bold dreams".

Shukla described his ISS flight, un-

dertaken with support from the US, as a crucial "stepping stone" towards realising India's "Vision Gaganyaan".

"The experience gained is a national asset. It is already being used by internal committees and design teams to ensure ongoing missions are on the right track," he said.

Shukla said the country's space ambitions include the Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme, the Bharatiya Station (India's own space station), and eventually a human landing on the Moon.

While the Moon mission is targeted for 2040, he said these projects are already in the pipeline, and the field will evolve at a "very rapid pace" over the next 10-20 years.

He told the students that though these targets are challenging, they are "achievable by people like you", urging them to take ownership of India's aspirations.

The sector will generate "a lot of employment opportunities" as India expands its human spaceflight capabilities, he noted.

Echoing the iconic words of India's first astronaut Rakesh Sharma, Shukla said that from orbit, "India is still the

best in the world".

Shukla also asserted that the achievement was not his alone, but that of the entire country.

"The youth of India are extremely talented. They must stay focused, remain curious and work hard. It is their responsibility to help build a developed India by 2047," he said.

Highlighting a shift from Sharma's era, Shukla said India is now developing a full-fledged astronaut ecosystem.

With Gaganyaan and future missions, children in India will be able to not only dream of becoming astronauts, but also achieving it within the country, he said.

"Space missions help a village kid believe he can go to space someday. When you send one person to space, you lift million hopes. That is why such programmes must continue... The sky is not the limit," Shukla said.

"Scientists must prepare for systems that will last 20-30 years, while ensuring they can integrate technologies that will emerge a decade from now," he said. Shukla added that he looked forward to more space missions, and was keen to undertake a space walk, which will require him to "train for another two years". (PTI)

SIR camps conducted for sex workers in 3 red-light areas in Kolkata

KOLKATA, Dec 10: The West Bengal CEO's office on Wednesday organised camps in three red-light areas in Kolkata to help sex workers fill up enumeration forms as part of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state, an official said.

These camps were set up in red-light zones in Kidderpore, Kalighat and Chetla areas in the city, he said.

The move comes a day after similar assistance camps were organised in Sonagachi, Asia's largest red-light district, in the eastern metropolis.

The special camps in the three red-light areas started functioning from 11 am, he said.

"The special camps were held at Five Star Club on Mungshiganj Road in Kidderpore, and also at 148 Kalighat Road. The two camps were closed by 12.40 pm," the Election Commission official said.

The camp in Chetla was being conducted at the moment, he said.

"The sex workers will be assisted in filling up the enumeration forms. The camp will continue till 4 pm," he said. In Kidderpore, there were at least 70 sex workers, while the number is nearly 100 in Kalighat, the official told PTI, adding that there are around 60 workers in Chetla.

This initiative comes in response to concerns raised by several organisations working for the welfare of sex workers and their children. The CEO's office had assured that dedicated camps would be organised to address the concerns and support the community.

On Tuesday, 805 sex workers in Sonagachi had thronged the assistance camps organised by the office of the CEO with anxiety writ large on their faces, even as Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal said not a single eligible voter would be excluded. (PTI)

India's Deepavali inscribed on UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: India's Deepavali -- the festival of lights -- was on Wednesday inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, sparking celebrations to mark the earning of the coveted tag.

The decision was taken during a key meeting of UNESCO being hosted at the Red Fort in Delhi.

Chants of 'Jai Hind', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' rent the air as UNESCO announced that the celebrated festival has been added to the prestigious list after a discussion by its committee.

Artists dressed in different traditional attire performed in front of the main stage while images of the Deepavali festival played on the big screen.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the addition of Deepavali to the UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List, saying it will contribute to the festival's global pop-

ularity.

"People in India and around the world are thrilled," PM Modi said in a post on X, responding to a post from UNESCO listing Deepavali in its Intangible Heritage List.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat delivered a statement on behalf of the country right after the inscription was announced during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

This is the sixteenth element from India to be inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Fifteen other elements already inscribed on this UNESCO list include the Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja of Kolkata, Garba dance of Gujarat, yoga, the tradition of Vedic chanting and Ramlila - the traditional performance of the epic 'Ramayana'.

Shekhawat and other members of the Indian contingent sported a

traditional headgear to mark the occasion.

"Deepavali" -- the festival of lights -- is one of the timeless festivals of India which is also now celebrated in many other parts of the world.

On this occasion, people decorate their homes with traditional lamps or 'diya', and buildings are illuminated, presenting a dazzling sight at night.

India had sent the Deepavali nomination dossier to UNESCO in 2023 for the 2024-25 cycle.

"For every Indian, Deepavali is deeply emotional, it is felt, lived, absorbed across generations," Shekhawat said in his address.

The Union minister said that with this inscription, "UNESCO honours the eternal human longing for renewal, peace and the triumph of good".

He said from potters to artisans, millions of hands keep this heritage alive.

This UNESCO tag is also a re-



sponsibility, and "we must ensure Deepavali remains a living heritage," Shekhawat said. Our children must know that Deepavali is the festival of Ram Rajya, i.e, good governance, he said.

He said that on the coming Deepavali, people should "light and extra lamp, a lamp of grati-

tude, a lamp of peace, a lamp of shared humanity, and a lamp of good governance".

Shekhawat, in his address, invoked the Sanskrit chant of "Tamsa Maa Jyotirgamaya" (from darkness take me to light) and ended it with, "Jai Hind, Bharat Mata ki Jai, Raja Ram Chandra Ji

ki Jai".

This is the first time that India is hosting a session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

The 20th session of the panel is underway from December 8 to 13 at the Red Fort complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Pakistani diplomat Shoaib Sarwar Sandhu, who is posted at the country's High Commission here, in an interaction with PTI, said, "My congratulations to India on Deepavali inscription".

A day ago, Borendo or Bhorindo, an ancient dying folk musical instrument and its melodies, knowledge, and skills, from Pakistan, Paraguay's ancestral ceramic craftsmanship and Mwazindika spiritual dance of the Daida community of Kenya, among 11 elements, were inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

A total of 67 nominations submitted by nearly 80 countries will be examined during the course of the nearly week-long key session of UNESCO.

On Tuesday, the traditional saree weaving art of Tangail from Bangladesh and Behzad's style of miniature painting from Afghanistan were among the elements inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The skills and practices of making 'Bisht' (men's Abaa or gown), a transnational nomination, were also inscribed on this list.

On Wednesday, other fresh inscriptions in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity category included, Al-Muhaibis: social practices and traditions associated with it, from Iraq; Al-Mihraas tree: knowledge, skills and rituals associated with it, from Jordan; and the Diwaniya, a unifying cultural practice in Kuwait. (PTI)

Nagaland receives ₹ 4.78 cr from NEC in Nov for development projects

KOHIMA, Dec 10: Nagaland has received ₹ 4.78 crore from the North Eastern Council (NEC) in November for various programmes such as youth and sports infrastructure, tourism promotion and support for indigenous cultural initiatives, an official statement said. The fund release was part of the NEC's monthly update on project sanctions and implementation across the northeastern states, it said.

According to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and the NEC Secretariat in Shillong, the council released a total of ₹ 56.22 crore across all eight states in November to support infrastructure development, livelihood enhancement, cultural events, seminars, research and innovation-based initiatives.

The NEC stated that its support for Nagaland covers critical sectors, including infrastructure, agriculture and allied activities, tourism, culture and heritage, edu-



education, skill development, livelihood promotion and innovation, according to the statement issued by the Information and Public Relations (DIPR) department on Tuesday.

Two militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 10: Security forces arrested two members of proscribed outfits in Manipur for allegedly being involved in extortion activities, police said on Wednesday.

A 30-year-old cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was apprehended from Langol Laimanai area in Imphal West district on Tuesday, a senior officer said.

The accused hails from Toupokpi Mayai Leikai in Bishnupur district.

One member of the banned KYKL (O) was arrested from Moreh in Tengenoupal district on Monday, the officer said.

Security forces also recovered one improvised mortar, two bombs and 27 blank cases of arms during an operation in Hengkapkot village in Churachandpur district on Tuesday, he said.

Search operations have been conducted in Manipur since ethnic violence broke out two years ago. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The Centre had, on February 13, imposed the President's rule in the state after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

PFDA highlights financial literacy push at Nagaland's Hornbill Festival

KOHIMA, Dec 10: The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFDA) on Wednesday underscored the importance of financial literacy and retirement planning, during its public outreach efforts at Nagaland's Hornbill Festival.

PFDA Chairperson S Ramann, speaking to reporters here, urged the youth to invest in the National Pension System (NPS), calling it the "safest and highest-return long-term investment".

"Our job is to make sure that all our citizens grow rich before they grow old," Ramann said.

He also stressed the need for greater awareness about financial literacy in the northeast. "Our endeavour is to make pension available to everyone, especially in the northeastern states," Ramann said. (PTI)

cation, skill development, livelihood promotion and innovation, according to the statement issued by the Information and Public Relations (DIPR) department on Tuesday.

Mizoram to deliver LPG cylinders to homes in district HQ towns by 2026

AIZAWL, Dec 10: Mizoram's Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister B Lalchanzova on Wednesday said that efforts are on to fully implement home delivery of cooking gas cylinders in all district headquarters and notified towns across the state by next year.

He said in a press conference here that the home delivery system will be fully implemented in all district headquarters in March next year and in notified towns in September.

In places where the home delivery service is not yet available, consumers are required to bring their empty cylinders to a designated spot, where workers of the gas agency provide refilled cylinders to them.

Lalchanzova said that home delivery of cooking gas has been fully implemented in five out of 11 district headquarters, including Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) area, Serchhip, Nnahthial, Mamit and Khawzawl.

"Although the home delivery system has been commenced in some of the remaining district headquarters, all district headquarters will be fully covered by March next year and 100 per cent home delivery will also be launched in all notified towns across the state

Complaint filed against Tripura minister over 'fake' edu certificates, 'concealing' of criminal case

AGARTALA, Dec 10: A Congress leader in Tripura lodged a complaint with a police station in Unakoti district, alleging that state minister Tinku Roy's educational certificates, declared during the filing of affidavits in the last two assembly elections, were "fake", a lawyer said on Wednesday.

The minister was also accused of concealing a criminal case pending against him while submitting his nomination during the state polls, he said.

Responding to the complaint, the minister said this was a "political issue". Senior Congress leader Chandrashekar Sinha lodged the complaint at Kailashahar Police Station on Tuesday, his lawyer Narsingha Das said at a press conference held at the district Congress headquarters.

The complainant alleged that state minister and Chandipur MLA Tinku Roy had declared that he passed class XII in 2004 from Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh.

"The educational certificates Roy submitted are alleged to be forged, and the board itself reportedly does not exist. In a case investigated by the CBI, the board was also identified as fake," the Congress leader claimed in the complaint.

development for indigenous groups, animal feed production units, scientific pig-breeding facilities, piggery value-chain infrastructure, documentation of traditional medicinal knowledge, tele-education expansion through smart virtual classrooms, among others. Sports infrastructure development in Manipur was also supported.

The NEC reported the completion of rainwater reservoirs for fire safety and a skill training centre in Nagaland, a project sanctioned in March 2023.

The initiative includes rainwater harvesting reservoirs at Dimapur (Assam border) and Khuzama (Manipur border), and infrastructure development at the skill training centre in Chiechama.

The project is expected to significantly enhance fire-safety preparedness and provide structured training for youth seeking employment in fire and emergency services, the DIPR statement said. (PTI)

Major project interventions during the month covered community

in September next year. The supply department, District Consumer Unions and Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) are collectively making efforts for the endeavour," he said.

Supply Director Saizikpui, who accompanied the minister at the press conference, said there are more than 20 notified towns in the state and the focus area will be those where there are distributors.

The IOCL has instructed distributors to clear all LPG booking backlog by December 13 after which no distributor should delay delivery of refilled gas cylinders, which are booked online, by more

than 2 days, he said. The minister said that there will be sufficient gas supply during the festive season.

He urged all churches to strictly use commercial gas cylinders during the festive season.

Lalchanzova also said that the government will take efforts to ensure that economically poor households get free gas connection under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana scheme.

He said that a total of 36,031 families are now given free gas connections under the scheme.

He said that any family whose annual income is less than ₹10,000 can avail the scheme. (PTI)



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Four injured in blast during Hornbill festival in Nagaland

KISAMA, Dec 10: Four people were injured in a blast at a site where gunpowder was being manually dried up during the ongoing Hornbill festival in Nagaland's Kisama village, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred on the premises of a morung, belonging to the Sangtam tribe, on Tuesday when the gunpowder caught fire and burst, he said.

4 militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 10: Four militants were arrested from different parts of Manipur's Imphal West district, police said on Tuesday.

The arrests were made on Monday, and all of them were accused of extortion.

Two cadres of the UNLF (Pambei) were arrested from Awang Wabagai. They were identified as Ningthoujam Nongpokganba Meitei (31) and Konthoujam Nelson Singh (23), police said.

UNLF (Pambei) signed a peace pact with the Centre in 2023, but members of the outfit continue to indulge in extortion and other crimes, they said.

Two members of the SOREPA were also arrested. Chungkham Nanao Macha alias Mitlang (24) was arrested from Ningthemkol, and Arambam Thoithoi Singh (41) was arrested from Changangai.

Unaccounted cash of Rs 3.90 lakh was recovered from their possession, police said.

Meanwhile, arms and ammunition were recovered from Ngairangbam Mayai Lambi Loukun in the district on Monday.

Among the items recovered were two single-barreled guns, one stun grenade, one smoke grenade, one 36-HE grenade without a detonator, 54 ammunition and two radio sets. (PTI)

Hung house in Mizoram's Lai district council

AIZAWL, Dec 10: The elections to the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) in Mizoram threw up a hung house on Tuesday, with the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) emerging as the single-largest party by winning eight of the 25 seats, officials said.

Congress won seven seats, while the ruling ZPM managed six. The BJP won two seats, and two independent candidates were also declared elected, they said. A party is required to win 13 seats to secure a majority in the LADC, they added. The elections were held on December 3, recording a voter turnout of nearly 84 per cent.

No party, except the ruling ZPM, contested all the seats. The MNF fielded candidates in 20 seats, the Congress in 14 and the BJP in 10.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) N Zangara of BJP lost to MNF's Premo Kanti by a margin of eight votes, while chairman VL Hmuaka of MNF was defeated by Congress nominee C Ngunlianchunga by 348 votes.

Ngunlianchunga is the incumbent Congress MLA from the Lawngtlai West constituency.

The MNF and Congress had earlier signed an agreement that they would help one another in the elections and even in the formation of the executive body, but ended up fielding candidates against each other in a number of seats. It is to be seen if the two parties now join hands for the formation of the executive body. The LADC was created in 1972 under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the Lai tribal people. (PTI)

Morung is a traditional cultural house of the Nagas, set up by the respective tribes, to showcase heritage, customs and village life to visitors at Kisama, where the festival was underway.

"The four people were injured in the incident and were taken to a hospital. Three of them had minor injuries, while one sustained severe burn injuries on his face and hands. He is now out of danger,"

the official said. The gunpowder to be used for handmade muzzle-loading firearms, an attraction of the festival, was being dried up when the blast occurred.

The Hornbill festival of Nagaland, an annual 10-day tourism promotional event of the state government, commenced on December 1 and will conclude on Wednesday night. (PTI)

MNF leads in Mizoram's Lai district council polls

AIZAWL, Dec 10: Mizoram's main opposition MNF was leading in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) polls as counting of votes was underway on Tuesday, officials said.

The MNF has won four of the 20 seats it contested, and Congress bagged two of the 14 seats in which it fought the polls, they said.

The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) fielded candidates in all 25 seats, but has so far managed to win one, while the BJP has secured one of the 10 seats it contested, they said.

The counting of votes is taking place in Lawngtlai, with no untoward incident reported so far, they added.

The elections held on December 3 recorded a voter turnout of nearly 84 per cent. A total of 80 candidates, including 11 Independents, were in the fray.

In the last LADC polls of 2020, the then ruling MNF won 20 seats, while the BJP and Congress bagged one each, and three independent candidates were also elected.

The LADC was created in 1972 under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the Lai tribal people. It has 25 elected members and four nominated ones. (PTI)

The counting of votes is taking place in Lawngtlai, with no untoward incident reported so far, they added.

The rally will be organised as part of the 'Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan' initiative of the Ministry of Defence to promote battlefield and border tourism, they said.

The rally will be flagged off from Sukna in West Bengal on December 12, and traverse the Siliguri-Gangtok-Cho La-Nathu La-Gnathang-Zuluk circuit before concluding on December 15, offering participants a firsthand experience of Sikkim's dramatic border landscape and pristine high-altitude routes, they said.

The event, organised by Mumbai-based Super Car Route Group, has been supported by the Black Cat Division of the Indian

Army's Trishakti Corps and the state government.

Conceptualised as a self-funded, self-driven expedition, the initiative aims to position Sikkim as one of India's most spectacular and premier destinations for driving enthusiasts, officials said.

A major highlight of the route is the Cho La (5,420 metres), a strategically significant site from the 1967 India-China clashes, which is now gaining prominence among travellers interested in battlefield tourism.

Because of the rally, Sikkim's lifeline NH-10 will remain closed for heavy vehicles on December 12 and 15, according to a notification.

Movement of heavy vehicles on the 52-km section of the highway from Sevoke in West Bengal to Rangpo in Sikkim will be restricted from 6 am to 12 pm on December 12, and from 3 pm to 9 pm on December 15. (PTI)

In a first, Sikkim to host high-altitude supercar rally

GANGTOK, Dec 10: Sikkim is set to host a supercar rally that will bring 17 of the world's most iconic high-performance machines, from Lamborghinis to Porsches, to the state's rugged mountain roads, officials said on Tuesday.

The rally has been organised as part of the 'Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan' initiative of the Ministry of Defence to promote battlefield and border tourism, they said.

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Preparations underway in Manipur for President Murmu's likely visit

IMPHAL, Dec 10: Preparations are underway in Manipur for President Droupadi Murmu's likely two-day visit from December 11, officials said on Tuesday.

Median along the 7-km route from the Imphal airport to the Nupi Lal Memorial Complex is being repainted and adorned with colourful flags.

A 20-foot banner welcoming the president has also been put up near the Keisampat Junction on the road leading to the airport.

"We haven't received any official itinerary, but have been told to make security-related arrangements for the visit of a VVIP," an official said.

Centre sanctions 25 road projects To enhance connectivity in 30 PVTG habitations of Tripura

AGARTALA, Dec 10: The Ministry of Rural Development has sanctioned 25 road projects measuring 65.38 km length under the Road Connectivity component of PM-JANMAN, with an estimated investment of Rs. 68.67 crore for Tripura.

According to PIB this initiative will provide all-weather road connectivity to 30 PVTG habitations in the State, improve the socio-economic condition of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) living in the State, enhance connectivity in rural areas, bridging the gap between remote villages and urban centres.

The report also said that it will help in foster economic development, trade, and commerce in the region, improve access to essential services like healthcare, education, and markets, create employment opportunities and stimulate local economies.

"Align with the Government's vision of a prosperous Northeast and a developed India (Viksit Bharat). The projects under PM-JANMAN will have a transformative impact on the region, contributing to the growth and prosperity of the Tribal Groups in the North-Eastern region and cementing the government's commitment to inclusive development", it said.

NFR General Manager inspects Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

GUWAHATI, Dec 10: NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava carried out a review inspection of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR), a Unesco World Heritage railway, an official statement said on Wednesday.

Northeast Frontier Railway GM reviewed the key sections of the DHR, interacted with field officials, inaugurated significant new assets and reviewed developmental initiatives integral to the long-term preservation and modernisation of DHR, the statement said. Shrivastava inspected the Tindharia - Rongtong section, assessing the condition of assets, progress of ongoing works and adherence to safety protocols along this challenging stretch. He also inaugurated the newly built Diesel Locomotive No 606, commending the team for ensuring high-quality construction, robust safety standards and superior performance parameters.

The GM also reviewed the maintenance practices being followed across DHR and expressed appreciation for the meticulous upkeep of rolling stock, track infrastructure and heritage structures.

Shrivastava also inaugurated the extensively upgraded Ghum Museum, which will increase the footfall of tourists to the museum. There are plans to further expand it with more informative, interactive and immersive exhibits that highlight the engineering marvel and historical legacy of DHR, he said. The special centenary run of steam locomotive 806B 'Queen of the Hills', marking 100 years of its service, was also flagged off by him.

During his inspection of the Ghum-Sonada section, the GM reviewed the track conditions, operational practices and safety systems, praising the efforts taken to maintain world-class safety while preserving the line's UNESCO World Heritage authenticity.

At Kurseong, he inaugurated the newly constructed Diesel Locomotive No 607 and unveiled the upgraded Kurseong Archives, a major enhancement expected to serve local residents, researchers, tourists and heritage enthusiasts with improved documentation and historical resources. He also inspected passenger interfaces, operational facilities and heritage assets. (PTI)



'Extraordinary Attorney Woo' director Yoo Insik: Indian content has huge potential to go global



When you love something, you begin to understand it and then you truly see it, says "Extraordinary Attorney Woo" director Yoo Insik, quoting a Korean proverb to explain the phenomenon that K-dramas and music have become world over. And he believes India is on the cusp of a similar global popularity wave.

His 2022 drama on Netflix topped the charts with its heartwarming story of an autistic lawyer, Woo Young-woo (Park Eun-bin), navigating the Korean legal system as a new hire at a firm.

On his maiden trip to India, the filmmaker, who is also the person behind hits such as "Vagabond", "Dr Romantic" and "Pinocchio", had had a busy couple of days as he visited the Taj Mahal in Agra and then flew to Hyderabad's Ramoji Film City to meet producers. In the city, he also sampled the famous biryani. He believes he has gained weight in just four days of his stay in India.

"I'm very happy to be here. Thanks to the invitation from the Korean Embassy, I had this precious chance to see the astonishing beauty of your country and so many surprising things," the director told PTI in an exclusive interview here at the Korean

Cultural Centre India (KCCI).

Director Yoo said he is familiar with many fans of Bollywood who get together to enjoy the song and dance of these movies. Personally, he has watched the Aamir Khan-starrer "3 Idiots", SS Rajamouli-directed "RRR" and "The White Tiger", starring Priyanka Chopra, Rajkumar Rao and Adarsh Gourav.

"I was very impressed because the three movies are very different. And (they have) a very high level of creativity. '3 Idiots' has a very good fable with deep wisdom. 'RRR' shows astonishing imagination and a high level of technology. And 'The White Tiger' has very sharp social insight.

"And thanks to the chance the Korean Embassy gave me this time, I got to know about the scale and amazing potential of Indian content to become global. I think it's a matter of time."

According to Yoo, when global audiences fall in love with something, they become curious about the culture behind it.

"There is a Korean saying that 'when you love something, you begin to understand it. And once you understand it, you begin to truly see it.' So maybe the new wave like Hallyu can happen anywhere in the world," he said, giving the example of recent hit "K-pop Demon Hunters".

"I didn't think of the Korean traditional hat 'Gat', or kimbap and ramyun. It's just typical Korean food. And the Seoul Fortress was just an everyday landscape for me. Until the 'K-pop Demon Hunters' changed everything."

Hallyu or 'The Korean Wave' is the term coined to explain the global popularity of everything Korean, be it dramas, movies, music, food or the attire. The filmmaker believes Korean shows have clicked with the Indian audiences in such a big way because they both share a painful colonial past and common interests.

"Korean society is changing at a very rapid pace. Koreans tend to be very sensitive to trends. So, our creators have to closely observe the global audi-

ences. Maybe that's why global audiences feel Korean content deals with some common interests nowadays and feel that Korean content is somewhat cool and trendy now.

"But especially in India, maybe the two countries share some similar painful history as colonialism. Indian society is changing rapidly. Naturally, the common interests like class issue or inequality or the clash between traditional values and modern values is a good source of story," he said.

Will India inspire Korean creators like him in his stories?

"I was very impressed with India. I went to the Taj Mahal. The scale was astonishing. And when I got closer to it, I found the details so lovely and amazing. They said it took 20 or more years to build it. I think they were very fast to get the level of detail and the scale. It was amazing. India is full of imagination. Some day, our creators (will) find something," he said. As for his next project, the director has reunited with actor Park Eun Bin for "The Wonder Fools", a comedy about a group of losers in a small town who gain super powers and happen to save the world.

The series, which will air on Netflix next year, also stars Tony Woo and Cha Eun Woo.

With Netflix, he has another project — period drama "100 Days of Lies". Starring Kim Yoo-jung, the spy melodrama is set in the Korea of the 1930s.

There is also a lot of buzz surrounding the second season of "Extraordinary Attorney Woo", but he is not ready to give away much.

"I'm very grateful that many people loved the show. And many viewers are hoping for season two. But we deal with very sensitive themes so we have to approach the idea with great responsibility. At this time, all I can say is we are discussing it very carefully."

He said "Attorney Woo" was inspired by a real person and he consulted many experts about autism to authentically portray the central character as he was afraid that if the portrayal is not correct, it might end up hurting the very people he was presenting on screen. (PTI)



JITENDRA KUMAR, MAHVASH TO STAR IN ROM-COM 'TEDHI HAIN PAR MERI HAIN'

"Panchayat" star Jitendra Kumar and newcomer Mahvash are set to lead the upcoming romantic-comedy "Tedhi Hain Par Meri Hain", to be presented by filmmaker Remo D'Souza.

Described as a quirky and humorous take on love where "madness leads the way" and imperfection becomes a virtue, the film will be directed by Jayesh Pradhaan, known for working as a choreographer on movies such as "Enthiran" and "Kai Po Che".

Calling the film a celebration of flawed yet authentic relationships, D'Souza said he was drawn to its grounded yet spirited storytelling.

"In my journey as a filmmaker, I've always loved narratives that are rooted in reality yet filled with a unique spark. "Tedhi Hain Par Meri Hain" celebrates imperfection. It's about finding your kind of crazy in someone else, and having a reliable and bankable actor like Jitendra Kumar on board ensures the film will strike a chord with the audience," the filmmaker said in a statement.

Kumar, known for his performances in shows "Panchayat" and "Kota Factory" as well as films such as "Shubh Mangal Zyada

Saavdhan" and "Bhagwat: Chapter One - Raakshas", said the story resonated deeply with him.

"The title itself, 'Tedhi Hain Par Meri Hain', perfectly captures the spirit of true, unfiltered love. Playing a wonderfully flawed and real character is a refreshing challenge. The film will resonate with anyone who understands that the most beautiful relationships are often the most imperfect ones," he said.

Mahvash, best known for her work as a radio jockey, said she was drawn to the honesty of the storytelling.

"This isn't just a love story; it's a wonderfully chaotic story. What drew me in was how real and imperfect the characters are — they feel like people you genuinely know. I can't wait for audiences to embrace the beautiful madness of this film," she said.

Written by Pradeep Singh, "Tedhi Hain Par Meri Hain" is produced by Ishan Shilpi Verma, Vishal Tyagi and Anwar Ali Khan in association with Kuree Studio and Shaisha Motion Pictures. The music is composed by National Award-winning veteran Ismail Darbar. (PTI)

Tamannaah Bhatia joins Siddhant Chaturvedi in biopic on V Shantaram

Actor Tamannaah Bhatia will feature opposite Siddhant Chaturvedi in an upcoming biographical drama based on the life and times of legendary filmmaker V Shantaram.

Written and directed by Abhijeet Shirish Deshpande, the film is titled "V Shantaram" and will trace the filmmaker's remarkable journey from the silent era, to the advent of sound and eventually, colour emerging as one of the most influential auteurs in Indian cinematic history.

In the film, Bhatia will essay the role of Jayashree, an actor known for her work in "Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani", "Shakuntala", "Chandra Rao More" and "Dahej". Jayashree was also V Shantaram's second wife and an influential figure in his cinematic journey.

"It's a great responsibility to portray a character rooted in one of the most influential eras of our cinema. And I feel immensely honoured to bring to life Jayashree, as she has been part of such legendary projects and the amount of grace she had was surreal," Bhatia said in a statement.

"Shantaram built a legacy that continues to shape generations, and decoding his universe has allowed me to witness the brilliance of the man behind the legend. Bringing a piece of that legacy to the screen is truly a special feeling, and I am thankful for the makers of V Shantaram to see me as Jayashree," she added.

"V Shantaram" is presented by Rajkamal Entertainment, Camera Take Films, and Roaring Rivers Productions and produced by Rahul Kiran Shantaram, Subhash Kale and Sarita Ashwin Varde. (PTI)

THE GREAT INDIAN KAPIL SHOW SEASON 4 TO STREAM SOON: WILL KIKU SHARDA AND SUNIL GROVER RETURN?

Kapil Sharma is gearing up to bring back The Great Indian Kapil Show for its fourth season, with the new chapter set to stream on Netflix from December 20 at 8 pm. The makers have revealed a fresh lineup of characters, a packed slate of celebrity guests, and the return of the core team that viewers have followed for years. Season 4 arrives just two months after the previous season wrapped up, promising a faster turnaround and a renewed format.

This season introduces an expanded universe of characters, with Kapil stepping into roles such as GenZ Baba, Tau Ji, Raja, and Mantri Ji, aimed at engaging audiences across age groups. The showrunners describe the concept as a wholesome "mastiverse," bringing multiple comedic styles into a single season.

Kapil Sharma explained that he often feels he has explored every format, but the audience's trust encourages him to create something new. "Har baar lagta hai ki ab toh sab kar liya, naye season me kya karunga, lekin phir aapka pyaar aur aapki umeed mujhe kuch naya karne ka rasta dikha deti hai... toh aapke liye comedy ke wo saare avtaar lekar aa raha hoon Netflix par, season 4 me... jo hoga comedy ke universe ka multiverse yani mastiverse."

In simple terms, he shared that every time he wonders what fresh direction to take, viewers' expectations show him the way, leading him to introduce a mix of new and familiar characters this season.

Confirming a major highlight for fans, Netflix and the makers have announced that Sunil Grover, Kiku Sharda, and Krushna Abbashek will reunite with Kapil Sharma. Sunil's presence, in particular, marks a special moment as he appears in a promo dressed in a Salman Khan-inspired avatar. Kiku and Krushna also join in new looks, adding to the variety of sketches planned for the episodes.

Archana Puran Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu will also be seen on the show as permanent guests, continuing the familiar laughter-filled panel that has become a hallmark of the series. The promotion highlights an "unexpected" lineup of guests, including World Cup champions, global stars, Gen Z icons, Bhojpuri actors, and surprise appearances. One of the early confirmations came from Priyanka Chopra, who shared a photo while trav-



elling to Mumbai and wrote, "Kapil Sharma you better be ready @thegreatindiankapilshow." Her post indicates she will film an episode for the new season.

The promo also features the Indian Women's Cricket Team, who recently lifted the World Cup trophy, offering a glimpse of the scale and variety planned for this season's guest list.

Netflix shared the season announcement with the caption, "In short, India ke mastiverse mein aapka swagat hai", marking the beginning of promotions for the upcoming episodes. Sunil Grover also reposted the teaser, adding to the buzz around the returning cast.

With a refreshed character universe, a beloved full cast, high-profile guests, and weekly episodes every Saturday, The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 4 aims to deliver a mix of comedy and novelty. (PTI)

'Saiyaara' leads IMDb's 2025 movies list, Aryan Khan's 'Ba***ds of Bollywood' tops series rankings



"Saiyaara", starring newcomers Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda, has topped IMDb's list as the most popular Indian film of 2025, while Aryan Khan's directorial debut "The Ba***ds of Bollywood" led the rankings among web series, the platform announced on Wednesday.

IMDb, one of the most popular online resources for information related to films, television series and artists, released its list of most popular Indian movies and series.

The rankings are based on page views from IMDb's more than 250 million monthly global visitors, making them a reflection of audience interest and worldwide engagement, the company said in a statement.

At the top of the IMDb Top 10 Most Popular Indian Movies of 2025 is Saiyaara, produced by YRF and directed by Mohit Suri. The film has become a global

talking point for its emotional storytelling and chartbuster music. Akshaye Widhani, CEO of Yash Raj Films, said the recognition is a "moment of immense pride".

"Saiyaara" has connected with audiences across India and the world, cutting across geography, age, and culture. We are hugely grateful that it has become one of the most iconic films for YRF and for the industry... Mohit Suri brought a clear vision and deep emotion to the film, while Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda delivered confident, heartfelt debut performances," Widhani said.

Other films on the list include the animated blockbuster "Mahavatar Narsimha" (No. 2), Vicky Kaushal's "Chhaava" (No. 3), Rishab Shetty's "Kantara: A Legend - Chapter 1" (No. 4), and Rajnikanth's "Coolie" (No. 5). The list features five Hindi titles, two Tamil films, and one each from

Kannada and Malayalam cinema.

At the sixth spot was the Tamil coming-of-age comedy "Dragon", followed by Aamir Khan's "Sitaare Zameen Par" and Shahid Kapoor's "Deva" in the seventh and eighth positions. Ajay Devgn's "Raid" 2 and Malayalam title "Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra" rounded off the list. "Mahavatar Narsimha" is also the first animated film to make it to IMDb's year-end Indian rankings. Topping the series list was Aryan Khan's "The Ba***ds of Bollywood".

"Seeing the show at No. 1 feels exactly like what we wanted to do - shake the room and own the conversation. The memes, the fan edits, the arguments, the obsession - that's a show becoming part of culture, not just a weekend watch." He added that the response affirms his instinct to tell stories "with no soft edges, no pretending." Aryan, son of superstar Shah Rukh Khan, said,

Filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane's "Black Warrant" and Sudip Sharma's "Paatal Lok" season two followed in second and third place, while fan favourites "Panchayat" Season 4 took the fourth spot. Psychological thrillers "Mandala Murders" and "Khaul" ranked fifth and sixth, respectively, ahead of "Special Ops Season 2" and "Khakee: The Bengal Chapter", with the newest seasons of "The Family Man" and "Criminal Justice" rounding off the top 10.

The series list is dominated by crime thrillers, with seven of the ten titles belonging to the genre. It also features a strong presence from streaming platforms: four titles each from Netflix and Prime Video, and two from JioHotstar. Yaminie Patodia, head of IMDb India, said this year's selections highlight a period of exceptional creativity across languages and formats. (PTI)

Liverpool without Salah beats Inter in Champions League

LONDON, Dec 10: Even from the penalty spot, Liverpool managed just fine without Mohamed Salah.

After leaving the Egypt forward in England, Liverpool got a much-needed boost with a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday. Barcelona and Bayern Munich celebrated comeback wins and Chelsea lost.

With regular penalty taker Salah out of the squad following his public criticism of the club last week, Dominik Szoboszlai stepped up instead to score the 88th-minute penalty which earned a 1-0 win over one of the competition's best-performing teams.

It was all the more valuable for coming after a run of one win in six games in all competitions for Arne Slot's under-pressure team, which moved up to eighth and is now back in contention for a direct spot in the round of 16. Inter dropped to fifth.

Liverpool's players thought they had taken the lead with Ibrahim Konate's header in the 31st minute. After a video review that lasted several minutes, it was ruled out for handball as Virgil van Dijk had earlier nodded the ball on to the arm of Hugo Ekitike.

Having taken away a goal from Liverpool, VAR came to the visitors' aid when it spotted that



Alessandro Bastoni had tugged Florian Wirtz's shirt in the area, with the midfielder flailing to the ground. Szoboszlai converted the penalty.

Bayern's new star shines
Bayern's 17-year-old midfielder Lennart Karl produced an audacious bit of skill to continue his high-scoring start to life in the Champions League in a 3-1 win over Sporting Lisbon which lifted Bayern to second behind Arsenal.

Karl scored his third goal in four career Champions League games, controlling a pass from Konrad

Laimer in mid-air before volleying a shot from a tight angle over two onrushing defenders and past the goalkeeper.

It was part of a 12-minute, three-goal turnaround for Bayern after Joshua Kimmich's own-goal handed Sporting the lead. Serge Gnabry leveled for Bayern when he was left unmarked at a corner in the 65th, before Karl scored Bayern's second in the 69th and defender Jonathan Tah made it 3-1 in the 77th.

Widely viewed as German soccer's best young talent this season,

Karl became Bayern's youngest-ever Champions League scorer in October on his first start in the competitions.

Late on, Alphonso Davies came off the bench for the Canadian left back's first game since March after a serious knee injury.

Chelsea loses
Chelsea was beaten in the Champions League for the first time in nearly three months as Belgium forward Charles De Ketelaere set up the equalizer and scored an 83rd-minute winner as Atalanta came from behind to win 2-1.

Chelsea, which went ahead through Joao Pedro, dropped out of the top eight automatic qualifying spots to 11th with its second loss. It was a fourth win for Atalanta, which climbed to third.

Gianluca Scamacca made it 1-1 by heading home a cross from De Ketelaere, who then drove in a shot that Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez got a hand to but couldn't keep out.

Koundé scores 2, Yamal sets record

Headers by Jules Koundé three minutes apart gave Barcelona a 2-1 comeback victory over Eintracht Frankfurt.

Marcus Rashford assisted in the first goal in the 50th and Lamine

Yamal with a cross in the second in the 53rd. That took Yamal to 14 career combined goals and assists in the Champions League, breaking a tie with Kylian Mbappe for the most by a player aged under 19, UEFA said.

The visitors had taken the lead with a goal by Ansgar Knauff in a 21st-minute breakaway at the renovated and only partially open Camp Nou stadium.

Son watches Spurs win

Son Heung-min said a belated goodbye to Tottenham as his former club moved up to ninth after beating Slavia Prague 3-0 on an own-goal and two penalties in a game overshadowed by a dispute over moving a rainbow flag showing support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Julián Alvarez scored for the ninth time in his last nine league-phase appearances to lead Atletico Madrid to a 3-2 come-from-behind win at PSV Eindhoven.

Marseille held on for a 3-2 win over Union Saint-Gilloise, which had two potential equalizers ruled out for narrow offside on video review. Folarin Balogun's close-range finish gave Monaco a 1-0 win over Galatasaray. Gelson Martins scored the only goal in Olympiakos' 1-0 win over Kairat

Almaty in Kazakhstan. (AP)

JUNIOR WOMEN'S WORLD CUP HOCKEY

Nidhi's brilliance helps India beat Uruguay



SANTIAGO (CHILE), Dec 10: Goalkeeper Nidhi made several brilliant saves as India defeated Uruguay 3-1 in shootout after an intense 1-1 draw to stay in contention for a ninth place finish in the hockey Junior Women's World Cup here.

Manisha (19) scored for India while Justina Arregui (60') slammed the equaliser for Uruguay on Tuesday in the 9/12 qualification match.

The first quarter saw India control the game, creating multiple chances early on. However, Uruguay won the first penalty corner in the fifth minute but squandered the chance.

India earned a penalty corner in the 18th minute and played an interesting variation by passing the ball to Sakshi Rana on the near post. But her shot was blocked by the rival goalkeeper.

Moments later, India broke the deadlock with Manisha (19') striking the ball from a distance as India took the lead.

The game opened up in the final quarter with Uruguay playing a lot more freely. With two minutes left on the clock, Uruguay switched their goalkeeper for an outfield player to push ahead in numbers and it paid off. With two seconds left on the clock, Uruguay won a penalty stroke. Justina Arregui converted the it to take the game into shootout.

India emerged victorious in the shootout as Purnima Yadav, Ishika and Kanika Siwach scored while goalkeeper Nidhi denied Uruguay thrice to ensure her team progresses in the tournament.

India will next play Spain on Thursday in the 9th/10th place match. (PTI)

Kohli rises to No 2 to ODI rankings, Rohit retains top spot

DUBAI, Dec 10: India great Virat Kohli continued his push to regain his place as the best ODI batter while moving up to the second spot in the latest ICC rankings released on Wednesday.

Kohli hasn't held the No.1 position for ODI batters since he was displaced by Pakistan's Babar Azam in April 2021, but the right-hander is closing in on the top spot once again following his superb recent efforts for India in the three-match ODI series against South Africa. The 37-year-old was adjudged Player of the Series for his 302 runs across the three matches and he was duly rewarded on the latest set of rankings as he improved two places to second overall behind teammate Rohit Sharma.

Rohit amassed 146 runs across the series to hold on to his spot at the top of the rankings, with Kohli closing to within eight rating points on the back of his unbeaten innings of 65 not out in the series finale in Visakhapatnam.

Shubman Gill retained his fifth spot despite missing the three-match series while stand-in skipper KL Rahul rose two places to 12th overall.

Left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up three spots to third in the bowlers' chart.

South Africa trio of Quinton de Kock (up three runs to 13th), Aiden Markram (up four places to 25th) and Temba Bavuma (up three spots to 37th) also made gains

on the rankings for ODI batters.

In the T20I rankings, the trio of Axar Patel (up two spots to 13th), Arshdeep Singh (up three places to 20th) and Jasprit Bumrah (up six runs to 25th) made gains, following their comprehensive 101-run victory in Cuttack.

Yashasvi Jaiswal remained the top ranked Indian batter in the Test rankings at number eight while Gill and Rishabh Pant have moved a step each to 11th and 13th respectively.

Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has made a big jump on the latest rankings for Test bowlers led by Jasprit Bumrah.

The left-armed moved up three spots to third overall on the back of consecutive Player of the Match performances during the first two Ashes Tests against England. Starc has 18 wickets from the two contests and finds himself moving to a new career-high rating and a best-ever ranking of third as a result.

The Indian trio of Mohammad Siraj (12th), Ravindra Jadeja (13th) and Kuldeep (14th) have all climbed up a spot.

England's lack of runs Down Under sees Harry Brook drop two places to fourth overall on the list for Test batters, with Kane Williamson (second) and Steve Smith (third) each gaining one spot behind Joe Root at the top. (PTI)

Real Madrid beat Wolfsburg in Women's Champions League

LONDON, Dec 10: Linda Caicedo raced clear from halfway to score the goal that clinched Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Wolfsburg in the Women's Champions League on Tuesday, while there were also victories for defending champion Arsenal and Juventus.

Paris Saint-Germain stayed winless after five rounds after a 0-0 draw with OH Leuven, however, and cannot now progress to the knockout stage with one match remaining.

The 20-year-old Caicedo, regarded as one of the top younger players in the women's game, recently signed a long-term deal with Madrid and showcased her talents with the second goal against Wolfsburg.

Played through by Caroline Weir, the Colombia striker outpaced the last defender after setting off inside her own half, rounded the goalkeeper, and slotted home a finish in the 67th minute. That added to the opening goal in the 19th by María Méndez for Madrid, which finished the match with nine players.

Maëlle Lakrar collected a second yellow card in first-half stoppage time, while Iris Santiago received a straight red in second-half stoppage time.

Madrid moved above Wolfsburg and into third place — one of the four automatic qualifying places — with the win and is assured of at least a spot in the playoffs. So is Arsenal after a 1-0

home win over Twente, secured thanks to Beth Mead's deflected 10th-minute strike.

Juventus, meanwhile, thrashed St. Pölten 5-0 and climbed to second place, on the same points as Madrid and first-place Barcelona, which plays Benfica on Wednesday in its game in hand.

Cristiana Girelli scored two of Juve's goals — one of which was from the penalty spot.

PSG, a two-time runner-up and a semifinalist as recently as two seasons ago, will not even make it to the playoffs.

The home draw with Leuven was PSG's first point of the campaign and the French club cannot now make the top 12. (AP)

Commonwealth Kho Kho to be held in March next year in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: Over 24 countries will compete in the inaugural Commonwealth Kho Kho Championship from March 9 to 14 next year, for which the venue is yet to be finalised in India.

The Kho Kho Federation of India is in talks with several states to finalise the venue after Commonwealth Sport (CS) gave the approval for the event to take place in India.

The event, which will see 16 men's and as many women's teams competing, will be organised on the lines of the first Kho Kho World Cup held in January this year in Delhi in which 23 nations participated.

This will be the first Commonwealth Kho Kho event in India after Ahmedabad was recently officially confirmed as the host city for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

"We are in talks with several states for the finalisation of the venue. Ahead of the Commonwealth Games in 2030, we are hopeful that this championship would prove to be a stepping stone towards Kho Kho's inclusion in the Doha Asian Games (2030), Commonwealth Games (2030) and Brisbane Olympics (2032)," said Upkar Singh Virk, general secretary, Kho Kho Federation of India. (PTI)

Flick downplays Yamal's reaction to late substitution in Barcelona's 2-1 win

BARCELONA (SPAIN), Dec 10: Barcelona coach Hansi Flick downplayed Lamine Yamal's reaction to being substituted late in the team's 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Yamal was replaced by Roony Bardghji in the 89th minute of the league-phase game. He walked off with a serious expression and appeared to be complaining to himself. He also didn't look happy after getting back to the bench. "We changed Lamine with a few minutes to go because he was booked and it was late," Flick said. "If he was a bit annoyed, then I fully understand and I like it. I was a player too. It's fully acceptable, not a problem."

Yamal was shown a yellow card in the 56th minute for a foul and will miss the team's next Champions League match.

His cross led to Jules Koundé's second goal in the 53rd to give Barcelona the come-from-behind victory after the visitors had gone ahead in the 21st. Koundé also scored in the 50th.

The 18-year-old Yamal has produced more goal involvements — assists and goals — than any other player aged under 19 in Champions

League history from group stage or league phase to final, according to UEFA. He has 14 — seven goals and seven assists. That is one more than Kylian Mbappe's previous record of 13 — 10 goals and three assists.

"It's great to have Jules scoring ... his talent and his mentality are so important," Flick said.

Koundé said it was "fun" to be able to make many forays into the attack on Tuesday.

"My first job is to defend well so I have to keep a balance," he said. "And there are games when we play against a back five — today Frankfurt were very deep, so you have to attack the spaces in behind, which is what I tried to do. I had success with those two goals."

It was the fifth consecutive match in which Barcelona conceded first. It rallied to victories in its last four games.

The victory moved Barcelona to 14th place, two points from the eighth spot in the competition's league phase.

Flick said he was "really happy how we come back," but added "sometimes it would also be good to start well and score the first goal. It is what it is." (AP)

Shooting League of India to be held from February 16 to 26

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: The inaugural edition of the Shooting League of India (SLI) will be held from February 16 to 26 next year, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

The dates have been finalised in alignment with the International Shooting Sport Federation's (ISSF) 2026 calendar to avoid clashes with major international competitions. The league had previously been deferred to early 2026.

The franchise-based league will feature several top Indian and international shooters competing in a mixed-team format across pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines.

"The SLI is a milestone for our sport, franchise-built, athlete-first, and aligned to the global calendar to maximise participation," NRAI President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said in a release.

"With mixed-team formats, compelling storylines, and a premium broadcast, we're set to deliver a world-class opening season that welcomes international stars and inspires India's next generation."

The competition will feature mixed team events in multiple categories -- pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3P), and shotgun (trap and skeet). The franchise-based teams will be divided into two pools for the league stage, followed by knockout rounds.

Players are drafted across four tiers -- Elite Champions, World Elite, National Champions, and Junior & Youth -- ensuring a mix of international stars, top Indian shooters, and emerging talent.

"With tighter formats, mixed-team dynamics, and a premium broadcast, the SLI can translate fine margins into compelling drama. It's the kind of platform that turns technical excellence into (a) must-watch sport," former World Champion Ronjan Sodhi said. (PTI)

Dinesh Karthik joins London Spirit in Hundred as mentor and batting coach

LONDON, Dec 10: Former India batter Dinesh Karthik joined London Spirit as the Hundred franchise's mentor and batting coach, the team management announced on Wednesday.

This is Karthik's maiden foray into a support staff role outside the Indian Premier League, where he works in a similar role with champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"It's a pleasure to welcome DK to the London Spirit. He is a truly original thinker and his vast experience in short-format and franchise cricket will be invaluable to us," Spirit director of cricket Mo Bobat said in a statement.

"He's also great fun to work with and brings an infectious energy and enthusiasm to everything he does," said Bobat, who is also RCB's director of cricket.

Karthik has finished his playing career after the IPL 2024, but ap-

pears in other leagues. The 40-year-old is currently in the roster of Sharjah Warriors in the UAE's ILT20.

Karthik had also appeared for Paarl Royals in the previous edition of the SA20.

"What an exciting time to be joining London Spirit. When I heard about the plans and the ambitions of Mo, MCC and the Tech Titans, I was really enthusiastic to join.

To spend the English summer working at Lord's is truly a dream come true.

"It is the ground where I made my debut for India and I played my last Test match - Lord's is very close to my heart. I can't wait to see the squad come together and to work with some exceptional cricketers next year," said Karthik.

Karthik, who has played 26 Tests, 94 ODIs and 60 T20Is for India, will be striving to help Spirit reach their maiden Hundred final. (PTI)

India's selection strategy: Jitesh over Sanju, fitting Arshdeep-Kuldeep duo tough in playing XI

MULLANPUR (NEW CHANDIGARH), Dec 10: If starting with Jitesh Sharma in the last three T20s in Australia felt like an experiment, his selection over fellow wicket-keeper batter Sanju Samson in the series opener against South Africa provided ample clarity over team management's thought process going in to the World Cup at home.

The think tank can't be blamed for preferring a specialist lower-order finisher ahead of Samson, who was displaced at the top of the order for no fault of his own after Shubman Gill's return to the shortest format. He has struggled to make the eleven since then.

Jitesh, who calls his finisher's role in the team as bread and butter, is expected to start the T20 World Cup for India unless he fares poorly in preceding series against South Africa and New Zealand.

At this stage, it is also difficult to look beyond Samson and Jitesh for the wicket-keeping options in the squad. And do the selectors need to think out of the box in this context?

"It is the right call. If Sanju is not in top three and if the keeper is batting in the middle order you rather play a specialist, a lower order batter than a top order batter. It is not easy batting for two balls or four balls.

"Jitesh is a specialist in that regard," former India wicket-keeper Deep Dasgupta told PTI.

"Nine games to go (before World Cup). I don't see

too many changes ahead of the T20 World Cup," he reckoned.

Arshdeep and Kuldeep: Only one can play
The selection on Tuesday night also made it clear that it is difficult to accommodate both Arshdeep Singh and Kuldeep in the eleven if the team needs batting till number eight. In spin-friendly conditions in the UAE, Arshdeep, India's leading wicket-taker, was benched for a majority of the games, raising a few eyebrows.

He was picked for three of the five games Down Under before making an impact in the series opener against the Proteas in Cuttack, having the dangerous caught behind with an outswinger.

The left-arm pacer's death bowling skills are also hard to match in the shortest format.

With Arshdeep in the side, another match-winner Kuldeep Yadav was left out. In the ODI series, Kuldeep had managed to get a clutch of wickets even in heavy dew, underlining his immense value to the side. "It is unfortunate (picking between Arshdeep and Kuldeep). The way Arshdeep is bowling (you have to pick him). He is the highest wicket-taker for you in the format. "You would want to have both ideally but you can't (with batting needed till 8)," said Dasgupta, who is part of the commentary panel for the ongoing series. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in sports with a focus on training, infrastructure sharing and sports science collaboration.

The agreement provides a "structured framework for joint promotion of sports, exchange of expertise and mutual access to each nation's elite sporting infrastructure and high-performance centres for athletes, coaches and sports science professionals."

The signing ceremony was attended by Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Antonio Tajani and Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya.

"Today marks a proud moment for the Indian Olympic movement. This partnership with CONI opens



new horizons for our athletes to train, learn, and excel within one of the world's most respected sporting systems," PT Usha, IOA President, said in a release.

"The exchange of knowledge, expertise, and infrastructure will play a pivotal role in elevating India's global sporting perform-

ance. We look forward to a long and inspiring collaboration with our Italian counterparts."

The MoU outlines structured plans for joint training camps, coaching exchanges, collaborative sports science programmes, and development pathways for emerging athletes, signalling a new era of co-

operation between the two Olympic committees.

"This partnership arrives at a crucial moment for India's sporting ambitions. Access to world-class facilities and joint training programmes will significantly strengthen our athletes' preparation for future Olympic cycles," Mandaviya said. "The Government of India welcomes this initiative and is committed to supporting meaningful international collaborations that uplift Indian sport."

Luciano Buonfiglio, President of CONI, said, "Italy and India share a deep passion for sport, and this MoU represents an important step in strengthening that bond.

"By opening our high-performance facilities and expertise to each other, we are building a bridge of excellence that will benefit both nations' athletes for years to come. CONI is delighted to join hands with IOA in this forward-looking initiative." (PTI)

Stands named after Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur to be unveiled

Pressure mounts on Gill as India look to press advantage in Mullanpur

MULLANPUR (NEW CHANDIGARH), Dec 10: Yet to stamp his authority in the shortest format, Shubman Gill would be eyeing major gains on home soil when a well-rounded India look to extend their dominance over South Africa in the second T20 International here on Thursday.

With only a travel day separating the first two games of the five-match series, Gill won't mind getting straight into the middle in search of a substantial knock.

India steamrolled South Africa in the series opener but the middling returns from Gill, since his T20 comeback in Asia Cup back in September, remains a talking point.

Following an impressive debut as Test captain in the UK, Gill was brought back into the T20 setup.

Even though Sanju Samson and his Punjab teammate Abhishek Sharma were doing the job at the top of the order, the team management showed immense faith in Gill's abilities as a T20 opener. The batter from Kerala was displaced and he has since then struggled to find a place in the playing eleven. The Test and ODI captain can seamlessly perform the role that Virat Kohli performed for India till the T20 World Cup last year but the team, with batting options till number eight, has doubled down on its fearless approach since the triumph in Barbados, leaving little room for an anchor.

Gill certainly can't go hammer and tongs like Abhishek Sharma in the powerplay and therefore needs to figure out what works best for him.



Besides Gill, captain Suryakumar Yadav, who has failed to find consistency over the past 12 months, is also facing additional scrutiny. Couple of months down the line, Suryakumar would be leading India's World Cup defence at home and considering the added responsibility, flow of runs from his bat form a crucial piece of the puzzle heading into the ICC showpiece.

In the colder environment of New Chandigarh, India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination. Returning to national duty from injury, Hardik Pandya reaffirmed his status as the leading all-rounder in the game.

His 28-ball 59 made a massive difference on a sticky wicket while it took him one ball to make an impact with the ball. The selection on Tuesday also indicated that two strike bowlers, Arshdeep Singh and Kuldeep Yadav, will not be part of the same eleven due to the need for batting till number eight.

Arshdeep got the nod on this occasion and India's leading wicket-taker in the format was once again able to provide the early wickets bowling alongside Jasprit Bumrah.

South Africa, on the other hand, would be looking for a drastically better outing with the bat after being bundled

out for 74 in the run chase of 176.

There is no time to reflect on the scale of the defeat and that can only be a good thing for the visitors.

"Nowadays in T20 cricket, there's not much time to look around and absorb. But the biggest factor was obviously not being able to build partnerships, settling after losing wickets and getting some momentum on our side. So yeah, we'll have brief conversations," said skipper Aiden Markram.

The venue would be hosting its first ever T20 International after hosting two women's ODIs back in September. During the last IPL, the pitches produced were not the easiest to bat on with scores ranging from excess of 200 to as low as 101.

On the sidelines of the fixture, stands named after Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur would also be unveiled.

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

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock (wk), Tristan Stubbs, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Lutho Sipamla, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, George Linde, Kwena Maphaka, Reeza Hendricks, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Otneil Bartman.

Match starts at 7pm IST. (PTI)

NZ loses Blair Tickner to injury but bowls out the WI for 205 in the 2nd test



WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 10: New Zealand fast bowler Blair Tickner was helped from the field with a shoulder injury after taking 4-32 on the first day of the second test against the West Indies on Wednesday in the latest cruel blow in a career flecked with tragedy. Tickner fell heavily while fielding a ball at fine leg in his first test in more than two years and only the fourth of his career. He lay motionless while being assisted by medical staff before being carefully lifted from the field on a stretcher.

The teams played to a draw in the series opener at Christchurch. Tickner bowled well in tandem with Michael Rae who took 3-65 on debut as New Zealand bowled out the West Indies for 205 in 75 overs. Devon Conway and Tom Latham were tested in the last 40 minutes but saw New Zealand to stumps at 24 without loss.

"I guess on the first day of a test match if you've rolled the other team for 200 and you're 20 or so without loss, you're happy," Tickner said. "It's been a really surreal couple of days for me since I knew I was going to play. Pinch me."

"Today if someone asked me when do you get comfortable bowling...you don't."

Tickner's injury adds to a growing catalog for New Zealand who already are without pacers Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith and Kyle Jamieson. Mitchell Hay also was handed a test debut Wednesday in place of wicketkeeper Tom Blundell who has a hamstring strain.

The injury to Tickner is particularly poignant,

given the setbacks he has had to overcome throughout his career. Just before his test debut, his father's house was destroyed in a cyclone. And while playing for Derbyshire, his wife Sarah was diagnosed with leukemia.

"Things are bigger than cricket," Tickner told media before the current match.

He learned of Sarah's diagnosis as he was about to start a four-day match for Derbyshire in the English county championship. The England Cricket Board ruled he could not be replaced at late notice.

"So I had to play that game knowing my wife had leukemia, going back and forth to the hospital and playing," Tickner said. "Looking back, it's crazy."

Sarah went through chemotherapy in New Zealand while pregnant with their first child. She is now in remission.

"If something went bad, I'd always be there. It was a journey for sure," Tickner said. "She is still having monthly chemo but she's a strong woman. It's been a big ordeal for the family but we're getting out the other side."

The West Indies came into the match on a high after their superb effort to draw the first test. After New Zealand had set them 531 to win, the West Indies batted more than 12 hours and finished 457-6. Justin Greaves made an unbeaten 202 and Kemar Roach batted four and a half hours for 58.

"The guys are very confident coming into this game," captain Roston Chase said at the toss.

The confidence showed, even after the West Indies lost the toss. John Campbell and Brandon King put on 66 for their first wicket, the best opening stand for the West Indies in 21 innings.

At lunch the West Indies were 92-2 and at tea 175-4, still on top. But as the pitch hardened, Tickner and Rae came into their own. The ball came off the pitch more quickly and began to deviate a little off the seam.

Three wickets fell quickly at the start of the last session and the West Indies slipped to 184-7 before Tickner's injury. (AP)

Failed to answer India's questions: Prince pulls up SA batters after record T20I collapse

CUTTACK, Dec 10: At a loss to explain South Africa's capitulation in the series-opener, their batting coach Ashwell Prince said the visitors simply failed to answer the questions posed by India's "formidable" bowlers while being dismissed for their lowest T20I total of 74 here.

Chasing 176, South Africa folded in 12.3 overs in a 101-run defeat in the opening match of the five-match series that marked the beginning of the two sides' build-up towards the global showpiece in India and Sri Lanka from



February 7. "Obviously after a batting performance as such, that is one department that we will have to improve on quickly," Prince said at the post-match media interaction at the Barabati Stadium, here on Tuesday.

"I thought the Indian bowlers, quite a formidable bowling attack, asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, as a batting unit, we're not able to answer the questions. Tonight we weren't up to the task." The two-paced wicket with the odd one rearing up also troubled the South African batters as Indian bowlers exploited the conditions beautifully.

Prince said the bounce should not be an excuse as they are used to playing on lively wickets back home.

"I think any score that you keep under 180 in T20 cricket is a chaseable score absolutely. There was a bit of bounce, it seemed like, but being South Africans, we should be accustomed to bounce.

"As I said, the Indian bowlers asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, we

weren't able to answer," he said blaming the batting unit.

The decision to bowl first after winning the toss seemed to have backfired but Prince said they did well to keep India's total in check.

"I thought the pitch was good. Not every pitch that you bat on is supposed to be a 220 pitch," he said.

India also had their share of struggles and kept losing wickets before Pandya's late heroics lifted them to 175/6.

"They had to work hard for the first part of the innings. Then, obviously Hardik came in and played a brilliant knock to give them a competitive score.

"I don't think in any cricket match you can decide at the halfway stage if you have a winning score. But what you can do is put up a competitive score and obviously it turned out to be enough."

All praise for Pandya's comeback fifty, Prince said the all-rounder is a calm six-hitter and his clarity in execution stood out once again.

"Hardik obviously played an outstanding innings. I think we have to give him a lot of credit. He has come back from an injury.

"He has come back looking sharp. He picked the right moments to attack with a spin on offer so he got a couple of early sixes away," Prince acknowledged.

"Against the seamers towards the end, he put the pressure on to them. He struck the ball as cleanly as ever so a lot of credit has to go to him."

Clarity in shot-execution was the key to Hardik's success, felt Prince.

"He is a six-hitter but he is also calm. I think identifying the right balls to attack comes with a lot of experience. As soon as the ball was in areas that he is very strong at, he put a good swing on it, no half measures.

"I think most of the time when Hardik hits it, he is not tentative. There is clarity in his thinking and there is clarity in his execution. It was an outstanding innings." (PTI)

Jitesh shrugs off Samson 'rivalry', says healthy competition brings out his A-game

CUTTACK, Dec 10: Jitesh Sharma, who has emerged as India's preferred wicketkeeper-batter in T20 format with less than two months left for the World Cup, has played down his 'competition' with Sanju Samson in the squad, saying it only brings out his 'A-game' to the fore, strengthening the side.

India once again preferred Jitesh over Sanju for the opening T20I of the five-match series against South Africa, a game the hosts won convincingly by 101 runs at Barabati Stadium on Tuesday.

"He (Sanju) is a great player. If you have to compete against him and play shoulder to shoulder, then I have to bring my A-game. I think we both are trying to play for India, not for other teams," the 32-year-old said at the post-match interaction.

Sanju, who finished last year as India's leading T20I run-getter with 436 runs including three centuries, had formed a formidable opening pairing with Abhishek Sharma.

But the return of Shubman Gill to the T20I top order has unsettled the batting line-up, pushing Sanju lower than his preferred opening position.

In the last three T20Is against Australia, the management leaned towards Jitesh, seeing him as a natural middle and lower-order option more suited to finishing games.

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav had also said Gill "deserved" to return as opener, a comment widely read as another hint that Sanju's role in the XI is uncertain under the current team plan.

But Jitesh played down the individual competition, choosing instead to emphasise camaraderie and shared ambition.

"I am very grateful that he is in the team and I'm under him... Frankly speaking, he is



like an elder brother to me. I think because of healthy competition, your talent comes out. I think it's good for the team also.

"There is so much talent in this Indian team. You can feel it that Sanju is out and I'm playing."

"We are like brothers. We share lots of experience with each other. He helps me a lot whenever I do keeping or batting."

Jitesh contributed an unbeaten 10 off five balls in an unbroken 38-run partnership with Hardik Pandya as India plundered 71 runs in the final six overs to finish on 175/6.

Finishing act 'bread and butter'

A reliable lower-order option since his debut at the Asian Games in 2023, Jitesh said he thrives in the finishing role -- something he has repeatedly taken up in the IPL and recent bilateral series.

"After Australia, I didn't have much of a break. I was there in Asia Cup. I've been doing the role of a finisher in

the IPL for the last two-three series (years). That's my bread and butter.

"In practice, I play with scenarios in mind and how I can be in the present and apply my skill and do whatever maximum I can."

With head coach Gautam Gambhir and the management leaning strongly towards him as a long-term middle-order option heading into the World Cup, Jitesh said he has been handed absolute clarity on his role.

"For sure there is a role clarity that I will bat in the middle or lower down the order. Whatever opportunity I get, I will try to control it as much as I can."

"I have full clarity from the management as to what my role will be and what expectations I have. And I think I have the best clarity that I have got in all these years. I am enjoying that clarity right now with the team."

On the mental grind of batting in the lower order, Jitesh said it's a tough, often thankless, job.

"Yes, it is difficult. But by practicing day in day out, we can replicate it in practice and match. It's a difficult job. It's a thankless job, basically, finishing the game.

"But I enjoy that pressure. When I go there to bat and there's a rush of hitting a first-ball six, I really enjoy that pressure and excitement."

Hardik Pandya, returning from a quadriceps injury that sidelined him for over two months, stole the night with a blazing 59 not out off 28 and figures of 1/16 in two overs to earn the 'Player of the Match' award.

"He (Pandya) is the main player of our team. I think we don't look after him that how he performs or what.

"He brings a lot of experience in the team, lots of talent. And when he is around, lots of boys feel confident. And it gives you lots of experience on the field because he is a World Cup champion player. And that brings a lot to the table for the juniors and all the players."

On working with India's mystery and wrist-spin options such as Varun Chakravarty and Kuldeep Yadav, Jitesh said that keeping is all about anticipation and simplicity.

"We know exactly because they are our teammates. So, I know how is his action."

"The more you practice with them, the more you understand as a wicketkeeper. That's my role. I have to be one step forward from them. I have to think ahead of the game and what can they do? I have to think about it. What can be the next ball? What can't be? I have to take that."

"So, that's how I work. I think if you focus on the basic skills, keeping things very simple is the key in the wicket-keeping." (PTI)

Cricket Australia delegation reviews T20 tour preparations in Lahore



LAHORE, Dec 10: A Cricket Australia (CA) delegation is in Lahore to review security arrangements ahead of the team's three-match T20I series against Pakistan in January.

The delegation includes an independent security advisor and an official of the Australian Cricketers' Association.

Australia will tour Pakistan early next year for a white-ball series, scheduled to be played in two phases. The first phase comprises a three-match T20I series in January. Though the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has not yet announced the venues and dates, it appears that all three games will be held in Lahore.

The delegation's programme includes visits to the Gaddafi Stadium and the LCCA Ground in Lahore, as well as the hotel where the Australian team will stay. They are also scheduled to meet PCB officials and government and security representatives.

Australia is set to tour Pakistan again in March next year for a three-match ODI series, but indications are that the series may be moved to another window ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup.

Officials from the Australian High Commission have also met PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi, who is also the federal interior minister, to discuss the tour. The meeting came after some Sri Lankan cricketers were instructed by their board to remain in Pakistan and complete a white-ball series last month.

Some Sri Lankan players had expressed a desire to return home after the first ODI in Rawalpindi, following a suicide bomb blast in Islamabad. (PTI)

Injuries test you mentally; wanted to come back stronger, bigger, better: Hardik



CUTTACK, Dec 10: India's ace all-rounder Hardik Pandya feels a positive mindset has helped him return to the ground "stronger, bigger and better" after injury setbacks led to self-doubt.

Pandya's return from a nearly two-month layoff due left quadriceps injury propelled India to a massive 101-run win against South Africa in the opening T20I here on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old all-rounder blazed to an unbeaten 28-ball 59 and 1/16 with the ball as he announced his return to the side after suffering the injury during the Asia Cup.

"My mindset was really about coming back stronger, bigger, better. Injuries test you mentally and at the same point in time, it kind of puts a lot of doubts... and a lot of credit to the loved ones," said Pandya in a video posted on bcci.tv.

"I've stood strong, I've done a lot of

things with grace and that has helped me to become even more confident, back myself and really trust my skillset... I really believe in myself as a player. I've always believed that if you don't believe in yourself, how would others believe you," Pandya, who will be a key member in India's T20 World Cup campaign in two-months' time, added.

The cricketer said that he is someone who derives confidence from within and doesn't bother too much about what others think about him.

"I think I have been a very honest, very real person in life as well, which has helped me a lot. I don't really sugarcoat a lot of things in my life. It's never about the other person, it's never about how others think or how others perceive. It's always about how I feel inside.

"Now, it's time where Hardik Pandya

wants to just play the sport, enjoy every second on the ground... and bigger and better will be the motto in my life."

Pandya says he derives an energy from the crowd, which helps him live up to the expectations.

"You should be a rockstar. You come, perform for 10 minutes and the crowd goes berserk, I think that has been the biggest motivation for me."

Pandya turned a hostile Mumbai crowd, when he moved in as Mumbai Indians skipper from Gujarat Titans in 2024, into loving fans with his triumphant performance in the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

"Life has thrown a lot of lemons at me, I've always thought I'll make a lemonade," he said. Every time I walk in, I feel like all the crowd is just waiting... they've come for this moment to watch me bat. (PTI)

Sky's willingness to adjust for the greater good brings out the best in the team, says Steyn

CUTTACK, Dec 10: Former South Africa pace ace Dale Steyn feels Suryakumar Yadav's "secure, welcoming, and willing to adjust" captaincy brings out the best in the players, who in turn back their skipper. With head coach Gautam Gambhir emphasising flexibility, dynamism, and a willingness to adapt to match situations, India have been experimenting with their batting line-up.

In opener Suryakumar himself shuffled between No.3 and No.4 spots. In the opening T20I against South Africa he came in at one down.

"When you have the backing of your team and feel comfortable in your environment, you can have open conversations with your players. You're not threatened by your spot or by the captaincy," Steyn said on JioStar.

"You put the team first and say, 'What's best for the individual? What's best for the team?' That's the kind of captain everyone wants, someone who's secure, welcoming, and willing to adjust for the greater good. Even if it's just for a game or a series, that flexibility brings out the best in your players."

"So when he tells someone, 'You can't bat at three today. I need you at six,' the batter understands because the captain has backed him before. That's a fantastic skill and a great leadership quality," Steyn added. (PTI)