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Vol .No. II Issue No. 281 RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2025 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

'Irresponsible and dangerous': CM on B'deshis' claim of separating NE India

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said that a section of Bangladeshis has been repeatedly saying that India's North East should be merged with the neighbouring country which is "irresponsible and dangerous" and India will not remain silent on this. Sarma was reacting to the statement of senior leader of Bangladesh's newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP), Hasnat Abdullah, on Monday that Dhaka should "isolate" India's northeastern states and extend support to separatist elements in the region, if New Delhi attempted to destabilise his country. "For the last one year, statements have been coming again and again from that country that the states of North East India should be separated and made a part of Bangladesh," the chief minister said (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Zubeen death case: Shyamkanu, Siddhartha and five others produced virtually before court

Charge sheet handed over to accused; next hearing on Dec 22

HT Bureau
 GUWAHATI, Dec 16: All seven accused in the high-profile death case of popular Assamese singer Zubeen Garg were produced virtually before the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Kamrup Metropolitan, on Tuesday, following the submission of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) chargesheet last week. The accused were presented through video conferencing after the court accepted the state government's submission citing security and law-and-order concerns if they were brought physically to court. Acting on this, the CJM directed their virtual appearance from different jails to ensure smooth conduct of the proceedings. During the hearing, copies of the voluminous chargesheet were formally furnished to the accused,



who confirmed receipt of the documents. The SIT had also handed over hard copies of the chargesheet to jail authorities prior to the hearing, while pen drives containing the documents were provided to family members of the accused. The court also enquired about their health condition, to which the accused responded that they were physically well. The CJM fixed December 22 as the next date of hearing, when the

court is likely to consider committing the case to the Sessions Court. Once committed, the trial in the sensational case is expected to formally begin. The SIT chargesheet, running into over 3,500 pages, was filed before the CJM on December 12 after months of investigation. According to officials, the SIT examined more than 300 witnesses, collected extensive forensic and digital evidence and conducted multiple rounds of interrogation before finalising the chargesheet. Those charged with murder include festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddhartha Sarma, bandmate Shekharjyoti Goswami and co-singer Amritprava Mahanta. Zubeen Garg's cousin, Sandipan Garg, has been booked for culpable homicide (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Eviction drive clears encroachments in Dhing



HT Bureau
 GUWAHATI, Dec 16: As part of the Assam government's ongoing efforts to free government land and wetlands from illegal encroachment, a major eviction drive was carried out on Tuesday in several areas under the Dhing Revenue Circle of Nagaon district, officials said. The drive began early in the morning at villages including Tuk-tuki, Salnabari and Ahomgaon and later extended to areas such as Roumari beel, Bherberi beel, Moiradhaj Katahguri, Akarabari and Magurmari beel. The operation targeted encroachments on over 100 acres of government land, including wetlands and natural streams, where unauthorised embankments and ponds had been constructed for fisheries. Officials said encroachers had built embankments around water bodies such as Roumari beel, dug hundreds of ponds and blocked the natural flow of water, resulting in recurring (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Vrindabani Vastra to return for public exhibition

Move to showcase State's centuries-old weaving heritage, says CM
HT Bureau
 GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday announced that the historic Vrindabani Vastra, woven in Assam and currently preserved in a museum in London, will be brought back to the State for public exhibition in 2027, saying the initiative would familiarise people with Assam's rich weaving heritage and cultural legacy. Addressing beneficiaries at programmes held in Lumding and Barpetta Assembly constituencies, the chief minister said the Vrindabani Vastra is a symbol of Assam's civilisational depth and artistic excellence. He said its exhibition in Assam

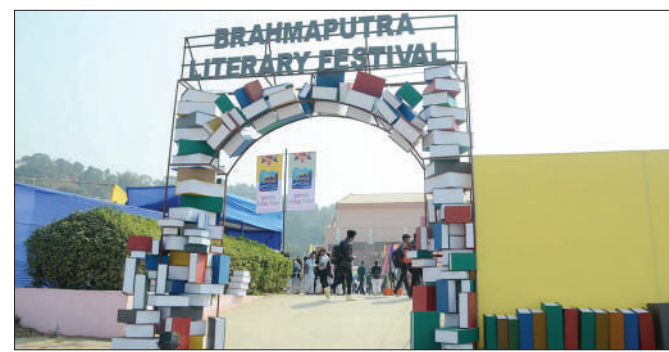
Vijay Diwas celebrated in state



GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Defence personnel and veterans on Tuesday paid homage to the sacrifices of brave hearts on the occasion of Vijay Diwas here. Vijay Diwas was celebrated at the Assam State War Memorial on the bank of Dighali Pukhuri by the Directorate (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Brahmaputra lit fest to pay special tributes to Bhupen Hazarika, Zubeen Garg

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: The next edition of the Brahmaputra Literature Festival will be held in Assam's Sivasagar from February 6-8 and will pay special tributes to cultural icons Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg. The theme of the event is "Confluence of rhythm, word and art - Celebrating the voice of humanity". Festival director and noted author Rita Chowdhury said this edition celebrates music, literature and spirit of humanity, highlighting the intertwining of art



forms and human emotions. "The Brahmaputra is our metaphor for humanity. It's vast, inclusive, timeless and musical," she said.

"Through the rhythm of our hills and the rivers, the Brahmaputra Literature Festival becomes a meeting ground of voices - a forum of positive thinking. This year, as we celebrate the birth centenary of Bhupen Hazarika and honour the artistic legacy of Zubeen Garg, the festival turns into an offering to humanity," Chowdhury said. Bharat Ratna Hazarika's birth centenary is being celebrated across Assam and many other parts of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Government of Assam

Gratitude to
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
 Chief Minister

for

Inauguration & Foundation Stone Laying
for various projects in Hojai district

from

Shri Keshab Mahanta
 Guardian Minister, Hojai District

INAUGURATION

- Construction of Roads - 16 **₹78 crore**
- Mini Stadium, Lumding **₹12.3 crore**
- Waste Management Plant cum Sanitation Park, Doboka **₹3.7 crore**
- Sub-Health Centres - 6 **₹3 crore**
- District Drug Controller Office **₹47 lakh**
- Blood Centre, District Civil Hospital

On behalf of the people of

Lumding, Hojai and Binnakandi LACs

FOUNDATION STONE

- Lumding Co-District Commissioner's Office **₹19.5 crore**
- Construction of Roads - 2 **₹19 crore**
- RCC Bridges - 3 **₹17 crore**

Total project cost ₹153 crore

DIPR/D/HLT/254/17-Dec-25

Sensex tumbles 533.50 pts dragged by foreign fund outflows, weak global trends

MUMBAI, Dec 16: Benchmark Sensex tumbled 533.50 points and the broader Nifty declined to the 25,860 level on Tuesday as persistent foreign fund outflows, a weak rupee and sluggish global market trends dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 533.50 points or 0.63 per cent to settle at 84,679.86. During the day, it dived 592.75 points or 0.69 per cent to 84,620.61.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 167.20 points or 0.64 per cent to a week's low of 25,860.10.

Among Sensex firms, Axis Bank tanked the most by 5.03 per cent. Eternal, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finserv, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement and Bajaj Finance were also among the laggards.

However, Titan, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra and Asian Paints were among the gainers.

"Continued INR weakness to fresh record lows, driven by persistent FII outflows and subdued global sentiments, dragged domestic markets into negative territory," Vinod Nair, Head of



Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The rupee breached the record low level of 91 against the US dollar and hit 91.14 in intra-day trade due to foreign fund outflows on Tuesday. The BSE midcap gauge dropped 0.78 per cent, and the smallcap index dipped 0.69 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty tanked 1.36 per cent, followed by bankex (1.03 per cent), commodities (0.91 per cent), IT (0.90 per

cent), BSE Focused IT (0.86 per cent), financial services (0.83 per cent) and metal (0.82 per cent).

Telecommunication and consumer durables were the only gainers.

A total of 2,519 stocks declined while 1,651 advanced and 158 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"A risk-averse mood dominated trading as the rupee's breach of the 91 level against the US dollar raised macro concerns, while weakness across Asian markets

added to global uncertainty. This combination prompted investors to reduce risk, triggering broad-based profit-booking, particularly across realty, financial services, metal and IT names," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 1.54 per cent to USD 59.63 per barrel.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended sharply lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended in negative territory on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,468.32 crore on Monday, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 1,792.25 crore, according to exchange data.

On Monday, the Sensex dipped 54.30 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 85,213.36. The Nifty edged lower by 19.65 points or 0.08 per cent to 26,027.30. (PTI)

HDFC Bank conducts 4,000 cyber fraud awareness workshops nationwide

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: HDFC Bank has conducted over 4,000 cyber fraud awareness workshops across the country as part of its digital banking awareness drive, educating more than 27,000 citizens on safe digital banking practices since April 2025.

The workshops were organised pan India with the objective of sensitising people to the growing threat of cyber fraud and equipping them with practical knowledge to safeguard themselves while transacting digitally.

The sessions were targeted at school and college students, senior citizens, self-help groups, customers and bank employees, covering a wide cross-section of society.

Through interactive discussions, real-life examples, stories and audio-visual presentations, participants were familiarised with common fraud tactics used by cyber criminals and ways to stay protected.

Several workshops were conducted in collaboration with Law Enforcement Agencies to reinforce awareness and ensure greater outreach.

The sessions explained how fraudsters exploit fear, urgency, greed or emotional appeals to manipulate victims, and highlighted common cyber threats such as digital arrest scams, investment frauds, phishing, smishing, vishing, SIM swap frauds, remote access scams, UPI frauds and malicious APK downloads.

Participants were also advised on the importance of

adopting secure banking habits, including the use of strong passwords, vigilance while clicking links and avoiding the sharing of sensitive information.

The workshops also featured 'Vigil Aunty' as a relatable awareness ambassador to reinforce simple yet effective safety messages.

Commenting on the initiative, Manish Agrawal, Senior Executive Vice President - Credit Intelligence and Control, HDFC Bank, said that fraudsters are increasingly using a combination of social engineering and technology to mislead customers.

He emphasised the need to create widespread awareness about such modus operandi so that people do not share confidential banking details or act on unverified links.

He said the workshops aim to encourage customers to always "Pause, Think and Verify" before taking any action.

The bank has urged customers to remain cautious while conducting digital transactions and to never share confidential banking information with anyone.

In the event of falling victim to online fraud, customers have been advised to immediately report unauthorised transactions to the bank to block the payment mode and prevent further losses.

Customers should also report cyber fraud by calling the 1930 helpline launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs and by lodging a complaint on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

Fusion CX Limited secures SEBI nod for ₹ 1,000cr IPO

KOLKATA, Dec 16: Kolkata-based customer experience (CX) support service provider Fusion CX Limited has received Sebi's green signal, clearing the way for the company to go ahead with its ₹ 1,000-crore initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to ₹ 600 crore and an Offer for Sale (OFS) of equity shares aggregating up to ₹ 400 crore, according to filing documents. The OFS involves the sale of shares by the company's promoter. The promoters of the company include Pankaj Dhanuka, Kishore Saraogi, P N S Business Private Limited, and Rashish Consultants Private Limited.

Fusion CX plans to utilise the net

proceeds from the fresh issue for several strategic purposes.

The company has earmarked Rs 291.8 crore for the repayment or prepayment of outstanding borrowings by the firm and its subsidiaries. Additionally, ₹ 74.7 crore will be invested in its step-down subsidiaries, Omind Technologies Inc and Omind Technologies Private Limited, to upgrade their IT tools. The remaining funds will be directed towards pursuing inorganic growth through acquisitions and other strategic initiatives, as well as for general corporate purposes, officials said. The company filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with SEBI on May 26, 2025. Incorporated in 2004, Fusion CX specialises in delivering high-

end, complex, and integrated customer experience services across multiple channels, including voice, email, chat, social media, and messaging. As of December 31, 2024, Fusion CX operates a multilingual global network with 40 delivery centres spread across 15 countries and serves a client portfolio of 197, which includes 22 Fortune 1000 companies.

The equity shares of Fusion CX are proposed to be listed on both the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE). NuVama Wealth Management Limited, IIFL Capital Services Limited, and Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors Limited are appointed as the book running lead managers to the issue. (PTI)

National Conference of Chartered Accountants to be held in Guwahati on Dec 19-20

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: The Guwahati Branch (EIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is set to host a two-day National Conference of Chartered Accountants on December 19 and 20, 2025, at the Srimanta Sankardeva International Auditorium, bringing together leading professionals and thought leaders of the accountancy profession from across the country.

CA Raginee Goyal, Chairman of the Guwahati Branch and Convenor of the Conference, said the event will be inaugurated on December 19 at 10 am in the presence of Past Presidents of ICAI, Council Members, Managing Committee members of the Guwahati Branch and eminent professionals.

She said the conference is being organised against the backdrop of rapid regulatory changes, rising litigation and technological disruption, and will feature six focused technical and thought-leadership sessions addressing key challenges and opportunities before the profession.

The technical deliberations will begin with an in-depth session on "Evidence and Statements in GST Proceedings" by Adv (CA) J K Mittal, who will share practical insights on investigations, appreciation of evidence, legal standing

and courtroom perspectives on statements recorded during proceedings.

This will be followed by a panel discussion titled "Crystal Gazing the Profession - 2030 and Beyond", featuring Past Presidents of ICAI, including CA (Dr) Debashis Mitra, deliberating on leadership, relevance and the evolving role of Chartered Accountants in the coming decade.

An internationally recognised expert in information risk management and regulatory compliance, CA Anil Bhandari, will speak on "Agentic AI vs Chartered Accountants", examining how artificial intelligence may reshape the profession by 2030.

Renowned tax expert CA (Dr) Girish Ahuja will address delegates on "Income Tax Act, 2025: Way Forward", focusing on the new Income Tax Act scheduled to come into effect from April 1, 2026.

The programme will also include a special leadership session by the President of ICAI and senior leaders of the Institute, highlighting the profession's role in governance, economic growth and nation building.

A talk show on "Capital Markets, Insights and Wealth Creation" featuring Kunal Saraogi,

Sumeet Bagadia and Nikunj Saraf will be moderated by CA Ravi Kumar Patwa, Central Council Member, ICAI, and will provide perspectives on market trends and advisory opportunities.

The highlight of the conference will be a motivational session by renowned diplomat and TEDx speaker Dr Deepak Vohra, titled "The Jaamvant Transformation - Unstoppable Bharat", linking professional excellence with India's growth narrative.

A cultural evening has been scheduled on December 19, featuring a storytelling performance by Laksh Maheshwari, a performance by western music band "Voodoo Child", and a dance drama "Gajanan Udbhava" depicting the origin of Lord Ganesha, to be performed by Chartered Accountants and CA students.

Branch Secretary CA Jay Prakash Gupta said the conference is expected to attract over 1,000 delegates, including members, students and special invitees from across India, and will serve as a platform for knowledge enrichment, professional networking and meaningful engagement.

Online registration is available, with spot registration open at the venue on December 19 between 9 am and 10 am.

NCLT approves Vedanta demerger plan to split into sector-specific entities

MUMBAI, Dec 16: The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Tuesday approved the Vedanta demerger plan, paving the way for splitting the group into sector-specific entities across aluminium, oil and gas, power, and iron and steel.

"The sanction to the company scheme is granted," the Mumbai bench of the tribunal, composed of Charanjeet Singh Gulati and Nilesh Sharma, said.

NCLT had reserved the order after hearing the matter in November.

Vedanta welcomed the NCLT order pronounced on Tuesday, sanctioning the company's demerger scheme.

"The approval marks a key milestone in Vedanta's transformation into focused, sector-leading companies with clear strategic mandates and dedicated capital structures. The company will now proceed with the necessary steps to implement the scheme," a Vedanta spokesperson said.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPnG) had opposed the demerger, citing concerns over the potential financial risks and alleged misrepresentation of hydrocarbon assets and insufficient disclosure of liabilities.

The ministry also wanted disclosures on the concealment of facts that include showing the exploration blocks as Vedanta's assets and details of the loan taken

on the basis of those assets, among others.

The ministry cited a long-pending dispute concerning Vedanta's RJ oil and gas block in Rajasthan, noting that a substantial portion of the company's debt was related to the government claims linked to the block. According to the ministry, Vedanta has not adequately disclosed these liabilities in its demerger scheme.

However, Vedanta said that the company has already complied with all the compliances required. "The company remains committed to the proposed demerger, which aims to create independent, sector-specific entities across aluminium, oil and gas, power, and iron and steel," Vedanta had stated.

The company also told the tribunal that it had already secured approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India after revising its demerger scheme in line with regulatory requirements.

The Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Group had announced the demerger plan in 2023, proposing to split its Indian operations into five separately listed entities - Vedanta Aluminium, Vedanta Oil & Gas, Vedanta Power, Vedanta Iron and Steel, and a restructured Vedanta. The parent entity would retain the zinc and silver businesses through Hindustan Zinc and act as an incubator for new ventures. (PTI)

Indian investors increasing widening their investment portfolio in overseas market: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Indian investors are increasingly broadening their exposure beyond single-stock investments to include US equities, index and thematic ETFs, private market opportunities, and global funds, a report said.

This reflects a more structured approach to portfolio construction and a growing comfort with global market participation, a report titled 'How India Invests Globally 2025' by Vested Finance.

According to the report, broadening access to research, digital tools, and education has played a critical role in shaping this shift, especially in cities beyond metros.

Besides, the depreciation in the rupee makes global investment more relevant, it said, adding that the persistent depreciation changes long-term outcomes in a way that headline numbers often fail to capture.

Outbound investment in overseas equity and debt witnessed a four-fold increase from USD 422 million in FY19 to about USD 1.7 billion in FY25, the report said.

During the first half of the current financial year, outbound investment in overseas equity and debt stood at USD 1.01 billion.

"What we are seeing in the data is not just higher participation, but greater intent - investors are thinking in terms of asset allocation, diversification, and long-term global exposure rather than one-off bets," Vested Finance CEO Viram Shah said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Brahmaputra lit fest

the country with a series of events.

Garg died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore while swimming in the sea on September 19. He had gone there to perform at a Northeast festival.

Organised by Adharxila Trust, the festival will be formally inaugurated on February 5. A curtain raiser at Gauhati will celebrate the legacy of zamindar Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah, actor-filmmaker Pramatish Barua and the renowned women of Rajbari for their contribution to art, culture and tradition.

The festival at Sibsagar Girls' College will feature speakers and performers from different parts of the country and also across the globe.

According to an initial list, some of the speakers include poet-lyricist Prabha Varma, writer Mitra Phukan, educator Vijaya Thakur, Bangladeshi poet Shimul Salahuddin, poet-folk artist Khajoor Singh Thakur, Myanmarese historian Thin Thin Aye.

The festival will also highlight the Bodo and the Mishing communities, showcasing their traditions, artistry, and cultural identity. There will be an ethnic food street, featuring the region's rich and diverse culinary flavours. Five awards will be presented to icons from diverse genres.

This February, a special edition of Brahmaputra Literature Festival was held at the New Delhi World Book Fair. (PTI)

Vijay Diwas celebrated

of Sainik Welfare, Assam.

Defence personnel of different ranks and veterans assembled to commemorate India's spectacular victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

Lt Gen Pranab Kumar Bharali (retd) was the chief guest of the event, which was attended by war veterans Maj Gen Purnananda Das (retd), Brig Abani Kumar Pait (retd), Col Robin Das (retd) and Maj Biren Borgohain (retd).

They shared their unforgettable experiences during the War. All the veterans were felicitated at the event.

Brig Ajit Kumar Bora, Group Commander, NCC group HQ Guwahati, was also present on the occasion.

Along with the Vijay Diwas, a program 'Amar Swaheed Shradhanjali' was also organised, and the widows of two army men killed in action were felicitated. (PTI)

Vrindabani Vastra to return

exhibition of the Vrindabani Vastra would serve as a source of inspiration for weavers and artisans across the State and reaffirm Assam's place in India's cultural and artistic history.

He added that such initiatives are essential to ensure that traditional crafts are not lost and continue to thrive alongside modern economic growth.

Sarma also informed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Assam on December 20-21 to inaugurate the new terminal building of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati and lay the foundation stone of the Rs 10,600-crore Ammonia-Urea project at Namrup.

The chief minister was addressing separate programmes in Laming and Barpeta while distributing seed capital cheques to women beneficiaries under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan, under which 32 lakh women across Assam are being supported in phases to become economically self-reliant.

'Irresponsible and dangerous'

on the sidelines of a programme in Lumding.

Sarma said, "India is a very big country, a nuclear nation and the fourth largest economy of the world. How can Bangladesh even think about it?"

He said that even thinking about it was "wrong, but the thought process of people of Bangladesh was bad". This mindset should not be encouraged, and Bangladesh should not be helped much in any way, Sarma said. "We should teach them a lesson that if they continue to behave in this way, we will not remain silent," he said.

Hasnat Abdullah, the Bangladeshi leader, had claimed that the Northeastern states were geographically "vulnerable" as they were dependent on the narrow Siliguri Corridor, also called the "Chicken's Neck", for connectivity with the Indian mainland. (PTI)

Charge sheet handed

not amounting to murder, while his personal security officers, Nandeshwar Bora and Paresh Baishya, have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust.

The accused appeared virtually from Baksa Jail and Haflong Jail during Tuesday's proceedings.

They were represented by advocate Dhruvajyoti Das, appointed by the District Legal Services Authority after the local Bar Association decided that none of its members would take up the defence in the case.

Zubeen Garg had travelled to Singapore to attend the North East India Festival, where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19.

The case has generated widespread public interest and emotional responses across Assam. (With inputs from PTI)

Eviction drive clears

artificial floods and damage to rural roads across nearly 15 revenue villages over the past several years.

During Tuesday's drive, authorities dismantled embankments, demolished illegal structures and cleared ponds used for unauthorised fish farming.

The operation was conducted peacefully. Nagaon District Commissioner Debashish Sarma, along with Additional District Commissioners Sudip Nath and Shouvik Bhuyan and Dhing Revenue Circle Officer Saurav Kumar Das, supervised the eviction.

Sarma said the drive aims to restore natural water channels and ensure that local residents do not continue to suffer from flooding caused by encroachments.

He added that the eviction would continue till December 19 and may be extended if required to fully clear the area.

More than 250 police and security personnel were deployed to maintain law and order during the operation. Due to the narrow and marshy terrain, bulldozers could not initially access some encroached sites, and over 100 labourers were engaged to dismantle embankments manually using tools before heavy machinery was brought in.

Officials said around 200 families involved in managing the illegal ponds had already vacated the area, as they have residences elsewhere in the district.

The current operation is part of a four-day drive scheduled from December 16 to 20, during which the administration plans to clear around 230 bighas of encroached government land in phases.

This is the second major eviction exercise in Nagaon district within a month, following a drive in late November to clear encroachment on reserved forest land in the Lutimari area.

Eviction drives have resumed across Assam since June this year, affecting thousands of families.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said such drives will continue as the government remains committed to clearing encroached land, including forests, grazing reserves, satras, namghars and other public areas, in a phased manner. (With inputs from PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

I Helal Uddin, S/O- Late Ayub Ali, Vill- Shibpur No 1, P.O.- Murajhar P.S.- Murajhar Dist- Hojai (Assam) That, my actual and correct name is Helal Uddin & my father's actual and correct name is Ayub Ali. That, in some documents wherein my name has been recorded as Helal Uddin instead of Helal Uddin. That, in some documents wherein my father's name has been recorded as Mohammad Ayub Ali instead of Ayub Ali. That, Helal Uddin and Helal Uddin are the names of one and same person i.e. of myself & Ayub Ali and Mohammad Ayub Ali are the names of one and same person.

NAME CHANGE

I Furhana Begum Laskar W/O- Noor Uddin Residing at Patidaya, Jamunamukh, Hajoai (Assam) henceforth be known as Farhana Begum W/O Noor Uddin as declared before notary public of Sankardev Nagar Court vide affidavit no IN-AS05135624966267X dated 16/12/2025 Furhana Begum Laskar and Farhana Begum both are same and identical person.

NAME CHANGE

I Noor Uddin Laskar, S/O- Khurshed Ali Residing at Patidaya, Jamunamukh, Hajoai (Assam) henceforth be known as Noor Uddin S/O- Khurshed Ali as declared before notary public of Sankardev Nagar Court vide affidavit no IN-AS05135426243342X dated 16/12/2025 Noor Uddin Laskar and Noor Uddin both are same and identical person.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Ainul Hoque, son of Jaimal Abdin, resident of Village Bechimari, P.O. Bechimari, P.S. Dalgaon, District Darrang (Assam), do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the above noted address and a citizen of India by birth. That my correct and actual name is Ainul Hoque. That in the electoral roll of 2025, my name has been wrongly recorded as "Alal Hoque" instead of "Ainul Hoque". Both Ainul Hoque and Alal Hoque refer to one and the same person, namely myself.

Sd/-
Ainul Hoque

KA Police seize 8 Kg Opium, arrest man

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Dec 16: Police in Karbi Anglong recovered opium from a car bearing registration number AS 01 EB 0448. The vehicle was intercepted at Dillai Check Post while coming from the direction of Dimapur, Nagaland.

The seized opium was packed in 10 packages, weighing a total of 8 kg, with an estimated market value of ₹ 40 lakh. In connection with the seizure, a man identified as Eno Maningpa, a resident of Senapati, Manipur, has been arrested.

IGP visits hunger strike site in Kheroni

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 16: IGP V Siva Prasad Ganjala visited the hunger strike site at Phelangpi, Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, where agitators led by Litsong Rongphar are demanding eviction from Village Grazing Reserve/Professional Grazing Reserve land.

During the visit, Ganjala held discussions with the protesters, who are currently on an indefinite hunger strike. West Karbi Anglong District Commissioner Sarangpani Sarma and Senior Superintendent of Police Ballin Deuri were also present at the site.

IGP Ganjala requested the protesters to end or withdraw the indefinite hunger strike immediately. However, the agitators stated that they would continue their protest until the Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang, or the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, personally come to hold discussions regarding their demands.

Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award under Pragyan Bharati scheme recognises academic excellence

Prasanta Phukan distributes scooters to meritorious students at DHSK College



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 16: Assam Cabinet Minister and Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan on Tuesday attended the Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award distribution ceremony at Hanumanbax Surajmall Kanoi (DHSK) College (Autonomous), Dibrugarh.

As part of the state government's Pragyan Bharati Scheme, Minister Phukan distributed scooters to meritorious students who secured 80 per cent and above marks in the 2025 Higher Secondary Examination. The initiative aims to encourage academic excellence and provide mobility support to students performing well in state board examinations.

During the programme, the Min-

ister also handed over certificates to the awardees in the presence of DHSK College Principal Dr Sashi Kanta Saikia and other dignitaries. Addressing the gathering, Phukan lauded the students for their hard work and dedication, noting that such incentives are intended to motivate youth to pursue higher education with greater confidence and determination.

The Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award, a key component of the Pragyan Bharati Scheme, is implemented across Assam to recognise and support deserving students. The scheme reflects the government's commitment to strengthening the education sector and nurturing talent for the state's future development.

Hagrama Mohilary joins community Bathou Kherai at Kokrajhar

Bathou prayer held to promote peace, harmony and unity in BTC region



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 16: The community Bathou Kherai puja, symbolising peace, harmony, unity and brotherhood of the Bodo land was held on Tuesday at Green Field in Bodofa Nwgrw, Kokrajhar. The Bathou prayer was organised by Dularai Bathou Gouthom (All Bathou Religious Association).

BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary participated in the community Bathou prayer. Assam Cabinet Minister Chandan Boro, BTC Executive Member Fres Mwsahary and Council Member Jubiraj Basumatary were also present and took part in the religious observance.

Speaking to the media after the puja, Hagrama Mohilary said that Bathou is the ancient religion of the Bodo people and described

himself as a devoted follower of the faith. He said that he offers prayers at the Bathou altar every morning before leaving for work.

Mohilary said he experienced immense peace and happiness after participating in the Bathou Kherai puja at Green Field and prayed for peace and well-being for all communities residing in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area.

He further stated that the Bathou religion has already received recognition from the state government and that prayers and worship under the Bathou faith are performed every Tuesday.

Mohilary added that the Bathou Kherai puja and community prayer are organised annually to promote peace, harmony, unity and brotherhood among all communities living in the BTC region.

BJP Minority Morcha celebrates advent Christmas in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 16: Adding festivity to the Christmas season and emphasising its inclusive ethos, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Minority Morcha of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong jointly organised an Advent Christmas celebration at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, BJP Office, opposite ARTC Gate-1 on Diphu-Manja Road. Themed 'The Gift of God's Grace' (John 3:16-17), the event aimed to showcase harmony and shared cultural values.

The celebration brought together party leaders, karyakartas and well-wishers from both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong in a festive atmosphere marked by prayers, carols and messages of hope, peace and goodwill. The event included an Advent Christmas cake-cutting ceremony performed by Chief Executive Member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Coun-

cil (KAAC) Dr Tuliram Ronghang, accompanied by party workers.

Among the participants were KAAC Chairman Raju Tisso, executive members, BJP presidents of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong Roland Killing and Radip Ronghang, and several senior party leaders. Roland Killing emphasised that BJP is a party for all communities, rejecting claims that it is communal or biased against any religion or caste. He noted that while previous pre-Christmas celebrations were modest, this year's event was organised on a larger scale to include wider participation.

The appointed speaker, Education Secretary of the Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention (KABC) Luke Rongphar, delivered the Advent Christmas message, highlighting the spiritual significance of Christmas as a reminder of the birth of Lord Jesus and his mission to save

mankind. He prayed for peace, unity, prosperity and guidance for the leaders of Karbi Anglong.

The evening was further illuminated by performances from youths of Lorulango Garo Baptist Church, women of Holy Cross Parish, Desobai, Kuki choir from Bagmari, Diphu, Karbi Anglong Evangelical Baptist Church, Rongali, solo presentations by gospel singers Christina Intipri, Carolin Amo, Columbus Rongphar, Miracle Band, Diphu and Worship Warrior band from Tika, West Karbi Anglong.

BJP Minority Morcha presidents, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, Roland Teron and Bijoy Teron, took responsibility for organising the event, ensuring that it was a memorable evening fostering interfaith understanding, communal harmony and a renewed sense of togetherness among all partici-

Indefinite rail blockade at Salakati temporarily suspended



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 16: The indefinite rail blockade programme proposed by various Kamtapuri nationalist parties and organisations at Salakati in Kokrajhar district has been temporarily suspended following an assurance from the Central Government.

Several organisations, including the Kamtapur State Demand

Council (KSDC), AKRASHU, JCPA and KPPIU, had been preparing to block the railway track near the Padmabil Lakshmi Temple at Puthiagaon. The agitation was jointly announced by KSDC, AKRASHU, UG AKRASHU, KPPIU, JCPA and other Koch-Rajbongshi and Kamtapuri nationalist organisations and was scheduled to begin from Tues-

day morning.

The proposed rail blockade was aimed at pressing demands for a separate Kamtapur or Greater Cooch Behar state through a swift peace accord with KLO and KLO (KN), granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Koch-Rajbongshi community and constitutional recognition of the mother tongue of the Koch-Rajbongshi and Kam-

tapuri people.

However, the programme has now been temporarily called off. KSDC Kokrajhar district president Baniram Barman said that the rail blockade was suspended after the Central Government assured the agitating organisations that their leaders would be invited for talks within the next seven days.

The leadership of the agitation warned that if discussions are not held within the stipulated time or if the talks prove to be merely an eyewash, a more intense movement would be launched in the coming days.

It may be noted that on Tuesday, Koch-Rajbongshi organisations had assembled at the Padmabil Lakshmi Temple premises in Puthiagaon with the intention of enforcing the indefinite rail blockade at Salakati railway station. Although the blockade was suspended, protesters raised slogans and staged a strong demonstration at the Lakshmi Temple playground in support of their demands.

SIT chargesheet on Zubeen Garg death vague and weak: Akhil Gogoi

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 16: Rajior Dal supremo and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on Tuesday strongly criticised the much-publicised SIT chargesheet filed in connection with the mysterious death of singer Zubeen Garg in the sea off Singapore, terming it vague, extremely weak and incapable of cornering the alleged conspirators during trial.

Speaking to the media at his Gohainchuk residence here, Gogoi said the 12,000-page chargesheet appeared to have been drafted with an intention to safeguard the Assam Association and some key accused persons. He alleged that only page 13 of the voluminous chargesheet mentions the allegations framed under Section 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita (BNS), raising serious questions about the strength of the case.

Gogoi further alleged that the chargesheet contains no details of the investigation conducted by the SIT at the actual scene of the incident in Singapore. He said the document mentions recovery of only a half-litre bottle of water and some seawater from the site, while no important documents or material evidence were reportedly collected from Singapore by the investigating team.

The MLA also pointed out that the chargesheet does

not include any reference to crucial evidence such as CCTV footage from the yacht, seizure of the yacht, statements of the yacht captain, members of the rescue team, ambulance driver or doctor, nor does it mention seizure documents related to the hotel room where Zubeen Garg had stayed or testimonies of hotel staff.

He alleged that there is no mention of any investigation conducted by the Singapore government into the death, nor are related official documents included in the chargesheet. Gogoi further claimed that the chargesheet interestingly records that Zubeen Garg's body had tested positive for COVID-19.

Raising further objections, Gogoi said that instead of the chief investigating officer, two SIT officers prepared a video and a sketch of the scene of occurrence, which he termed highly irregular. He added that there is no material in the chargesheet strong enough to ensure punishment under Section 103 of the BNS, which provides for the death penalty.

Reiterating his earlier stand, Gogoi alleged that the SIT did not record any questioning of Union Minister Pabitra Margherita, who had organised the event in Singapore. He concluded by stating that the entire investigation was a farce and claimed that the accused would eventually go unpunished.

Teacher shortage plagues 100-year-old Govt Girls' HS School in Dhubri

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Dec 16: A deep sense of irony has gripped the education sector in Dhubri as the historic Government Girls' Higher Secondary School, recently recognised as a flagship Pradhan Mantri Shri (PM SHRI) School, is facing severe neglect marked by acute teacher shortages, administrative gaps and a deteriorating academic environment.

Established in 1925 during British rule, the school is approaching its centenary year. However, concerned citizens allege that the Assam government and the Education Department have failed to extend due attention to this heritage institution, despite its upgraded status under the PM SHRI scheme.

The PM SHRI initiative, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, aims to modernise selected schools by improving infrastructure and learning standards. Contrary to these objectives, the ground reality at the Dhubri Government Girls' Higher Secondary School reflects serious administrative shortcomings.

The school is currently grappling with a major human resource crisis. Of the 67 sanctioned posts for faculty and staff, as many as 34 posts remain vacant. The key leadership positions of Principal and Vice-Principal have been lying vacant for a long time. At present, Dhubri Inspector of Schools Adit Kumar Sharma is serving as the acting Principal, while Biswanath Roy is functioning as the Academic Principal.

The shortage is particularly severe among teaching staff. Out of 13 sanctioned posts for subject teachers in the Arts and Science streams, 10 posts are vacant. In addition, two of the three Demonstrator posts, two of the three Grade-III staff posts and five of the 11 Grade-IV posts are also vacant.

The Science Department has been the worst affected. The school offers Science education from Class VI to Class XII, but due to the chronic shortage of teachers, the Higher Secondary Science stream has remained closed for a long period. As a result, no students have enrolled in the first and second year of the Higher Secondary Science stream this academic year.

The institution caters to around 853 students from Class VI to Higher Secondary Arts. Local residents and education observers allege that the limited number of existing teachers is unable to cope with the workload, leading to a steady decline in academic standards.

Members of the conscious circles in Dhubri have expressed concern that the PM SHRI recognition has failed to bring about any visible improvement in the school. They allege that the academic atmosphere is deteriorating with each passing day, undermining the very objectives of the scheme.

The local community has urged the Assam government to take immediate corrective measures. Their demands include the prompt appointment of a permanent Principal and Vice-Principal, along with the urgent filling of all vacant teaching and non-teaching posts, so that the school can restore its academic strength and uphold its legacy as a near-centenary institution.

One-day training on Piggery and Goatery held

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Dec 16: A one-day training programme on Piggery and Goatery production, processing and marketing was organised on Tuesday by the Margherita Co-District Administration in collaboration with Khowang Exotic Food Solutions LLP at the office premises of the Co-District Commissioner, Margherita.

The programme was inaugurated by the Co-District Commissioner, Margherita, Rahul Doley, who in his address highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship, livelihood enhancement and strong market linkages for local livestock producers.

More than 60 participants, including members of ASLRM Pro-

ducer Groups, pig and goat farmers and butchers from across the Margherita Co-District, took part in the training. The programme focused on imparting practical knowledge, modern processing techniques and market-oriented strategies to promote sustainable and profitable livestock-based enterprises.

Anshul Haque, Founder of Agro Animal Farms, Dibrugarh and Diganta Saikia, Founder of Manxho, served as resource persons. Haque shared insights on scientific and sustainable goat farming practices, while Saikia highlighted best practices in commercial pig farming, hygienic meat processing, branding and market linkage.

The objective of the training was to empower producer groups,

farmers and butchers by strengthening their capacities in value addition, hygienic processing, branding, packaging and effective marketing of pig and goat products. The programme also aimed to enable participants to access wider markets through collaboration with the local brand Manxho.

Special emphasis was laid on women empowerment, encouraging the active participation of women in livestock-based enterprises and enhancing their role in income generation and decision-making.

Officials from the Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department and administrative officers of the Margherita Co-District Administration were also present on the occasion.

Majuli NGO aims to declare historic site a protected sanctuary for migratory birds

Jadav Payeng appointed Global Ambassador for Charaichong bird nesting site



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 16: Padma Shri awardee Jadav Payeng has been appointed as the Global Ambassador of Asia's first protected bird nesting site in Majuli, known as Charaichong. The local NGO, Majulir Xahitya, is working to have the area, which hosts about four large lakes and attracts numerous migratory birds in winter, officially declared a bird sanctuary by the government.

Kamal Dutta, president of Majulir Xahitya, explained the history of Charaichong, meaning "Birds' Nests," which was named by Ahom king Pratap Singha in 1633. While constructing a fort from Lahdogarh to Majuli, the king discovered the area full of bird nests and decided to halt work to protect the nesting birds, effectively creating Asia's first protected bird sanctuary.

Dutta said Majulir Xahitya has been working since 2024 to revive the approximately 5 sq km sanctuary and seek government recognition. The district administration and the local MLA have responded positively to the proposal. Bird festivals have been held annually, with the most recent festi-

val running from December 7 to 20, 2025. To promote Charaichong globally, Majulir Xahitya Secretary Gobin Khaund and Dutta met Payeng at his residence in Kokilamukh, Jorhat and formally proposed his appointment as Global Ambassador. Payeng's daughter, Munmun Payeng, also present at the ceremony, has dedicated herself to nature conservation following her father's footsteps.

A public resolution was passed during the meeting to declare the 392-year-old bird nesting site as a sanctuary, ensuring the safety of migratory birds, developing a tourist package for Charaichong, and supporting the preservation of Majuli's wetlands and bird sanctuaries. The delegation plans to meet Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma and the Forest Minister to advance the initiative.

Payeng urged public cooperation to protect the birds and support efforts to officially declare Charaichong a bird sanctuary, highlighting the historic significance of the site and the vision of Ahom king Pratap Singha.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

People fall forward to success.
—Mary Kay Ash

SHANTI Bill and nuclear power

It is difficult to explain why the government took nearly 17 years to decide on launching a bill in Parliament to allow private participation in India's nuclear power generation programme. The proposed Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill to amend the civil liability law to shield plant operators and cap nuclear equipment suppliers' liability along with redesigning operator insurance to Rs. 1,500 crore per incident under Indian Nuclear Insurance Pool finally comes several years after the landmark 2008 Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal. The bill proposes up to 49 percent foreign direct investment (FDI) and creation of a unified legal framework for atomic energy, including a specialized nuclear tribunal. The government must explain the reason for the delay in promulgating such an act to facilitate private entry in the country's slow-growth nuclear energy programme. In the last 17 years, numerous nuclear power reactors have been connected to the grid globally. China recorded the fastest rate of nuclear power growth since 2008.

The existing Atomic Energy Act bars private enterprises and state governments from operating nuclear power plants. The central public sector Nuclear Power Corporation of India is the country's sole generator of atomic power. It runs 24 commercial reactors. Over the last two decades, several units have been connected. They include Kaiga 4, Rajasthan 5 & 6, Kudankulam 1 & 2, and Kakrapar 3 & 4. The contribution of nuclear power to the country's overall electricity generation is only around 3 percent. According to an official statement, the present installed capacity of nuclear power is 8.78 GW (excluding RAPS-1, 100 MW). Now, indigenous PHWR technology has matured for larger size reactors of 700 MW. With the deployment of indigenous 700 MW reactors and 1000 MW reactors with international cooperation, the present capacity will increase to 22.38 GW (excluding RAPS-1, 100 MW) by 2031-32 on progressive completion of ongoing projects. Further, the Government has also announced the Nuclear Energy Mission to reach 100 GW by 2047. Under the existing policy, FDI in atomic energy is prohibited.

China leads the world in new reactor commissioning, with numerous units brought online since 2008, including at sites like Hongyanhe, Ningde, Fuqing, Tianwan, Yangjiang, Sanmen, Haiyang, Taishan, and Fangchenggang. India wasted nearly two decades to create a right legal framework to strongly expand its nuclear power generation. During Dr. Manmohan Singh's premiership, the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal seemingly ended India's nuclear isolation and allowed the country to access civilian nuclear technology and fuel. The agreement, finalized after complex negotiations with the US, enabled India to pursue its energy demands through international cooperation while maintaining its strategic nuclear deterrent. It was seen as a crowning achievement of his time in office.

Labour codes to push majority of MSME workers into informal employment

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

India is transitioning from old labour laws to new labour code regime. Union Government expects the new labour codes will be fully implemented from April 1, 2026, that is from the beginning of the new financial year 2026-27. The impact is very difficult to assess on account of lack of current reliable data. However, analysts says that the new rules and definitions who lead to lopsided development of MSME sector in the country, while majority of workers will be pushed out from MSME sector to informal sector. Nevertheless, the union government press note published in the PIB website says, "The Labour Codes collectively represent one of the most significant reforms in India's labour governance framework. By simplifying compliance, encouraging digital processes, promoting voluntary adherence, and expanding social security, the Codes create a balanced environment where MSMEs can grow more easily while workers benefit from fair wages, dignity, and protection. India's MSME ecosystem will strengthen under these new Codes, aligning with the principles of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047 and ensuring that the benefits of development reach every worker and entrepreneur."

Government is still pushing the stale data in public domain obviously to mislead the people and make them believe the government's claim. Let us take for example the actual number of MSMEs in India. In 2015-16, India had an estimated 63.39 million (6.34 crore) Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), with over 99% being micro-enterprises, predominantly in rural areas and engaged in manufacturing, trade, and other services, according to the 73rd NSSO Survey. After 2015-16, many things happened, which included shutting down of millions of MSMEs after demonetisation in November 2016. Then definition of MSMEs were changed in 2020-21 during COVID-19 outbreak as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat schemes. The new limits were Micro: Investment < ₹ 1 Cr, Turnover < ₹ 5 Cr; Small: Investment < ₹ 10 Cr, Turnover < ₹ 50 Cr; and Medium: Investment < ₹ 50 Cr, Turnover < ₹ 250 Cr. At that time the existing level of Micro was investment greater < ₹ 25 lakh for manufacturing and < ₹ 10 lakh for services; Small - investment < ₹ 5 crore and < ₹ 2 crore; and Medium Investment < ₹ 10 crore and < ₹ 5 crore for manufacturing and services respectively. The current definition is Micro not more than ₹ 2.5 crore investment and not more than ₹ 10 crore turnover. These figures for Small units are ₹ 25 crore and ₹ 100 crore; and for Medium ₹ 125 crore and ₹ 500 crore. However, the government go on giving the same number of MSMEs in the country.

The new PIB release said that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is the backbone of India's economy, accounting for a substantial 30.1% of the country's GDP, 35.4% of manufacturing output, and 45.73% of overall exports. The sector provides employment to nearly 28 crore people across 6.5 crore units. This scale, reach, and diversity make it one of the most crucial engines of development and economic resilience. This data is stale and does not reflect the current ground realities. Therefore, the likely impact of the new labour codes is almost impossible to assess. Only this can be said that with the change in definition and applicability of the rules will render many MSMEs out of its fold and push them in the informal sector, because the labour codes will not be applicable on them.

Though the PIB release said that there were 6.5 crore MSMEs, there were only 5.7 crore MSMEs registered by June 2025. The data mismatch can be seen. The new definition of MSMEs and the applicability of the new rules for the sector are bound to impact this sector. The government claimed that Labour Code will streamline factory licensing and faster approvals. The threshold to obtain a factory license has been increased: From 10 to 20 workers (with power), and from 20 to 40 workers (without power). In means that factories employing less than 20 workers (with power) and 40 workers (without power) will not need license at all, which means they the Labour Codes for MSMEs will not be applicable for them. Since 99 per cent of units are in this category, majority of them will go out of this sector and just will become informal units.

The current State of government schools in Assam

The government schools in Assam, which form the backbone of the state's social, cultural, and intellectual life, are currently in a context that is not confined merely to an educational problem; rather, it has become a complex socio-political crisis deeply intertwined with the existence of future generations and a matter deserving profound reflection. There was a time when these government schools were the sole and reliable centres of knowledge pursuit in Assam, from which students who emerged went on to lead the state's literature, science, administration, and politics in later years. However, under the strong influence of globalisation and neoliberal economics, when the education system gradually transformed into a commodity, the foundations of Assam's government schools began to shake. To this day, when we discuss government schools, a contradictory picture emerges before us—on one side, the government's dazzling advertisements of digital classrooms and smart education, and on the other, classrooms that leak during rains, shortage of teachers, and the pitiful faces of lakhs of students suffering from future uncertainty. This situation did not arise suddenly in one day; it is the unfortunate outcome of a long and slow process of governmental neglect, short-sighted planning over the past several decades, and the middle class of society turning away from the government system. To understand this crisis in government schools, we cannot rely solely on the statistics of matriculation or higher secondary examination results; rather, we must analyse the associated infrastructural poverty, flaws in teaching methods, problems of teachers, and most importantly—the debate over the medium of instruction—with an impartial and realistic perspective.

The infrastructural problems of government schools in Assam are inextricably linked with the state's geographical diversity and natural disasters, which cannot be denied in any way. Excluding a few selected "model schools" in Guwahati metropolis or district headquarters, the infrastructure of the majority of rural schools remains in a highly dilapidated state even today. Although the government talks of "Digital India" or world-class education, in reality, many schools still lack pure drinking water, electricity connection, or even minimal toilet facilities for students. Especially in flood-affected areas of Assam—such as Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, or the char-chapori regions of lower Assam—education comes to a complete halt every year during the rainy season. School buildings remain submerged under water for months or turn into relief camps for flood-affected people, resulting in a large portion of the students' academic year being wasted. This loss can never be compensated. Moreover, the kind of practical laboratories or audio-visual tools needed for science and mathematics education are unavailable in 95 percent of rural schools. In such circumstances, students are forced to memorise concepts merely from book pages, preventing the development of scientific temperament or creative thinking

among them. This infrastructural deficiency adversely affects not only the students but also the mindset of teachers. In a dilapidated classroom without a fan in the heat or with a leaking roof during rains, no matter how talented a teacher may be, it becomes practically impossible for them to inspire and teach students effectively. Infrastructure does not mean merely concrete walls; it is a comprehensive educational environment where there should be a rich library, a playground, and open air for the mental development of students. Comparing government schools with private sector ones without ensuring these minimum facilities is merely a meaningless effort.

When reviewing the aspect of teacher appointment and human resource management, we encounter another complex problem that has paralysed the government education system. It is true that many qualified and talented teachers have been appointed through the TET examination in recent times, which is a positive step; but the issue lies in the distribution of teachers and the burden of non-educational tasks imposed on them. Even today, thousands of primary schools in Assam run on the support of a single teacher. It is easily imaginable how one teacher can provide quality education to all students from class one to five simultaneously. This proves that no matter how transparent the government's teacher appointment process may be, there are severe flaws in its management and distribution system. Furthermore, government school teachers have to perform countless governmental duties beyond teaching—

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

work, supervision of mid-day meals, surveys for various government schemes, and so on. Being busy with these tasks disrupts their primary responsibility, namely the classroom teaching process. Along with this comes the lack of teacher training and the question of professional accountability. Modern educational science continually discovers new research and methods, but opportunities for rural teachers to master this new knowledge remain very limited. The occasional government training camps are mostly confined to formalities. As a result, teachers continue teaching through old methods, which fail to attract the current smartphone-using generation. On the other hand, there is a perception in society that government-employed teachers evade responsibility; although this notion is not entirely false, merely blaming teachers is insufficient—supervisory systems and bureaucratic complexities in the education department are equally responsible.

In the current era, the most controversial and sensitive issue in Assam's education world is the policy of changing the medium of instruction in government schools, particularly the decision to teach mathematics and science in English medium. This governmental step has created intense disagreement in society. The government's argument is that knowledge of English is essential to empower Assam's students in the global

market and all-India competitive examinations. However, according to educational psychologists, linguists, and educationists, children can most easily and quickly master complex concepts at the primary or secondary level through their mother tongue. For rural or tea garden area students whose home environment has no practice of English, suddenly imposing a foreign language is likely to have the opposite effect. As a result, students will emphasise memorisation merely to pass examinations rather than understanding the subject matter, destroying their fundamental thinking power. Moreover, this decision poses a threat to the existence of Assamese, Bodo, and other local languages. If the importance of mother tongue decreases in schools, the practice of literature and culture in these languages will stagnate in the future. In attempting to compete with private sector English-medium schools, the hasty decision taken by the government is actually creating a situation where "the cure is more deadly than the disease." What was truly needed was to strengthen mother tongue medium while simultaneously arranging to teach English as a language subject through highly skilled and modern methods. Making students multilingual is the demand of the time, but sacrificing one's own mother tongue for it can never be an acceptable solution. There is also an undeniable risk that many students will suffer frustration and drop out due to this policy, especially those with weak educational foundations.

As a reflection of social and economic inequality, government schools have now become a tool of class division in society, which is extremely dangerous for a democratic society. Today, government school seemingly means "school for the poor" or "school for children of those without economic capacity." Even teachers, officers, or employees working in the government sector hesitate to enrol their own children in government schools. As a result, two distinct classes have emerged in society—one elite class studying in English-medium private schools, and the other ordinary or neglected class in government schools. This division creates a huge barrier not only in the educational field but also in future employment, social status, and self-confidence. The majority of students in government schools come from poor farmer, daily wage labourer, or tea garden worker families. For these children, there is almost zero educational environment or tuition facility at home. For them, the school is the only beacon of hope. But when the government closes or merges schools citing "amalgamation" or other policies, this poor class suffers the most. When the nearby school closes and shifts far away, many girls have to discontinue education midway due to travel costs or lack of safety. Therefore, the problem of government schools should not be viewed merely as an issue of the education department; it needs to be seen from the perspective of social justice and human rights. In a society where education becomes easily accessible only to

those with money, that society can never progress.

The "Gunotsav" that the government conducts to assess the quality standards of schools requires an impartial analysis of its impact and effectiveness. Gunotsav has certainly provided the government with a database of school infrastructure and educational standards and has made teachers and management committees somewhat alert. But in reality, Gunotsav has turned into a festival-like event. During the few days of Gunotsav, schools are decorated, student attendance is artificially increased, and the environment is made to appear as if everything is fine. But the real picture for the remaining 360 days of the year may be the opposite. This dramatic effort to appear good before inspectors covers up the actual problems. Moreover, this evaluation process creates excessive mental pressure on teachers, where they remain more busy preparing data or saving "grading" than providing real education to students. The evaluation system should have been continuous and constructive, pointing out teachers' weaknesses and providing opportunities for improvement. But in the current system, schools showing poor results are only criticised or threatened, which hurts teachers' confidence. The question remains how quickly the government resolves specific deficiencies in schools using Gunotsav data. If school buildings remain broken or teacher posts vacant even after evaluation, then what is the rationale for this massive expense-intensive process? For real change, not just external evaluation but ensuring internal school environment and local public participation is more urgent.

Revival of government schools in Assam requires governmental goodwill along with active societal participation. We cannot just blame the government and sit idly. Unless school management committees, parents, former students, and local civil society become alert, successful implementation of government schemes is impossible. Today, the government school models of Kerala or Delhi are repeatedly mentioned; the key mantra of success there is increased public investment in education and trust of all classes in the government system. To create such an environment in Assam, the government must increase budget allocation in the education sector and keep education policy above political experimentation. Along with modernising and life-oriented curriculum, students must be introduced to our indigenous knowledge traditions and culture. Teachers should be given dignity not merely as government employees but as "intellectual leaders." On the other hand, controlling fees in private sector schools and increasing standards in government schools—these two tasks must proceed in parallel for the middle class to possibly return to government schools. Assam's future depends on these ordinary classrooms, where today's children dream of tomorrow. To realise these dreams, a comprehensive, well-thought-out, and long-term revolution is needed, which can remove the darkness from Assam's education world and show the path to light.

PMEGP: A pathway to revitalising jobs and enterprise in the Northeast

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Northeast has long been endowed with fertile land, abundant rainfall, rich biodiversity and a youthful population rooted in agriculture and allied activities. Yet, the transition of these activities from subsistence-based practices to commercially viable enterprises has been far slower than what the region's natural advantages should have enabled. This structural stagnation has had serious socio-economic consequences, most visibly reflected in the steady migration of lakhs of young people from farm families to other parts of the country in search of employment and alternative livelihoods. The phenomenon is not merely a matter of individual aspiration but a symptom of deeper inadequacies in the regional employment landscape. Reversing this outward migration demands not cosmetic interventions, but a transformative strategy that links enterprise creation, access to finance, local production systems and administrative efficiency into a coherent whole.

In this context, the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme assumes particular significance for the Northeastern states. Conceived as a credit-linked subsidy scheme to promote self-employment through the establishment of micro enterprises, PMEGP has the potential to act as a catalyst for MSME-led growth and decentralised employment generation. However, leveraging the scheme effectively in the region requires a professional, outcome-oriented approach that goes far beyond routine references to budgetary allocations, numerical targets and employment statistics. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry's recent observation that project support under PMEGP has declined in several Northeastern states, notably Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, since the 2021-22 fi-

nanial year, underscores the underutilisation of a scheme that was designed precisely to address employment deficits in such regions.

The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises has maintained that PMEGP is a demand-driven scheme, where the sanction of projects and release of loans ultimately rest with the concerned banks. While this assertion may be institutionally correct, it also implicitly acknowledges that the region, as a whole, has fallen short in mobilising entrepreneurial demand and navigating the financial architecture necessary to translate policy intent into operational outcomes. The data on margin money subsidy reinforces this concern. Over a period of four years, from 2021-22 to 2024-25, the margin money subsidy allocated to the region has increased by only Rs 51 crore, rising from Rs 180 crore to Rs 231 crore. Such a modest increase, despite enhanced incentives, points to subdued demand and systemic bottlenecks rather than a lack of fiscal support.

This low uptake is particularly striking because PMEGP offers substantially higher incentives to beneficiaries in the Northeast compared to general category states. In rural areas of the region, the margin money subsidy stands at 35 percent, while in urban areas it is 25 percent, as against 25 percent and 15 percent respectively in other states. The scheme further reduces the financial burden on aspiring entrepreneurs by requiring only a 5 percent own contribution from beneficiaries in the Northeast, compared to 10 percent in general category states. Additionally, a second loan tranche of up to Rs 1 crore is available for the upgradation and expansion of well-performing existing units, with a subsidy of 20 percent for the region and other hilly areas, higher than the 15 percent applicable elsewhere. The removal of any ceiling on the number of proj-

ects financed under transport activities in the Northeast, unlike the 10 percent cap in other regions, is another targeted concession aimed at improving connectivity-dependent livelihoods.

Despite these favourable provisions, persistent structural barriers continue to undermine the scheme's impact. The Parliamentary Committee has pointed out that limited banking outreach and connectivity gaps discourage potential applicants in several Northeastern states. These challenges are compounded by the nature of the loan application process itself. Extensive scrutiny, multiple layers of verification and prolonged timelines disproportionately affect small-value loans, which form the backbone of micro enterprise creation. Recognising this, the Committee has recommended the introduction of a self-certification mechanism for loan applications up to Rs 10 lakh. Such a mechanism would allow applicants to submit self-certified declarations of compliance with eligibility norms and documentation requirements, with periodic random sample testing to ensure transparency and accountability.

The rationale behind this recommendation is both pragmatic and timely. Many young people in the region nurture entrepreneurial ambitions but are deterred by the sheer weight of paperwork and repeated visits to banks required to access margin money subsidies. The psychological cost of navigating complex procedures often outweighs the perceived benefits of the scheme, leading to disengagement even before an application is formally submitted. Streamlining processes through self-certification for smaller loans could significantly lower entry barriers, restore confidence among first-generation entrepreneurs and stimulate demand for PMEGP support across rural and semi-urban areas.

Encouragingly, certain corre-

ctive measures have already been initiated. Since January 2024, all implementing agencies have begun accepting PMEGP applications in physical form, in offline mode, in 12 scheduled languages, including Assamese, in addition to English. This step acknowledges the linguistic diversity of the region and addresses a critical, though often overlooked, barrier to participation. However, the effectiveness of this reform depends on the extent to which it is publicised and internalised at the grassroots level. Without wide dissemination of information regarding language support, the intended beneficiaries may remain unaware of their newfound access, thereby limiting the reform's impact.

The Ministry's advisory to the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, the principal implementing agency of PMEGP, to examine the feasibility of automating the scrutiny process and operationalising self-certification for projects involving loans below Rs 10 lakh, represents another important step forward. Automation can reduce discretion, improve transparency and accelerate decision-making, all of which are essential for restoring trust in the scheme. The urgency of such reforms is further underscored by KVIC's own findings that, in Assam, many bank rejections were based on grounds that were not valid. This revelation exposes a critical disconnect between policy intent and ground-level execution, one that cannot be bridged without coordinated intervention involving banks, state agencies and central authorities.

Beyond procedural inefficiencies, there are deeper systemic issues that continue to constrain PMEGP's transformative potential in the Northeast. Reports of non-receipt of margin money in several cases and recurring technical glitches in the PMEGP portal have

slowed implementation and eroded credibility. These are not isolated administrative lapses but indicators of a larger governance deficit that undermines enterprise development efforts. For MSME units to be sustainable, especially in geographically remote areas, reliable access to finance must be complemented by timely subsidy disbursement and robust digital infrastructure.

Equally important is the question of raw material availability. MSMEs cannot thrive in isolation from their production ecosystems. In the Northeastern context, the sustainability of micro and small enterprises is closely linked to the vitality of agriculture and allied sectors. Strengthening local production systems, improving value chains and enhancing post-harvest processing are therefore integral to changing the employment landscape. PMEGP, when aligned with agricultural diversification, food processing, handloom, handicrafts and other region-specific activities, can serve as a bridge between farm-based livelihoods and non-farm employment.

Ultimately, reversing migration from the Northeast is not merely about creating enterprises but about creating confidence in the future of local economies. This calls for state governments in the region to prioritise PMEGP implementation, not as a peripheral scheme but as a central pillar of their employment strategies. Proactive outreach, handholding of applicants, coordination with banks and continuous monitoring of outcomes must replace a passive, target-driven approach. Only then can PMEGP fulfil its promise of transforming subsistence economies into vibrant centres of production, entrepreneurship and dignified employment, enabling the youth of the Northeast to build their futures at home rather than seeking them elsewhere. (the writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Marching beyond tokenism: Women and India's defence future

By: Kalpesh Patkar

On 30 May 2025, 17 women cadets joined the Passing Out Parade at the National Defence Academy (NDA). The event, a decisively historic moment in India's military history, signified a shift in the male-dominated structure of the Indian Armed Forces. The development followed a 2021 Supreme Court ruling, which directed the NDA to implement gender-neutral admissions. It also emphasised the need for equal opportunities for women in military training, paving the way for systemic changes within the institution.

Women have historically been excluded from Permanent Commission (PC) and frontline combat roles, and were largely restricted to administrative or support responsibilities. The successful training of these 17 cadets reflects more than an individual accomplishment. It brings to the fore the renewed demands confronting India's military, inching it closer to modernisation and diversity. The development presents an opportunity to build a more inclusive and balanced defence structure, encouraging the creation of a military that represents the broader society it serves. The event, a decisively historic moment in India's military history, signified a shift in the male-dominated structure of the Indian Armed Forces.

Against this backdrop, the rising involvement of women in strategic operations reflects a shift in military leadership roles. A key example is the debriefing of 'Operation Sindoor' by two senior women officers - Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh. Their leadership illustrates the expanding responsibilities of women in critical military planning. Yet, this progress remains limited in terms of overall representation. Women currently hold fewer than 7 percent of officer positions in the armed forces. Their presence in active combat remains minimal and largely symbolic. Most continue to serve in medical and administrative areas.

Although symbolic achievements do hold value, real inclusion demands structural transformation. This involves widening access to combat

roles for women and advancing them to senior leadership posts. It also requires addressing deep-rooted institutional attitudes that block gender integration. Military politics often rely on a narrow, state-centred view of security. This perspective hides the gendered patterns shaping global defence practices. Traditional military structures tend to maintain and repeat patriarchal systems. Women, while essential to military and diplomatic functions, remain sidelined in policy narratives. Their efforts are significant but rarely recognised in dominant military discussions.

Traditionally, diplomacy has regarded women largely as the spouses of ambassadors and senior officials, rather than as diplomats in their own right. While they have contributed extensively to soft power and cultural engagement in informal ways, this narrow view risks lending a diminished lens to women's roles as professional diplomats. Today, Indian women hold positions as ambassadors, senior officials, and lead negotiators in global arenas. Their roles are central to directing and shaping India's foreign policy. Focusing only on spousal contributions reinforces outdated gender roles and diminishes professional success. A more accurate understanding must highlight women's leadership in diplomacy. Their growing presence reflects bigger structural changes in international governance.

The belief that states or militaries protect women is misleading. In reality, militarisation tends to increase women's exposure to harm.

Military bases in developing countries often reveal troubling links between gender and occupation. These sites can become areas of exploitation, where local women are pushed into sex work due to poverty and lack of support. The presence of foreign troops often brings disruption rather than protection. Communities face long-term consequences such as abandoned children and rising gender-based violence. These impacts reflect deep social harm linked to militarisation.

The military often views war and peace through the lens of power and control, neglecting human rights and gender-based vulnerabilities. It fails to



acknowledge that women face challenges amid conflicts in unique and unequal ways. For instance, sexual violence during war was seldom a random act. It was, in fact, used as a tactic during the Bosnian War, where around 35,000 women were raped and forced into pregnancies as part of ethnic cleansing. Violent actions of such nature are systematic and deliberate, and often result in deep trauma, weaken community bonds, and perpetuate political control. The belief that states or militaries protect women is misleading. In reality, militarisation tends to increase women's exposure to harm. The rhetoric of protection is commonly used to justify actions that reinforce gendered violence and structural abuse.

A major weakness in military governance is the lack of women in leadership roles. Their strategic absence from policymaking creates systems that overlook gender-specific con-

cerns. Without their voices at negotiation tables, key aspects of peace and justice are left unaddressed. This exclusion limits the development of balanced and inclusive security strategies. India's influence in global diplomacy, peacekeeping and world politics is steadily growing. However, its engagement with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda remains limited. This global framework promotes women's active roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. India has deployed female peacekeepers to United Nations missions. Yet, it has not adopted a National Action Plan to apply WPS principles nationally. This gap signals a reluctance to embed gender-focused policies into domestic security planning.

Stronger engagement with the WPS agenda could reshape women's roles in the Indian military. This shift would extend beyond numbers to leadership

and decision-making power. Aligning domestic defence policies with global commitments would enhance India's credibility on gender equality. It would also show consistency between its international stance and internal security practices. True alignment with India's peacebuilding rhetoric requires a shift from tokenism to transformational participation, where women are empowered to shape policy and contribute strategically.

India has traditionally projected itself as a strong advocate of peacebuilding at the United Nations (UN), particularly during its tenure on the Security Council. However, this global position is not matched by its internal defence and security strategies. Although more women have joined the armed forces, the progress is largely symbolic. The focus remains on access and presence, not on leadership or meaningful authority. True alignment

with India's peacebuilding rhetoric requires a shift from tokenism to transformational participation, where women are empowered to shape policy and contribute strategically. Elevating women to command positions would reflect a deeper commitment to the principles India advocates globally. Bridging this domestic-international gap is not only a matter of credibility but a necessary step toward building a more equitable and resilient security architecture.

To achieve this, redefining security to focus on human well-being is essential. This includes safeguarding dignity and protection from all forms of violence. Peace must go beyond the mere absence of war to encompass fairness, inclusion, and justice. Expanding women's participation in the military and diplomacy can foster cooperation over conflict, helping to reduce the scale and severity of future violence.

Around the world, defence policies are being reconsidered through new perspectives. One influential model is Feminist Foreign Policy, introduced by Sweden's former Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström. This framework shifts the focus from protecting borders to protecting people. It redefines security by including dignity, safety, and human rights. From a military angle, it questions traditional views of war and defence. It calls for recognising women not as victims but as active contributors to peace and strategy. The approach supports the idea that diverse and inclusive armed forces are not only fairer but also more capable and effective in practice.

A key gap in defence planning is the absence of a strong female perspective in leadership roles. Despite some progress, women are underrepresented in strategic decision-making bodies. The graduation of the first 17 women from the NDA is a significant step. It signals more than symbolic progress and may help shift military culture over time. Their presence challenges rigid masculine norms and promotes alternative strategies focused on dialogue and restraint. While women alone cannot prevent conflict, their broader participation encourages a more balanced and humane approach to national defence and security. (Courtesy: ORF)

Outside the West, the Kundalini tradition presents a model of the 'divine feminine' beyond binary gender

By: Anya Foxen and Sravana Borkatakya-Varma

The notion of the divine feminine is a recurring motif in American pop culture, playing with the assumptions people make when referring to God - often the deity described in the Bible - as "He."

Whether it's Alanis Morissette's iconic portrayal of God in the 1999 comedy "Dogma" or Ariana Grande's titular declaration in her 2018 track "God is a Woman," the effect is the same: a mixture of irreverence and empowerment. It dovetails, moreover, with a ubiquitous political slogan: "The future is female."

But in a historical moment when society is bitterly contesting ideas about gender, we'd note that these notions still rely on a simplistic binary.

As two scholars who study the entangled history of spirituality and gender, we often observe an especially fraught version of this dynamic playing out among "spiritual but not religious" practitioners, often called spiritual seekers. To many such people, the divine feminine represents an escape from oppressive gender norms, and yet many stumble in trying to reconcile the idea with the embodied realities of biological sex.

An approach that escapes this dilemma is the centuries-old Kundalini tradition, which paints a model of the divine feminine beyond gender altogether.

The feminine Shakti

There are certainly examples of the feminine divine to be drawn from Christian and other Abrahamic religious traditions. Yet many seekers quickly find themselves reaching beyond these borders.

When they do, one of the first concepts they come across is Shakti, a divine feminine energy that manifests in the human body as the electrifying force of Kundalini. Both terms originate in South Asian religions - especially Hinduism - that fall under the broad umbrella of tantra.

Tantric cultural and spiritual traditions, which began to emerge in the early centuries of the Common Era, take a positive perspective on the material world in general and the human body in particular, as opposed to tradi-



tions that regard both as inherently illusory or sinful. In tantra, the material world and physical body are suffused by divine energy. This energy is called Shakti, and it is feminine.

Another key idea common to tantric traditions is that the universe is composed of two fundamental principles - or rather that it has two poles: a dynamic energy, which is female, balanced by an unchanging consciousness, which is male. As the great Goddess, Shakti goes by many names, including Durga, Kali and myriad others. The masculine principle is usually called Shiva, though this can vary as well.

Divinity beyond binaries

Tantric traditions span over a millennium in time and a subcontinent in space, so it should come as no surprise that they are incredibly diverse. However, most practices that enjoy global popularity today, especially those centered on the divine feminine energy of Kundalini, can be traced to a specific tradition called Kaula Tantra, which developed in the northeast of modern-day India near Kashmir.

This tradition is distinctive by maintaining that while the cosmos is polar, it is also nondual, meaning that there is only one ultimate reality. So, the pairing of Shakti and Shiva, feminine and masculine, energy and consciousness, is best understood not as a binary but as the two sides of a Möbius strip, where one seamlessly flows into the other.

Take a strip of paper, twist it into a figure eight - also the symbol we use for infinity - and glue the back to the front. That's the Kaula model of the universe.

In such a world, Shiva is Shakti. The masculine is the fem-

inine. Both are divine, but even more than this, both are ultimate, because there is no difference between them. God is goddess, and both are nonbinary.

Awakening Kundalini

Kundalini yoga is a centuries-old practice quite different from the branded version popularized more recently by Yogi BhaJan. It involves using complex meditative and physical techniques to awaken and raise this energy from its usual resting place in the bottom of the torso.

In doing this, tradition says the practitioner experiences a radical transformation both of the body and of consciousness. Premodern texts describe Kundalini's fiery energy burning through the tissues of the body, shooting up to the crown of the head, where the feminine Shakti unites with her masculine counterpart and all dissolves into oneness.

While some texts treat this ascent as equivalent to a sort of voluntary death, others describe how, once she has ascended, Kundalini returns to bathe the body in a cooling nectar of immortality, resulting in an embodied state of enlightenment and liberation.

According to this tradition, the body may appear the same but is now enlivened with a new consciousness that has transcended all dualities - including male and female.

Is the divine feminine female?

Human gender norms often prove difficult to shake, however. Though the energy of Kundalini is understood as feminine, Kundalini yoga in South Asia has been traditionally practiced by men. The reasons for this are perhaps almost entirely social, and

yet they remain a powerful force.

Ironically, the very fact that Kundalini is often believed to be associated with womanhood has resulted in women being excluded - or at least deprioritized - from cultivating their own practice. Instead, they have historically become assistants or accessories to the enlightenment of men.

The fieldwork we present in our recent book on the topic bears this out. Among South Asian practitioners, the common attitude is that women embody the maternal principle, and this makes them extremely powerful. In them, the energy of Kundalini operates naturally. Men, on the other hand, need to be purified by a woman through ritual in order to effectively engage in Kundalini practice. Such ideas are also common among Western practitioners, who tend to believe women have a more natural aptitude for Kundalini awakening. One of our subjects said this is because women have less ego. Another attributed it to female sexual fluids.

However, cultural difference plays a role, too. Western notions of the divine feminine are much more inclined to cling to the binary, resisting the idea that male and female bodies alike are ultimately woven from the same nondual reality.

Most striking, perhaps, one man who had spent a lifetime among seekers at spiritual retreats in the U.S. and South America told us of a long-held and common belief that only women were capable of Kundalini experience. It was, to him, an energy exclusive to the female body. He recounted having been shocked, only months prior, at encountering a copy of the 1967 classic "Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man," authored by the decidedly male Gopi Krishna.

The broader point, however, is that the historical core of Kundalini practice has always been about transcending all dualities.

Thus, even as a goddess representing the ultimate "She," Kundalini is best understood as nonbinary. Perhaps if we can wrap our heads around this idea, we can cultivate a more inclusive empowerment. (Courtesy: The Conversation)

Do women's periods actually sync up with each other?

By: Madeleine Aggeler

To be someone who menstruates believed to be untangle fact from fiction. Is it true that you can't swim on your period? No. Does the scent of a person menstruating attract bears? Also no.

There is one period rumor I've always kind of enjoyed, though: when women are in close proximity for long enough, their menstrual cycles will eventually sync up, also known as "menstrual synchrony". I've had several friends over the years claim that my period had yanked them on to my cycle.

"I remember hearing that from family members when I was younger," says Dr Rachel Jensen, Darney-Landy fellow at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Jensen says she understands why this belief is so popular: "The idea that our bodies would synchronize with those we are close to is comforting and connecting."

But the body doesn't actually work that way. Below, what you need to know about this common myth.

Is menstrual synchrony real?

No. The idea gained a lot of attention in the early 1970s, when Dr Martha McClintock published the first scientific paper on menstrual synchrony. In it, she observed students living in a college dorm, and determined that women who live in close proximity or share a common environment experience a convergence of their menstrual cycles. This became known as the McClintock Effect.

A number of subsequent studies in the 1990s confirmed McClintock's finding. Some suggested that the shift may be the result of "olfactory cues" or pheromones which accelerate or delay the menstrual cycle.

But more recent studies that have been "more rigorously designed" have "generally failed to show any synchrony between menstrual cycles in women living together," says Dr Jewel Kling, chair of women's health at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona.

And research has failed to show how the body would even trigger this effect. "There isn't a biological mechanism for menstrual syncing," says Jensen.



Why do so many people believe in menstrual synchrony?

"Many women think this is true," says Dr Salena Zanotti, OB-GYN at the Cleveland Clinic.

If it seems like people's periods are syncing up, that's the result of information biases and statistics rather than biology.

We are more likely to know and remember the menstrual timing of those we are close with, Jensen says. This means that if our cycles sync up, we are more likely to notice.

Since menstrual cycles vary in time and length, it's statistically likely that the cycles of two people will eventually overlap, Jensen says: "Studies show that cycles sync up at the same rate as we would expect based on mathematical probability due to chance."

What affects menstrual cycle timing?

Many factors affect the timing and duration of one's menstrual cycle, experts say. These include:

- Body composition: a high BMI is associated with irregular cycles, says Kling.
- Age: "Menses can be irregular in adolescents and as people approach menopause," says Jensen.
- Psychological stress: depression can disrupt a person's cycle.
- Medication, such as birth control.
- Medical conditions, such as thyroid disease, polycystic ovarian syndrome or menopause.
- Lifestyle factors, such as smoking, alcohol and caffeine consumption, diet and physical activity.

What are other common menstrual myths?

Many menstrual myths are cul-

tural, says Zanotti, like the idea that periods are dirty or embarrassing.

She also points to the myth that using a tampon or a menstrual cup means that one is not a virgin. (Not true.)

Nor is it true that people should not have sex or exercise while on their period, says Jensen. "Both are safe, though people should be aware that there is still a risk of STIs or pregnancy while on their period," she says, adding that exercise can help with certain period symptoms like cramps or mood changes.

Such menstrual myths seem to propagate freely, while some facts remain under-discussed. Kling says that menstrual-related conditions such as painful menses (dysmenorrhea), abnormal uterine bleeding, and physical and psychological premenstrual symptoms are very common. "Up to 85% of women experience some menstrual-related syndrome," she says. "And 40% report being significantly bothered by them."

It doesn't have to be this way, says Zanotti. "Periods are a normal way of life," she says. "They do not have to be very painful and very heavy." If one struggles with their cycle, she suggests seeing a medical provider to help manage it.

Although the myth of menstrual synchrony is relatively harmless, Jensen notes that "there can be serious consequences if people follow inaccurate health advice."

"If you see or hear something on social media or from a friend, it is always a good idea to check with your doctor before acting on it or even passing it on," she says. (Courtesy: The Guardian)

India, Israel share 'policy of zero tolerance' against terrorism: Jaishankar

JERUSALEM, Dec 16: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday condemned the terror attack during a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach, saying that India and Israel both have a policy of "zero tolerance" against terrorism.

Jaishankar, who arrived in Israel on Tuesday on a two-day visit, made the remarks while addressing the press alongside Israeli counterpart Gideon Moshe Sa'ar here.

"Let me first of all convey our very, very sincere, deep condolences at the loss of life due to the terror attack at Hanukkah celebrations in Bondi Beach. I want to say that we condemn it in the strongest possible terms," Jaishankar said.

He thanked Israel for its support of India in its fight against terrorism.

At least 15 people were killed, and 40 were injured in an attack by two gunmen on a gathering during the Jewish festival Hanukkah by the Sea celebration on Sunday.

"Where India and Israel are concerned, we are both countries that have a policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism. We appreciate your consistent support in our fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," Jaishankar said.

He said that they will be discussing a strategic partnership between the two countries, which has "really developed very significantly in the last decade."

Jaishankar said that India and Israel are "very complementary partners, and we must make the most of that."

He also reiterated India's support for the Gaza peace plan and expressed hope that it will lead to a lasting and durable solution.

His visit comes as preparations are underway for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed trip to India.

Netanyahu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke recently over the phone, after which the Israeli leader said the two would be "meeting very



During his stay, Jaishankar would also meet Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister

Netanyahu.

"The discussions will revolve around bilateral and regional issues with a view to further deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries," a source here told PTI.

Jaishankar arrived in Tel Aviv from Abu Dhabi, where he participated in the high-profile Sir Bani Yas Forum. He also attended the 16th India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting and the 5th round of the India-UAE Strategic Dialogue held on December 15.

Netanyahu's much-anticipated visit to India is expected to follow a series of high-level exchanges between the two sides.

Israeli Minister of Tourism Haim Katz, Minister of Economy and Industry Nir Barkat, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Avi Dichter and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich visited India earlier this year as the two countries build momentum towards a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

India and Israel inked a Bilateral Investment

Treaty (BIT) during Smotrich's visit to New Delhi in September, followed by the signing of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the proposed FTA during the visit of Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal to Israel last month.

In the defence sector, the two countries last month inked a landmark agreement to enhance defence, industrial, and technological cooperation, enabling the sharing of advanced technology to promote co-development and co-production.

India and Israel have also expanded cooperation in the cultural and academic spheres, with film festivals, dance performances and filmmaker exchanges aimed at strengthening people-to-people ties.

On Monday, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Tel Aviv University signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish an India Chair at the university to boost academic co-operation. (PTI)

Pak's 'unique way' of respecting people's will is jailing PM: India at UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 16: In a sharp retort, India ripped through Pakistan's "divisive agenda" at the UN Security Council, calling out Islamabad's "unique" way of respecting the will of its people by jailing a prime minister and giving lifetime immunity to its army chief.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni, delivered a strong response in the Security Council on Monday after Pakistan's Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad raised the issues of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty during an open debate on 'Leadership for Peace'.

"Pakistan's unwarranted reference to Jammu and Kashmir in today's open debate attests to its obsessive focus on harming India and its people. A serving non-permanent Security Council Member that chooses to further this obsession in all meetings and platforms of the UN in pursuit of its divisive agenda cannot be expected to fulfil its designated responsibilities and obligations."

"Let me be clear -- India will counter Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in all its forms and manifestations with all its might," Harish



Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has been imprisoned since his arrest in August 2023 on corruption charges and has reportedly been held for extended periods in solitary confinement.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Alice Jill Edwards has urged the Pakistani government to take immediate action to address reports of Khan's "inhumane and undignified" detention conditions, warning that they may amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

The 27th Constitutional Amendment, passed last month under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, gives Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces and army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir lifelong immunity from any legal prosecution.

Harish further reiterated that the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India. "They were, are, and will always remain so," he said.

Harish added that India had entered into the Indus Waters Treaty 65 years ago in good faith, in a spirit of goodwill and friendship. "Throughout these six and a half decades, Pakistan has violated the spirit of the Treaty by inflicting three wars and thousands of terror attacks on India," he said.

"In the last four decades, tens of thousands of Indian lives have been lost in Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks, the most recent of which was the Pahalgam terror attack," in April 2025, which involved religion-based targeted killings of 26 innocent civilians.

"It is in this backdrop that India has finally announced that the Treaty will be held in abeyance until Pakistan, which is a global epicentre of terror, credibly and irrevocably ends its support for cross-border and all other forms of terrorism," Harish said. (PTI)

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Zelenskyy says peace proposals to end war in Ukraine could be presented to Russia within days

KYIV, Dec 16: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says proposals being negotiated with US officials for a peace deal to end his country's nearly four-year war with Russia could be finalised within days, after which American envoys will present them to the Kremlin before further possible meetings in the United States next weekend.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Monday that a draft peace plan discussed with the US during talks in Berlin earlier in the day is "very workable." He cautioned, however, that some key issues — notably what happens to Ukrainian territory occupied by invading Russian forces — remain unresolved.

US-led peace efforts appear to be picking up momentum. But Russian President Vladimir Putin may balk at some of the proposals thrashed out by officials from Washington, Kyiv and Western Europe, including postwar security guarantees for Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov repeated Tuesday that Russia wants a comprehensive peace deal, not a temporary truce.

If Ukraine seeks "momentary,

unsustainable solutions, we are unlikely to be ready to participate, Peskov said.

"We want peace — we don't want a truce that would give Ukraine a respite and prepare for the continuation of the war," he told reporters. "We want to stop this war, achieve our goals, secure our interests, and guarantee peace in Europe for the future."

American officials on Monday said that there's a consensus from Ukraine and Europe on about 90 per cent of the US-authored peace plan. US President Donald Trump said, "I think we're closer now than we have ever been, ever, to a peace settlement."

Plenty of potential pitfalls remain, however.

Zelenskyy reiterated that Kyiv rules out recognising Moscow's control over any part of the Donbas, an economically important region in eastern Ukraine made up of Luhansk and Donetsk. Russia's army doesn't fully control either.

"The Americans are trying to find a compromise," Zelenskyy said, before visiting the Netherlands on Tuesday. "They are proposing a free economic zone" (in

the Donbas). And I want to stress once again: a free economic zone does not mean under the control of the Russian Federation."

The land issue remains one of the most difficult obstacles to a comprehensive agreement.

Putin wants all the areas in the four key regions that his forces have seized, as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed in 2014, to be recognised as Russian territory.

Zelenskyy warned that if Putin rejects diplomatic efforts, Ukraine expects increased Western pressure on Moscow, including tougher sanctions and additional military support for defence. Kyiv would seek enhanced air defence systems and long-range weapons if diplomacy collapses, he said.

Ukraine and the US are preparing up to five documents related to the peace framework, several of them focused on security, Zelenskyy said.

He was upbeat about the progress in the Berlin talks.

"Overall, there was a demonstration of unity," Zelenskyy said. "It was truly positive in the sense that it reflected the unity of the US, Europe, and Ukraine." (AP)

Talks with King Abdullah II strengthened India-Jordan partnership across key areas: PM Modi

AMMAN, Dec 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his talks with King Abdullah II have strengthened India-Jordan partnership across key areas, including renewable energy, water management, digital transformation, cultural exchanges, and heritage cooperation.

"My visit to Jordan has been immensely productive," Modi said at the end of his two-day visit as he thanked King Abdullah II and the people of Jordan for their "exceptional" friendship.

"Our discussions have strengthened the India-Jordan partnership across key areas such as renewable energy, water management, digital transformation, cultural exchanges and heritage cooperation. The outcomes we have achieved together will open new avenues for progress and prosperity for our citizens," he posted on social media.

Modi held a one-on-one meeting with King Abdullah II at the Husseinia Palace on Monday before the delegation-level talks.

According to a joint statement issued on Tuesday, the two leaders appreciated the long-standing relationship between their countries, which is characterised by mutual trust, warmth and goodwill.

"They positively assessed the multi-faceted India-Jordan relations that span across various areas of co-operation, including political, economic, defence, security, culture, and education, among others," it said.

The two sides agreed on continued collaboration in the areas of digital transformation, governance and capacity building.

The two leaders underscored their commitment to working together in the field of healthcare through the sharing of expertise, especially in advancing telemedicine and capacity building in the training of the health workforce, the joint statement said.

They acknowledged the importance of health and pharmaceuticals as a key pillar of bilateral cooperation, underlining its role in promoting the well-being of their peoples and in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (PTI)

statement said.

They appreciated the strong bilateral trade, currently valued at USD 2.3 billion, making India the third largest trading partner for Jordan.

"They agreed on the need to diversify the trade basket to further enhance bilateral trade. The leaders also agreed on the early convening of the 11th Trade and Economic Joint Committee in the first half of 2026, to monitor progress in economic and trade relations," the joint statement said.

A high-level business delegation from the two countries discussed ways to further strengthen and expand trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Both leaders underlined the potential for enhanced economic cooperation between the two countries, taking into account Jordan's strategic geographic location and advanced logistics capabilities.

"Both sides reaffirmed the importance of strengthening transport and logistics connectivity, including the regional integration of Jordan's transit and logistics infrastructure as a strategic opportunity to advance shared economic interests and private-sector collaboration," the joint statement said.

They also agreed to explore further avenues of cooperation in the implementation of digital transformation initiatives of both countries. Both sides agreed to collaborate in ensuring a safe, secure, trusted and inclusive digital environment.

The two sides agreed on continued collaboration in the areas of digital transformation, governance and capacity building.

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Zelenskyy, some 30 countries to approve compensation body for Ukraine damages



THE HAGUE, Dec 16: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and some 30 other countries are expected to formally approve plans on Tuesday to create a compensation body to pay for damages to Ukraine caused by the Russian invasion, but questions remain about where the money will come from.

The expected approval at a ceremony in the Dutch city of The Hague follows peace talks in Berlin with US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and German Chancellor

Friedrich Merz. Zelenskyy voiced readiness to drop his country's bid to join NATO in exchange for Western security guarantees, but rejected the US push for ceding territory to Russia.

"These security guarantees are an opportunity to prevent another wave of Russian aggression," he said, in response to journalists' questions. "And this is already a compromise on our part."

The Council of Europe, the continent's preeminent human rights organisation, has facilitated the International Claims Commission, which will allow

Ukrainians to seek compensation for "damage, loss or injury" caused by the Russian Federation since the full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

The commission will assess claims made to the already up-and-running register of damages, which was launched during a Council of Europe summit in Iceland in 2023. "There will be no reliable peace without justice," Zelenskyy told leaders at the summit by video address from Kyiv.

Some 80,000 claims have already been filed with the register, which is based in The Hague.

Questions remain about where the claims commission will get its funding. The Council of Europe is adamant that Russia must foot the bill, but there is no clear pathway for forcing Moscow to pay up. One proposal is to use some of the tens of billions of dollars in frozen Russian assets held in Europe.

Twenty-five countries must sign on for the commission to launch, but more than 30 are expected to join, an unprecedented number for the start of a Council of Europe treaty. (AP)

Thai authorities deport Luthra brothers to India

BANGKOK, Dec 16: Thailand authorities on Tuesday deported Gaurav Luthra and Saurabh Luthra, co-owners of the Goa nightclub where 25 people were killed in a fire earlier this month, to India amid an ongoing probe into the tragedy.

They have boarded a flight for Delhi and will be handed over to Indian authorities on arrival, sources said.

The duo will be produced before a Delhi court for further legal proceedings, they said.

A case of culpable homicide and negligence has been registered against them in connection with the fire.

Videos circulating online showed Gaurav, 44, and Saurav, 40, being escorted by Thai police at Bangkok airport ahead of their departure for India.

The deportation comes days after the two were detained in Phuket on December 11 following the intervention of the Indian mission, which was in close touch with the Thai government in the case.

The Luthra brothers, co-owners of 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub in Arpora in North Goa, had left for Thailand shortly after the December 6 fire. They were reportedly attending a wedding in Delhi at the time of the incident.

An Interpol Blue Corner Notice was issued against the duo.

The blaze had sparked widespread outrage and raised serious questions over alleged safety violations and lapses by the nightclub management.

The Indian government, after cancelling the passports of the two brothers, had submitted a dossier to Thai authorities alleging their involvement in the deaths of 25 people and formally sought their deportation. (PTI)



Envoys try to narrow gaps on loan plan for Ukraine ahead of Thursday's crunch EU summit

BRUSSELS, Dec 16: European Union envoys worked on Tuesday to narrow gaps on a plan to use billions of dollars in frozen Russian assets as collateral for a massive loan to cover Ukraine's economic and military needs over the next two years, ahead of a crunch summit of EU leaders later this week.

Almost four years into Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, the leaders have committed to funding Kyiv's needs, which the International Monetary Fund puts at 135 billion euros (USD 157 billion). Ukraine is desperate to secure the money by early 2026.

"We do not have the luxury of time," Sweden's EU Affairs Minister Jessica Rosencrantz told reporters in Brussels. "It is really time to move forward with a decision, and Sweden is willing to share the risk because the cost and risk of doing nothing is greater."

Such a move has never been made before, and it comes with risks. The European Central Bank has warned that if Europeans appear willing to grab other countries' money, it could undermine confidence in the euro currency. Some member nations are also concerned about inviting retaliation from Russia.

Belgium, where most of the assets are held, is the main opponent of the plan. It fears that Russia will strike back, either through the courts or in more nefarious ways.



headquarters in Brussels until they have reached a decision, even if it takes days.

A deep freeze, and two options
EU leaders froze the money, most of it in Russian Central Bank assets, over the war that President Vladimir Putin launched in February 2022. Moscow has described the plan as "theft." Then last Friday, the EU placed an indefinite freeze on the assets — estimated to total around 210 billion euros (USD 247 billion) — to ensure that Hungary and Slovakia, both with Moscow-friendly governments, can't prevent the billions of euros from being used to support Ukraine. It also ensures that the assets can't be used by the United States or Russia in any Ukraine peace negotiations without European approval.

Two plans for using the money have emerged. The first would be a "reparations

loan" that would use the Russian assets until Moscow agrees to pay for the damage inflicted on Ukraine. Few think Putin will ever agree to pay reparations.

Plan B would be for the EU to borrow the money on financial markets, such as the bloc did to fund a massive loan plan to revive European economies after the coronavirus pandemic. But many of Europe's major economies are cash-strapped and mired in debt. The assets make up a substantial pot of potentially ready-to-use cash. The vast majority — around 193 billion euros (USD 227 billion) at the end of September — are held in the Belgian financial clearinghouse known as Euroclear.

Plan A has distinct political advantages. Should the EU choose to use the assets, only "a qualified majority" of countries — around a two-thirds majority — would be required for a green light. Borrowing on financial markets would have to be endorsed by all, meaning that even a single no vote would sink the idea.

Details of the reparations loan
European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has said the EU would cover two-thirds of Ukraine's needs for 2026 and 2027, for a total loan of 90 billion euros (USD 105 billion). International partners would fill the gap. Due to EU sanctions on Russia's assets, cash balances have accumulated at Euroclear. Under the new plan, some of the cash would be transferred to an EU debt instru-

ment. Ukraine would owe the EU the money but would repay only after the bloc's sanctions are lifted and after Russia agrees to pay war reparations.

The commission insists that there is no "theft," as Russia has claimed, because the right of the Russian Central Bank to make a claim on its money and Euroclear's duty to repay will remain intact.

Opposition in Belgium
Importantly for Belgium, the plan contains safeguards to ensure that the risks would be shared by its partners. Other EU countries would offer to guarantee the loan if something went wrong. Germany has already signalled that it would do so, as Sweden did on Tuesday.

But the Belgian government has not been assuaged. Even before the commission's reparations loan plan was made public, the government warned of "consequential economic, financial and legal risks," and said it felt that EU partners were not listening to its concerns.

Euroclear has not ruled out legal action of its own, should the EU oblige it to transfer the Russian assets.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy agrees that a reparations loan would be "a game-changer. Why? Because it is a security guarantee for Ukraine — a financial security guarantee." Ukraine, he said, would be free to use the money on its economy, infrastructure or armed forces, depending on how the war goes. (AP)

Panchayati Raj polls conclude peacefully

Smooth voting across six Zilla segments; counting on December 20

HT Correspondent

YUPIA, Dec 16: The Panchayati Raj Elections-2025 for Rural Papum Pare district concluded peacefully and successfully on Monday, covering all 16 Zilla Parishad segments and 390 Gram Panchayat (GP) segments.

All the 16 Zilla Parishad segments were contested during the elections. Out of the 390 Gram Panchayat segments, 169 segments witnessed contests, while 220 segments were declared uncontested. The Gram Panchayat segment of Hote was declared vacant as the sole nomination filed for the segment was rejected during the scrutiny process.

Polling Station No 16 at BK Mission School, Midpu, under the II-Doimukh Zilla Parishad Constituency was designated as a Model Polling Station. The station showcased best practices in election management and voter facilitation, reflecting the administration's efforts to ensure a voter-friendly polling environment.

The elections also highlighted the commendable role of the "men in red"—the Goan Buras—who worked in close coordination with the police and security personnel to maintain law and order. Their active involvement contributed significantly to the smooth and peaceful conduct of the polling process across the district.

The entire polling exercise was closely and continuously monitored by the District Election Officer (Panchayati Raj), Vishakha Yadav, IAS, along



with the General Observer, Mige Kamki, to ensure strict adherence to all prescribed electoral guidelines.

The District Election Administration expressed its appreciation to the polling personnel, security forces, Goan Buras and voters for their cooperation, which played a vital role in ensuring the peaceful and successful conduct of the Panchayati Raj Elections-2025 in the district.

Our Key Panyor Correspondent adds: Polling for the Panchayati Elections in Keyi Panyor district was conducted successfully, smoothly and securely across all six Zilla Parishad segments, covering a total of 46 polling stations. The polling process remained orderly throughout the day and no major untoward incident was reported.

The elections were conducted under the overall supervision of the District Election Officer, Shweta Nagarkoti

Mehta, IAS, with the support of the Deputy District Election Officer and the Superintendent of Police, Angad Mehta, IPS. Robust police deployment and effective security arrangements played a key role in maintaining law and order and ensuring a safe environment for voters.

The District Election Officer expressed sincere appreciation to all polling parties led by Presiding Officers, Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, along with Sector Magistrates, Sector Police Officers and all police personnel deployed at polling stations, including those assigned at the last minute. Their professionalism and dedication ensured the peaceful and fair conduct of the elections.

The DEO also placed on record her appreciation for the commendable work carried out by the Election Branch under the leadership of the ADC-cum-Deputy DEO, the police machinery led by the Superin-

tendent of Police and all Nodal Officers, who discharged their duties with precision and commitment.

Although the elections were anticipated to be sensitive and complex in certain areas, effective coordination between the civil administration and the police ensured that the entire process remained smooth and well-managed at all stages. The District Administration also acknowledged the cooperation extended by political parties and candidates, which contributed significantly to the peaceful conduct of the polls.

The District Election Officer thanked all officers, officials and stakeholders for their hard work, cooperation and exemplary teamwork, which led to the successful completion of the Panchayati Elections in the district.

Counting of votes will be held on December 20, 2025, at the Indoor Badminton Stadium, beginning from 8 AM onwards.

Nearly 75 pc voter turnout recorded in panchayat polls in Arunachal: SEC



ITANAGAR, Dec 16: A voter turnout of nearly 75 per cent was recorded in the panchayat polls in Arunachal Pradesh, the State Election Commission (SEC) said on Tuesday.

In the urban local body elections, voter participation stood at 51.39 per cent in the Itanagar Municipal Corporation, where 24,604 out of 47,877 electors exercised their franchise.

The Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) recorded a higher turnout of 60.95 per cent, with 7,541 of the 12,373 eligible voters participating in the polling process, the SEC said.

Of the total 5,94,307 voters enrolled in the panchayats, 4,45,264 exercised their franchise, registering a turnout of 74.92 per cent across the state, it said.

The polling for 186 zilla parishad con-

stituencies, 1,947 gram panchayat seats, 16 Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) wards and eight Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) wards was largely peaceful on Monday, it said.

In the panchayat elections, the highest polling percentage of 84.31 per cent was recorded in Longding district, while East Kameng reported the lowest turnout at 65.05 per cent.

In the municipal polls, the highest voting percentage was recorded at the government secondary school, Pasighat, under ward number 1 of the PMC, while the lowest was reported at the fishery director's office here, under ward number 3 of the IMC.

The commission also announced that repolling will be conducted on December 18 in select polling stations due to reported disturbances.

These include the Nongkhon gram panchayat segment in Namsai district, the Nisangiang/Besai gram panchayat in Bichom, multiple gram panchayat constituencies in Tirap and the Rotom polling station in Kamle.

Barring a few incidents of minor disturbances, the overall polling process concluded peacefully across the state without any major law and order issues.

Counting of votes is scheduled to be held on December 20. (PTI)

'Army honours war heroes, fostering patriotism and celebrating 1971 victory'

Army celebrates Vijay Diwas in remote Mechuka in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, Dec 16: The Indian Army on Tuesday commemorated Vijay Diwas in the remote border village of Mechuka in Arunachal Pradesh's Shi-Yomi district.

The Army organised a special screening of a documentary on the 1971 war for school students, highlighting military operations, strategic leadership and bravery of Indian soldiers, defence spokesperson Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said.

The screening was followed by an interactive session in which Army personnel spoke on the historical importance of the 1971 war and the enduring role of the armed forces in safeguarding the nation's unity and integrity.

The programme also focused on fostering patriotism and national pride among the younger generation, while strengthening the bond between the Indian Army and students in the border region. Emphasis was laid on values such as courage,

discipline and selfless service exemplified by the soldiers, the official said.

The Army also felicitated veterans with officers visiting their residences, acknowledging their immense courage, sacrifices and invaluable contribution to the nation.

Army personnel interacted with the war heroes and their families, reaffirming their commitment to honouring those who laid down their lives in the service of the country.

The state's leaders also paid rich tributes to the valour and sacrifice of the armed forces on the occasion.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein led the tributes, recalling the courage and selfless service of the soldiers who upheld the nation's honour and secured peace and freedom for future generations.

Mein said Vijay Diwas is a solemn reminder of the "unmatched courage, sacrifice and valour of the Indian Armed

Forces who secured a historic victory in 1971 and upheld the honour of our nation".

He said their dedication and selfless service continue to ensure India's sovereignty, peace and freedom.

Home Minister Mama Natung also paid homage to the soldiers, stating that the "brave hearts fought with courage and compassion to protect justice and humanity".

He said their sacrifices are etched forever in India's history and in the hearts of every Indian.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Biyuram Wahge said the day is a solemn occasion to remember and salute the bravery and sacrifice of the armed forces.

Vijay Diwas is observed every year on December 16 to mark India's decisive victory over Pakistan in 1971, which led to the liberation of Bangladesh. (PTI)

Governor's Citation presented to 11 Assam Rifles for security and civic role

Parnaik praises Assam Rifles for professionalism, counter-insurgency ops

ITANAGAR, Dec 16: Governor Lt Gen (Retired) K T Parnaik on Tuesday praised Assam Rifles for its exceptional professionalism, effective counter-insurgency operations and humane and compassionate approach in extending timely assistance to the civil administration and the local populace, an official statement said.

Speaking after presenting the Governor's Citation to the 11th Battalion of the Assam Rifles at Lok Bhavan here, Par-

naik said through constant vigil and robust security measures, 11 Assam Rifles has ensured peace in its area of responsibility and also instilled a sense of safety and confidence among the people, thereby creating an enabling environment for development.

The citation was received by Commandant, Colonel Vivek Tripathi, along with Subedar Major Lekh Raj and Rifleman G D Neelesh Kumar on behalf of all ranks

of the battalion, it said.

Congratulating the commandant and all ranks on behalf of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, he expressed confidence that the battalion would continue to uphold its high standards of service and dedication.

He further observed that the battalion has made efforts to strengthen mutual trust and harmony between the armed forces and the local communities. (PTI)

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Engagement under World Bank supported Project "Support School Education in Assam"

A Project Management unit (PMU) is proposed to be set-up in Assam for implementation of the World bank supported Project Supporting School Education in Assam". The Project is for a period of 5 years and the engagement will be purely temporarily in nature. Samagra Shiksha Axom has been assigned to initiate for setting up the PMU by filling up the posts under the project. As such, the online applications are invited from Indian Citizens (as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India) for the under mentioned position for setting up the PMU. The online applications will be received from 17.12.2025 to 31.12.2025. The posts are temporary in nature and the selected candidates will be initially engaged for a period of 11 (eleven) months only. The contractual engagement will neither be regularized under any job/programme of Government of Assam or in Samagra Shiksha Axom in future and no person (s) so engaged shall have any right (s) to claim for permanent absorption in any post (s) in the government or in the Samagra Shiksha, Assam.

Age for categories of post: The candidate should not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 45 years of age as on 01-01-2025.

The age limit of the candidates will be calculated on the basis of the Matriculation/HSLC Admit Card or Pass Certificate issued by a recognized Board Council and no other document shall be accepted in lieu of the mentioned documents.

The remuneration of the positions to be engaged under the project will be paid under the PMU fund of the Project Supporting School Education in Assam" only

Sl. No	No. of posts	Desired Qualification/Experience	Monthly fixed remuneration
1.	Procurement Specialist	<p>Eligibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering, commerce graduate with MBA or Masters degree/Post Graduate Diploma (minimum two years duration) in any discipline from any Govt. recognized university/institution Minimum 5 years of post-qualification experience in project procurement and contract management. Experience of procurement rules of the World Bank Externally Aided Project (EAP) Proven experience in preparing procurement plans, Bid documents, preparing evaluation reports and contracts as per Bank SBD and managing procurement processes Thorough Knowledge of procurement through GEM and Assam-tenders Ability to upload bids on GEM and Assamtenders Thorough knowledge on GFR, Assam Public Procurement Act 2017 and Assam Public Procurement Rule 2020, CVC Guideline, GEM <p>Duties & Responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of Project Procurement Strategy for Development (PPSD), Procurement Plan and Procurement Manual with formats to guide procurement and threshold-based methods for goods, non-consulting services and consultancy services Preparation of bidding documents related to the entire tendering cycle from preparation of bidding documents, to tendering, pre bid meetings, technical & financial evaluation, preparation of evaluation statements & reports and contract management. Organising pre-bid or pre-proposal meetings, providing clarifications, coordinating the receipt of bids/proposals, leading, and participating in the opening of bids/proposals/expressions of interest. Review bid documents and prepare bid evaluation reports for all procurements planned as per delegated valued thresholds and type of procurement method adopted. During bidding period, prepare responses for questions, from bidders and issue amendment/s to the procurement documents in accordance with relevant clauses of the Bid and RFP. Design a proper contract monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance to milestones, deliverables, timely completion of assignments, release of payment, issuing contract amendment of all signed contracts. Ensure proper record keeping pertaining to award of tenders, including bid notification, register pertaining to sale and receipt of bids, bid opening records /minutes, bid evaluation Reports and all correspondence pertaining to bid evaluation, communication sent to/with the World Bank. Support DoE to set-up a Complaints and Dispute Resolution Mechanism and prepare and submit updates, of all complaints received and action taken to the Project Director for review. Perform duties and responsibilities as assigned from time to time, in alignment with the project's needs and goals. <p>Reporting and Coordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and submit quarterly status report of all ongoing contracts, including contract management issues such as delays, payments, and other issues to the Project Director. Advise concerned officials of the DoE on the most efficient methods of procurement and identify the risks to the procurement activities Liaise with related personnel to analyse and define the user requirements/ division requirements and develop Terms of Reference (TOR) as required. Liaise with World Bank team, other project implementation team members, line departments, educational institutions, training providers, and other stakeholders to establish necessary project coordination and accomplish operational requirements for day-to-day tasks. Participate in and/or organize relevant seminars, workshops, consultations etc. as and when required; review the capacity building requirements of procurement staff on a regular basis. And any other work assigned by the Project Director from time to time. 	(Rs. 1,20,000/- to Rs. 1,50,000/-)

Instructions:

- The link of the recruitment portal will be available in the Samagra Shiksha website <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>
- Read the User Guidelines carefully which is available on the recruitment portal on how to submit the online application form.
- Chairs for any correction will not be entertained after submitting the online registration and online application.
- Before filling the on-line application, applicant has to go through the User Guidelines for online registration and online application.
- Candidate must upload the supporting, document of educational qualification, experience and other's through portal.
- Only eligible candidates will have to appear in test/interview, the exact date of which will be communicated separately.
- A candidate must be in good mental and bodily health and free from any physical defect likely to interfere with the efficient discharge of his/her duties as an Officer of the service
- The exact date & time of the Test Interview will be communicated to the shortlisted candidates separately
- Marking pattern will be on General Awareness, Personality & Aptitude, Subject matter in relevant field, Relevant Experience, etc. for the post. The applicant has to obtain minimum 50% of the total marks on the above in the interview and only then the candidates will be shortlisted.
- The office will not be responsible for any non submission of online application due to any error or other problem.
- The decision of the Selection Committee in all aspects and all respects pertaining to the application and its acceptance or rejection as the case may be, conduct of test and at all subsequent stages concluding in the selection or otherwise of any candidate shall be final in all respects and binding on all concerned The Mission also reserves its right to alter and modify time and conditions laid down in the notification for conducting the various stages up to selection withdraw the Notification at any time, duly intimating details thereof to all concerned, as warranted by any unforeseen circumstances arising during the course of this process, or as deemed necessary by the Mission at any stage
- The authority reserve the right to cancel the advertisement at any time without assigning any reason or non receipt of suitable candidates

National Herald case: Relief for Gandhis as court refuses to take cognisance of ED complaint

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: In a relief to Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and five others, a Delhi court on Tuesday refused to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate's money laundering charge against them in the National Herald case, holding that the agency's probe stemmed from a private complaint and not an FIR.

Delivering his order in a case that was marked by political sluffest and legal battles for several years, Special Judge Vishal Gogne said the cognisance of the ED's prosecution complaint relating to the offence of money laundering was "impermissible in law."

The ED complaint was based on an investigation into a complaint by private person Subramanian Swamy and not on an FIR of a predicate offence, the judge said. The court said it has now become premature and imprudent for it to decide the submissions made by the ED as well as the proposed accused in relation to the merits of the allegations, especially so when cognisance is liable to be declined on a "pure question of law".

"Other arguments possibly live to fight another day," ED officials said the probe agency may file an appeal against the court's order after taking opinion from law officers, including Solicitor General Tushar Mehta.

With court proceedings not moving to the trial stage for now, the officials said the agency will file a fresh chargesheet against Sonia and Rahul Gandhi apart from others as it has taken cognisance of the latest Delhi Police FIR filed in the National Herald money laundering case on October 3 this year.

The ED has accused Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, as well as late party leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes, along with Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda, and a private company, Young Indian, of conspiracy and money laundering.

It has been alleged that they acquired properties worth approximately Rs 2,000 crore belonging to Associated Journals Limited (AJL), which publishes the National Herald newspaper. Reacting to the order, the Congress claimed that the "illegality" of the Narendra Modi government and its "politically motivated prosecution stands fully exposed".

In a statement, the Congress said the ED's proceedings against Congress leadership -- Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi -- in the case have been found to be "completely illegal and mala fide" by the court.



"Truth has prevailed, and truth will always prevail," Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara and Mohammed Khan told a joint press conference. The BJP said no cognisance is not a clean chit to Sonia and Rahul. In a post on X, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said the primary criminal case, which originated from the private complaint filed by Subramanian Swamy alleging cheating, criminal conspiracy, and breach of trust, the predicate offence, is still pending trial in the Delhi Court. "Bail Granted, Not Acquitted: Sonia and Rahul Gandhi were summoned in that original case and are out on bail. The court has not acquitted them in this case."

In a related development, the court set aside a magisterial court's order directing the Delhi Police to provide a copy of an FIR registered by them against Sonia and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

Reading out the operative part from the 117-page order on cognisance of the ED's complaint, judge Gogne said the Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing has already lodged an FIR in the case, and hence, it will be premature to adjudicate on ED's arguments in the case based on merits.

"An investigation and the consequent prosecution complaint pertaining to the offence of money laundering defined under Section 3 of the PMLA and punishable under Section 4 is not maintainable in the absence of an FIR or offence mentioned in the schedule to the Act." While section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) deals with the offence of money laundering, section 4 pertains to punishment for the offence of money laundering. (PTI)

Mathura fog tragedy: 13 dead, 43 injured in Yamuna Expressway pile-up

MATHURA, Dec 16: Thirteen people died of burns, and 43 sustained injuries when a vehicle pile-up in dense fog on the Yamuna Expressway here early Tuesday turned into an inferno, according to police.

Eight buses and three smaller vehicles collided with each other in the thick fog around 4.30 am, the officer said.

The incident occurred under the Baldev Police Station jurisdiction.

"The vehicles collided due to low visibility on the Agra-to-Noida side of the Yamuna Expressway. Some vehicles also caught fire. All injured have been sent to the hospital," Mathura Senior Superintendent of Police Shlok Kumar said.

Two of the deceased were identified as 44-year-old Akhileendra Pratap Yadav, a resident of Prayagraj, and 75-year-old Rampal, from Maharajanj district, Baldev Police Station SHO Ranjana Sachan said. A third, identified later by a chief medical officer from Vrindavan, was 62-year-old Sultan Ahmed, a resident of Gonda district.

All 13 died of burns, Sachan said. Visuals from the spot revealed charred buses and cars, reduced to mere mangled shells. Cranes were called in to remove them from the road.

"We are preserving the DNA of charred bodies to match them with the information provided by their relatives. We have identified three dead passengers and are contacting their relatives," Kumar said.

District Magistrate Chandra Prakash Singh said arrangements are being made for the last rites of those whose bodies have been identified, and treatment is being provided to the injured. The DM ordered a four-member team to investigate the road tragedy and submit a report in two days. The committee will be headed by Additional District Magistrate (Administration) Amresh Kumar.

The SSP, who was at the site, said that an unidentified driver was booked at the Baldev Police Station.

Meanwhile, Chief Medical Officer Dr Radha



Vallabh said two separate teams of doctors had been appointed for the post-mortem of the deceased and the collection of DNA samples.

He said that the police have delivered 17 body bags for post-mortem.

He said that some of the seriously injured had been referred to SN Medical College and Hospital in Agra, while some were referred to Delhi.

The CMO also said that by noon, a total of 43 people had been brought to the Joint District Hospital in Vrindavan for treatment. Of these, 10 were women, and 33 were men.

According to a Mathura Police statement on X, the pile-up at Milestone 127 involved seven buses and three smaller vehicles. "None of the injured are in critical condition," it said.

An injured person at a hospital said the bus was bound for Delhi. "It was fog. The bus was going to Delhi. Many people have died. I broke my back," he said, as he lay on a stretcher.

The passengers were sent to their destinations in government vehicles, the SSP said.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, in a post on X in Hindi, expressed

his condolences to the kin of the deceased.

"The loss of life in the road accident on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura district is extremely tragic and heartbreaking. My deepest condolences are with the bereaved families," he said. "I have instructed the district administration officials to ensure proper treatment for the injured. I pray to Lord Ram to grant peace to the departed souls and a speedy recovery to the injured," Adityanath said.

According to a post from his office, the chief minister announced Rs 2 lakh each to the kin of the deceased, and Rs 50,000 each to the injured.

On Monday, fog led to the deaths of three people, two of them police officers, in two separate road accidents involving multiple vehicles in Haryana's Sonapat and Nuh districts.

In the Nuh pileup, two people, including a CISF Inspector, were killed on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. In Sonapat, a female assistant sub-inspector of police was killed when the car in which she was travelling for work hit a truck that was taking a wrong turn on the highway, police said. (PTI)

National Herald case Modi govt's illegality fully exposed: Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: The Congress on Tuesday claimed the "illegality" of the Narendra Modi government and its "politically motivated prosecution stands fully exposed" after a court here refused to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate chargesheet in the National Herald money laundering case against Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and others.

In a statement, the Congress said the ED's proceedings against Congress leadership -- Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi -- in the case have been found to be "completely illegal and mala fide" by the court.

"The mala fide and illegality of the Modi government stand fully exposed. The court has ruled that the ED case is without jurisdiction; it has no FIR, without which there is no case. This politically motivated prosecution by the Modi government over the last decade of the principal opposition party stands exposed before the people of India," the opposition party said.

"No case of money laundering, no proceeds of crime and no movement of property; all baseless charges that have been a part of a political witch hunt, propaganda, reputation assassination and campaign which stands defeated today," it said.

The party asserted that it and the leadership were committed to fighting for the truth and for the rights of every Indian. "We cannot, and will not ever be intimidated, because we fight for the truth," the statement added.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge reminded people that when false allegations were levelled to defame the National Herald, the party and its leaders, then too he had said that "if we didn't fear the British, what are these BJP-RSS or Modi-Shah worth?"

"Today, the court too has declared the Modi government's actions illegal and foiled this conspiracy hatched with the malicious intent of political revenge. No matter how much force this 'vote-chor government' deploys to crush democracy, we will continue our fight for 1.4 billion Indians and to save this Constitution. The victory of truth is certain," Kharge said in a post on X.

Party general secretary K C Venugopal said, "Through this judgment, the court has exposed the illegal and mala fide political targeting by the Narendra Modi government."

"From day one, the opposition, especially Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, has been targeted without any legal basis or wrongdoing. This judgment clearly vindicates our stand," he told reporters.

In a post on X, he later said that time and time again, "the BJP-controlled ED has tried its best to frame the Congress leadership in the totally bogus National Herald case. Today's verdict of the Court declaring that the entire case is

without jurisdiction, without FIR, and as such without basis, proves that this was purely driven by political vendetta".

"It is a tight slap on the face of all those who repeatedly try to besmirch Sonia Gandhi ji and Rahul Gandhi ji through this frivolous case. This verdict today should come as a clear message to the vendetta-driven investigation agencies, including ED, who will go to any extent to appease their masters with malicious cases," Venugopal said.

Congress senior spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi, who is also an advocate, said he had told the court that this is a "very weird case" where there is not a millimetre movement of money or of immovable property.

"The judgment is significant because cognisance is the lowest form of dealing with a case. It is very easy to take cognisance of a case. It (the court's decision) means the case is not worth taking cognisance of. And here you see the amount of halla gulla and shor (brouhaha) that the BJP has done to make a superstructure of exaggeration," he said.

Later, addressing a joint press conference, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara and Mohammed Khan said the truth has prevailed, and truth will always prevail.

The "conspiratorial FIR orchestrated by the BJP in the National Herald case, born out of the Modi-Shah political vendetta", has been quashed by the Court, they said.

Khara alleged that the case was blatantly politically motivated, driven by the BJP government's mounting frustration over the Congress consistently exposing its failures.

"As the 'vote chori' of the BJP government was exposed by Rahul Gandhi, the BJP government and its agencies, including the ED, have run out of fresh smears. When facts ran thin, theatrics stepped in, selective prosecutions, recycled allegations, and a thinly veiled attempt to keep political opponents perpetually in the dock," their statement said. By quashing the FIR in the case, the judiciary has delivered a decisive rebuke to the BJP's politics of persecution, exposing its political vendetta and its mindless attempts to hound the opposition, Khara said.

The quashing of the FIR clearly demonstrates that the BJP's politics is rooted in vendetta, intimidation, persecution, and fear-mongering, carried out at the behest of those with a criminal mentality, he said.

"The 50-hour questioning over five consecutive days was nothing but a state-sponsored political witch-hunt, which the Congress confronted head-on. With the FIR now quashed, it stands proven once again that truth has prevailed, and truth will always prevail," Khara said. (PTI)

Messi event fiasco: Aroop Biswas's resignation as WB sports minister accepted

KOLKATA, Dec 16: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday accepted Aroop Biswas's resignation as the sports minister in the wake of the controversy over the mismanagement of football icon Lionel Messi's event last week, a senior leader of the ruling TMC said.

Biswas, who had written to the chief minister seeking to be relieved of his responsibilities as sports minister, will continue as a cabinet minister, retaining charge of the power department.

Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "Biswas's resignation had been accepted, and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will oversee the sports and youth welfare portfolio."

The acceptance of Biswas's resignation marks a significant political and administrative development following the hue and cry over the chaos that unfolded after Messi's brief appearance at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, popularly known as the Salt Lake Stadium, on December 13.

Angry spectators, upset over alleged mismanagement, crowd control failures and security lapses, resorted to vandalism inside the stadium after the Argentine star exited the field, causing damage to property estimated by officials at around Rs 2 crore.

Biswas had written to the chief minister on Monday, seeking relief from the sports portfolio, citing the need for a "neutral" and unhindered probe into the incident.

While he holds charge of both the sports and youth welfare and the power departments, his request was limited to stepping aside from the sports ministry.

Even after the acceptance of his resignation from that post, he remains part of the state cabinet, sources said.

Ghosh had earlier shared on social media what he described as a copy of Biswas's letter to the chief minister, dated December 15, stating that the minister had offered to resign in view of the controversy.

The development initially triggered some political confusion, with Ghosh later clarifying that the final decision rested with the chief minister. On Tuesday evening, however, Ghosh confirmed that the resignation had been accepted.

Following Biswas's request to step aside, senior officials of the Sports and Youth Welfare Department were summoned to the state secretariat 'Nabanna' on Tuesday.

The controversy has been deepened by images and videos circulating widely on social media that showed Biswas in close proximity to Messi during the event. Football fans and sections of the public accused the former sports minister of crowding the star player, even as spectators struggled to get a clear view.

As the visuals went viral, criticism mounted not only in public discourse but also within political circles, intensifying speculation over whether Biswas would be divested of his responsibilities or choose to step down.

Some party insiders said there had been an expectation among Biswas's associates that the controversy might be overshadowed by the publication of West Bengal's draft electoral rolls under the Election Commission's Spe-

cial Intensive Revision (SIR) on Tuesday.

However, Biswas moved swiftly, writing to the chief minister even before the EC's formal announcement, and his resignation was accepted the same day.

The acceptance of the resignation has coincided with a wave of administrative action initiated based on the preliminary findings of a high-level inquiry committee constituted to probe the lapses during the Messi event.

The chief minister had earlier appointed a committee to investigate the incident, which submitted its initial report and recommendations at Nabanna on Monday night.

Acting on those findings, the state government on Tuesday issued show-cause notices to Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar and Bidhannagar Police Commissioner Mukesh Kumar, asking them to explain within 24 hours why the situation spiralled out of control during the event.

Bidhannagar Deputy Police Commissioner Aneesh Sarkar has been suspended pending a departmental inquiry, officials said. Show-cause notices have also been issued to the state sports secretary, Rajesh Kumar Singh. In addition, Dev Kumar Nandan, the CEO of the Yuba Bharati Krirangan, has been removed from his post.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been formed to conduct a detailed probe into the incident, following the recommendations of the inquiry committee, according to an official statement issued by the office of Chief Secretary Manoj Pant. (PTI)

Human-wildlife conflict: Special cell set up in Uttarakhand to deal with situation, govt tells IS

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: A special cell has been set up in Uttarakhand for identification, monitoring, and resolution of situations arising due to human-wildlife conflict in the state, the government has informed the Lok Sabha.

Replying to a question from BJP MP Anil Baluni on the issue, Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Kirti Vardhan Singh also told the House on Monday that an exercise for the estimation of the leopard population in Uttarakhand has been completed with the assistance of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

Baluni asked the government as to whether it proposes to formulate a new policy for Uttarakhand to check "rapidly increasing" incidents of human-wildlife conflict and run a joint special campaign with the state government to check the increasing incidents of animal attack.

The Garhwal MP also asked whether the government is conducting any specific studies or carrying expert investigations to understand the reasons behind the increasing conflict between wild animals and the humans in the state.

In his reply, the minister said, "As per information received from the State of Uttarakhand, a 'Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Cell' has been constituted in the state."

"Under this mechanism, systematic work is being carried out for the identification, monitoring, and resolution of situations arising due to human-wildlife conflict, along with documentation and maintenance of relevant records and data," he said.

Further, with the assistance of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, the exercise for estimation of the leopard population has been completed in the state, Singh added.

The minister said that incidents of crop damage due to human-wildlife conflict are reported from different parts of the country from time to time.

"However, the management of wildlife including mitigation of human-animal conflicts is primarily the responsibility of the concerned state government/Union territory administration," he said, adding they are the first responder in human-wildlife conflict situations. Baluni, who is also the chief spokesperson of the BJP, had recently flagged the rising incidents of man-animal conflict in the hill regions of Garhwal in Uttarakhand, and urged the Centre to help the state in dealing with the challenge. (PTI)

58 lakh names off WB rolls under SIR, reshaping electoral map across districts, high-profile seats

KOLKATA, Dec 16: West Bengal's electorate has undergone its sharpest churn in decades, with the EC's SIR draft rolls striking off over 58 lakh names, redrawing voter profiles across districts, border belts and high-profile constituencies, and injecting fresh political volatility ahead of 2026 assembly polls.

The draft electoral rolls published on Tuesday show the state's electorate shrinking from around 7.66 crore voters to over 7.08 crore, after names were deleted on grounds ranging from death and permanent migration to duplication and non-submission of enumeration forms. The EC underlined that the exercise is provisional and subject to hearings.

Nowhere is the churn more visible than in north Bengal, where all seven districts have reported sizeable deletions, particularly in border and urban pockets.

EC sources indicated that around 31,181 names may be deleted from Siliguri, while Kalimpong could see nearly 17,321 deletions.

Jalpaiguri district emerged as one of the most affected. In Dabgram-Phulbari seat, which has



around 3.25 lakh voters, as many as 38,395 names are set to be deleted, including over 12,000 marked as deceased and nearly 19,000 untraceable, EC sources said. Mal seat could lose 21,127 voters, while Jalpaiguri Sadar, Rajganj, Nagrakata and Dhanguri also reported deletions running into five figures. Several of these seats are held by the TMC, while Dabgram-Phulbari, Maynaguri and Nagrakata are with the BJP.

Alipurduar district, which has five assembly seats, is set to lose more than 95,267 voters, nearly half of them marked as deceased, according to EC sources.

District election officials said the deletions could be partly offset by the addition of new voters during the final revision.

In Cooch Behar, which witnessed around 1.13 lakh deletions, the highest was reported from Dinhatata (16,442) followed by Sitai (15,999), both border constituencies.

State minister Udayan Guha, who represents Dinhatata, said higher voter numbers naturally meant higher counts of deceased and shifted voters. BJP leader Malati Rava, however, said the process was exposing "fake voters" that several parties had long alleged. Dakshin Dinajpur district's Gangarampur and Tapan

seats -- both held by BJP -- are among the worst affected, while TMC-held Kumarganj has the lowest deletions in the district.

The Muslim-majority Murshidabad district, bordering Bangladesh and with over 57 lakh voters, witnessed around 2.78 lakh deletions. In Malda, several India-Bangladesh border constituencies, including Kaliachak, Sujapur, Englishbazar and Habibpur, are likely to see 12,000-20,000 deletions each, EC sources said. Altogether, the district with a sizeable number of Muslim voters witnessed deletions of over two lakh names from nearly 32 lakh voters when the SIR process began.

The second single largest district-wise impact has been recorded in North 24 Parganas, which has 31 assembly seats, where over 7.92 lakh names have been deleted.

Of these, over 3.08 lakh were marked deceased, 2.18 lakh untraceable and 2.45 lakh permanently shifted.

In Matua-community dominated seats of North 24 Parganas such as Bangaon Uttar, Bangaon Dakshin, Swarupnagar, Gaighata, Baduria, Habra and Ashoknagar, consid-

ered as stronghold of the BJP, voter deletions of around 1.25 lakhs were recorded.

Bhatpara, considered BJP leader Arjun Singh's stronghold, has seen the highest percentage deletions in the state-20.42 per cent, or 31,725 voters. The constituency is currently represented by his son Pawan Singh.

TMC MLA Somnath Shyam alleged that the figures exposed past electoral manipulation, a charge the BJP rejected.

Bhatpara was followed by Barackpore (19 per cent deletions), Bidhannagar (18.17 per cent), Rajarhat (17.46 per cent) and Kamarhati (17.39 per cent).

In contrast, Matua-dominated and border constituencies such as Bongaon North, Bongaon South, Gaighata and Bagdah recorded relatively lower deletion percentages, ranging between 1.7 per cent and 8.6 per cent.

In Kolkata, the data has added a sharp political edge. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Bhabanipur constituency has recorded 44,787 deletions-nearly four times the 10,599 names struck off in Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari's Nandigram seat. (PTI)



I try to speak a lot in silence: Paramvir Cheema on receiving praise for 'Tere Ishk Mein'

In Aanand L Rai's chaotic and intense love story "Tere Ishk Mein", Paramvir Cheema brings a sense of calm and the actor says the restraint comes naturally to him as he is a quiet person in real life.

The film, which has emerged as a hit at the box office with a collection of over Rs 150 crore, follows the turbulent relationship between Shankar (Dhanush), a fiery student leader and Mukti (Kriti Sanon), a research scholar.

Cheema, who has been praised for his performances in shows "Tabbar", "Chamak" and most recently "Black Warrant", plays Jasjeet, Mukti's husband.

"I remember when I was shooting for 'Chamak', the director told me, 'Param, when something works, you can feel it in the air. You know the moment the atmosphere changes.' And after 'Tere Ishk Mein', I really feel that the air has changed," Cheema told PTI in an interview.

The actor has also been receiving calls and messages from family and friends, praising his performance in the movie.

"Everyone has been saying my character comes across as very understanding, that I bring warmth, calm and a subtle presence to the screen. The feedback has stayed with me

because there's a lot happening internally, yet the calm is always visible.

"Recently, I met the film's cinematographer, who told me that while grading the film, even the colourist asked, 'Who is this guy?' So I'm really happy," he said.

Critics have praised the actor for bringing quiet intensity and emotional depth to Jasjeet, who comes across as a grounded counterpoint to the heightened emotions of Shankar and Mukti.

As an individual, Cheema said he reads a lot and prefers silence in his everyday life.

"I try to speak a lot in silence and I like that. When I meet someone, I talk a lot but in real life, I enjoy my silence a lot. So for some time, this has been inside me and that is where the intensity comes. A lot of people ask me 'why am I always serious?' I think when you have seen life a lot, the depth and intensity comes within," he added.

Being raised by his grandmother in Jalandhar, Punjab, after losing his mother at a young age, and watching his father struggle with depression, forced Cheema to grow up quickly.

"My father came out of it and married another woman. In the beginning, I had problems with her. Gradually, I was able to fix everything. So you get mature and you start understanding things in a different way. You become very understanding in life that 'This is life. This is how it is going to be and you have to make it work.'"

Cheema believes struggle is essential for growth and it was reinforced by his years in Mumbai.

"If you don't struggle, I don't think you can move forward in life. Struggle goes on

throughout but when it gets over, you realise that you have learned a lot in those days.

"This is what is helping me now."

"Tere Ishk Mein" came to Cheema while he was shooting for the upcoming movie "Border 2".

Cheema said he received a call from casting director Mukesh Chhabra, who just told him that he was "doing a film" without even revealing the project.

The only clue was that it was directed by Rai, who had earlier directed hits like "Raanjhanaa", "Tanu Weds Manu" and "Tanu Weds Manu Returns".

"I did a Zoom call with him. And he said, 'We watched 'Black Warrant' and we loved you.' He asked me to read the script and get back to him," he said.

After reading the script, Cheema said he was in two minds about doing the movie.

"I was not sure. I said, 'Sir, I didn't understand. What is this? Where is this part going? Will I be registered?' So, he said he will get me in touch with Himanshu Sharma, the writer of the film and he will explain everything."

"When I spoke to him, he said, 'Param, we need you. We're not calling someone just to stand there - it is a good-guy role... We're not wasting you.'"

The actor is now excited for "Border 2", in which he stars alongside Sunny Deol, Diljit Dosanjh, Varun Dhawan and Ahan Shetty.

"'Border 2' is full of action, emotion and war. And people have not seen me in action till now. But in this film, they are going to see me. And that's a very different part which I've played. So I'm very excited," he said. (PTI)



RANVEER SINGH-STARRER 'DHURANDHAR' STORMS PAST RS 550 CRORE MARK AT WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE

Filmmaker Aditya Dhar's espionage drama "Dhurandhar" has emerged as a global box office juggernaut, raking in ₹ 552.70 crore worldwide in just 10 days, the makers said on Monday.

The Ranveer Singh-led movie, which released in theatres on December 5, earned ₹ 58.20 crore nett in India on its second Sunday (day 10) -- the biggest Sunday ever for a Hindi film -- taking its total India net collection to ₹ 364.60 crore.

The film's India gross stands at ₹ 430.20 crore, while overseas earnings have touched ₹ 122.50 crore.

The film opened with ₹ 218 crore nett in its first week, followed by ₹ 34.70 crore on the second Friday and ₹ 53.70 crore on the second Saturday, culminat-

ing in the landmark second Sunday haul.

In a statement, the makers said the film has enjoyed an "unprecedented, record-shattering run", noting that "every day has been bigger than the previous from the first Monday onward".

They added that "Dhurandhar" has registered the biggest second Friday, second Saturday and second Sunday in Hindi cinema history.

"With packed houses, midnight shows and round-the-clock screenings continuing unabated, there is simply no stopping this monster hit. The Dhurandhar wave has now become a worldwide phenomenon, driven by unprecedented word of mouth and an audience love that refuses to slow down," the makers said.

"Dhurandhar" is a high-octane spy thriller, which is directed and written by Dhar. Featuring Singh in the lead role, the film follows covert intelligence operations set against a backdrop of geopolitical and terror events like Kandahar plane hijack, 2001 Parliament Attack and 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The film, which has led to polarising reactions from many critics and people in India, is mostly set in Lyari town of Karachi, an area known for its history of gang wars and violent turf battles.

Produced by Dhar and Lokesh Dhar under B62 Studios in association with Jyoti Deshpande's Jio Studios, the film also stars Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun, R Madhavan and Rakesh Bedi. (PTI)

Abhishek Bachchan praises nephew Agastya's Ikkis role

Actor Abhishek Bachchan has extended his support and admiration for his nephew Agastya Nanda as he prepares to play a key role in the forthcoming war drama Ikkis. The film, directed by Sriram Raghavan, is based on the life of Indian Army Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, the nation's youngest recipient of the Param Vir Chakra who died at 21 during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War.

Abhishek reposted a behind-the-scenes video from the sets of Ikkis that highlighted Agastya Nanda's reflections on portraying such a significant figure. In the video, Agastya stated, "Arun Khetarpal, once I heard about it, I felt extremely grateful to have the opportunity to play such a famous character in the In-

dian Army." The post accompanying the video emphasised the legacy of Khetarpal.

Abhishek Bachchan reacted to the post on X and wrote, "Agastya, this is a huge honour and responsibility!! A huge hero of our nation. I am sure you have given him the respect, valour and dignity he truly deserves. You are an immensely sincere actor and your dedication to portraying Arun ji is so commendable. May God and the audiences bless you. #KeepFightingTheGoodFight (sic)."

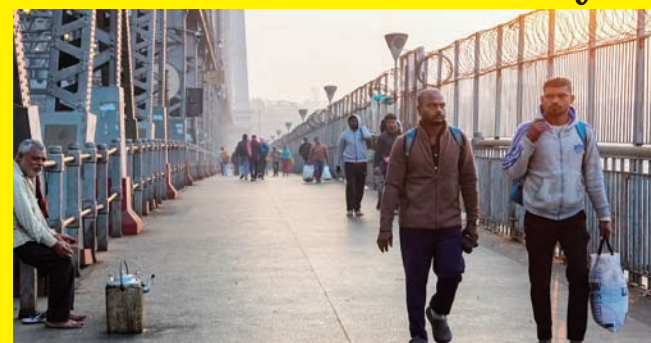
The film Ikkis features an ensemble cast including Dharmendra, Jaideep Ahlawat, Aadyanshi Kapoor, Simar Bhatia, Ekavali Khanna, Shree Bishnoi, Sikandar Kher, and Akashh Alonia. The project is produced by Maddock Films and is scheduled for release

on December 25, 2025. The story aims to bring attention to Arun Khetarpal's bravery and the events of the 1971 conflict, underscoring his enduring legacy.

Fans and members of Agastya Nanda's family, including Abhishek Bachchan, have expressed anticipation for the film's debut.

Previously, during his appearance at Agenda AajTak, Agastya discussed the impact of his role and said, "I am most grateful for being like a fauji (soldier). Being a fauji is one of the best things. You learn such good manners, how to treat a lady, how to eat at a dining table, and how to address your seniors. Even if I didn't do the film, I am very grateful to experience the fauji lifestyle. I had an amazing time." (PTI)

IFFK to screen all 15 films awaiting censor approval, confirms Resul Pookutty



The International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) is in the center of a controversy after 19 films scheduled to screen at the festival did not get clearance from the censor. However, latest development is that the festival has decided to screen all films as scheduled despite the denial of the central government clearance, confirmed Kerala Chalachitra Academy Chairman Resul Pookutty. The festival, which began on December 12, will be concluded on December 19.

IFFK to screen all films "I am happy to let you know, dousing all the fire on the controversies regarding film screening in the IFFK, we are going ahead with all the screenings of the film as scheduled as per the notification issued by the Kerala government and long live cinema," he said in a video message. Sources said the academy took the decision, after the Left government in Kerala decided to defend freedom of expression following delays in obtaining official censor exemptions to screen around 15 films, including some related to the Palestine conflict and Sergei Eisenstein's 100-year-old classic Battleship Potemkin.

Earlier in the day, four of the 19 movies awaiting the Centre's approval for screening were granted official censor exemp-

tions. They said discussions were held with the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to obtain permission to screen these films at the 30th edition of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK).

The movies granted permission for screening are Beef, Eagles of The Republic, Heart of The Wolf and Once Upon A Time In Gaza, the sources said.

"Beef" follows Lati, a young woman from the outskirts of Barcelona, who turns to freestyle rap to confront grief, prejudice, and gender barriers after her father's death, sources said. The remaining 15 films awaiting clearance include Sergei Eisenstein's 100-year-old classic Battleship Potemkin and several films related to the Palestine conflict.

Shashi Tharoor criticises denial to screen films Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and Kerala Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cherian on Tuesday criticised the denial of clearance to the films at the IFFK being held in Thiruvananthapuram from December 12 to 19.

Tharoor termed it as "cinematic illiteracy" and "bureaucratic over-cautiousness" and claimed that he has urged External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Union Minister Vaishnaw to ensure approval for screening of the films. (PTI)

Aamir Khan honours real stars in Sitaaron Ke Sitaare documentary



Actor Aamir Khan introduced the trailer of a new documentary about the real-life backstory of the specially-abled actors from Sitaare Zameen Par. The upcoming film, titled Sitaaron Ke Sitaare, reflects on the life story of the parents of the actors, whom Aamir referred to as the "real stars."

The trailer starts with the voiceover of a parent saying, "In our country people hide specially-abled children, so if you will show it on-screen, then who is going to watch it." This was followed by light-hearted moments showing the parents' love marriage, proposals, and arranged marriages. The promo later shifted to a serious tone when the parents realised their children were specially challenged, and they had to deal with social taboos.

One of the parents told about the problems at school and said, "We were told parents of other kids are having an issue. Don't bring him to school tomorrow onwards." Another parent added, "He said a lot of things that we couldn't understand."

One parent highlighted the social hypocrisy and said, "Society, doctors, teachers...they just make you feel small." Another parent mentioned, "People said 'performing rituals will fix this'."

While showing determination and resilience, a parent said, "You can't give up hope. When you come to a full stop, it's all over. His life is over, your life is over."

The trailer then shifts to the inspiring turning point as a parent shared: "I got a call. 'We are doing a film. It's Aamir Khan Productions'. So then I paused." Another parent enthusiastically said, "He'll be known to everyone. Oh my God! Can you imagine that?" (PTI)

Walton Goggins and 'Fallout' stars on season 2: Really excited to be back



Walton Goggins, Ella Purnell and Aaron Moten, the cast of Prime Video's post-apocalyptic drama "Fallout", are excited about the show's second season, which they say was a joyful cinematic experience despite a complex production.

Based on the popular video game franchise of the same name, "Fallout" is set in a futuristic world, ravaged by nuclear wars, where survivors navigate violence, power struggles and ethical dilemmas.

The second season, which premieres on Prime Video on Wednesday, picks up in the aftermath of the epic finale of the first season and take audiences along for a journey through the wasteland of the Mojave Desert in California to the post-apocalyptic city of New Vegas.

The cast said the creative energy on set remained as charged as ever in the second season.

"We're excited. We're all really excited to be coming back and feeling very lucky to be picked up and doing it again," Purnell, who plays Lucy, a sheltered but resilient young woman forced to confront the harsh realities of the outside world, told PTI.

According to Goggins, who is returning to a popular drama after a much-admired stint in "The White Lotus 3", the enthusiasm is not just limited to the cast, but extends to the entire crew. On "Fallout", Goggins stars as the Ghoul, a complex, centuries-old survivor "700 people that work on this show are fans of this show... Hopefully the fans will consume this right with passion, and excitement. That's how we felt when we were reading these scripts. Every single time we read them, we would call or text each other or see each other on set and go like 'Can you believe that this is happening?'... It is a cinematic extravaganza. It is a global story that doesn't belong to



any one of us," Goggins told PTI.

The actor said it was a complex production, which included shooting episodes out of sequence across multiple storylines.

"It's such a behemoth. It's a very big thing to move this ball forward every single day. But we've never really talked about the fact that we shoot this show out of order. We have eight episodes. They're not all written when we start

the show, but they anticipate things that might come later.

"On any given day, we could be filming three or four or five episodes because we're crossing through the same location, and with multiple directors and multiple storylines, some of which we don't truly understand why or how we got here. But we just all rely on each other to realise the fact that this will make sense. We know exactly what we're doing, even if at times we

don't, and that's exciting, that's art on a very high level."

Moten, who essays the role of Maximus, a young soldier navigating loyalty, ambition and survival within a rigid power structure, credited the crew and detailed sets for keeping the experience fresh.

"It's such a joy to work on this series, it's never boring for us. That's mostly due to the crew, the incredible artisans working on this, the people that even when I have days where I might feel exhausted because we've been running so hard, I'll show up to a set and we have some amazing sets in the show."

"There's this excitement I always have for coming to a show like this where I feel motivated to continually give it everything I have because everyone else around me is doing the same." (PTI)

Man United and Bournemouth draw 4-4 in Premier League thriller

MANCHESTER, Dec 16: Manchester United drew with Bournemouth 4-4 in one of the best games in the Premier League on Monday.

United coach Ruben Amorim said before the match that "playing against Bournemouth is never fun" and they were prophetic words on a night his side had most of the opportunities but still came away with only a point.

The Cherries had beaten United 3-0 in their last two visits to Old Trafford but there seemed little chance of that happening again as the home side took control from the off and was a goal up after 13 minutes.

Diogo Dalot's lofted cross fell to Amad Diallo to nod in almost on the goal line.

United dominated a pulsating first half but Antoine Semenyo brought Bournemouth level after 40 minutes. Poor defending saw United lose the ball on the left flank and Semenyo strode forward and sent an angled shot under Senne Lemmens.

Casemiro restored United's lead on the stroke of halftime when he headed home from a Bruno Fer-



nandes corner. Bournemouth goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic flapped at the Brazilian's effort.

"It was a fun game for everyone at home," Amorim said. "If you look at the game you can think we lost the two points in the second half. I think we lost the two points in the first half. I think we should have more goals, we should have a different result at halftime."

"It was then similar to Nottingham (Forest, 2-2 in November)

where we suffered two goals really fast, but we managed to get back to take the advantage and then we need to close the game out."

After the break, the visitors scored twice in six minutes to take the lead for the first time.

Evaniilson finished superbly after only 37 seconds thanks to a great through ball from Marcus Tavernier, and six minutes later Tavernier curled a left-foot shot around the United wall to put

Bournemouth 3-2 ahead and silence the home crowd.

United rallied and a superb free kick from Fernandes, so often a savior, sailed into the top corner with 13 minutes left and two minutes later Matheus Cunha got the break of the ball inside the box and finished clinically to put the home side back in front at 4-3.

And yet Bournemouth had its own reserves of resilience to come back a third time in the match.

With six minutes remaining Eli Junior Kroupi finished brilliantly with one-touch control and a curling side-footer past Lemmens.

"It is one the fans will definitely enjoy," Tavernier said, "but for us on the pitch it was a bit frustrating. We started the first half very slow but stayed in the game and then in the second came out and did what we had to do.

"The start of the second half was amazing for us on the pitch. We put ourselves in an amazing position in the game. Unfortunately, we conceded such sloppy goals."

The result lifted Manchester United into sixth place. Bournemouth, winless in seven league games, was 13th. (AP)

Play as a unit and keep the 'josh' high: WC winner VJ Philips to Indian hockey team

CHENNAI, Dec 16: World Cup-winning hockey legend Victor J Philips is confident that the current Indian hockey team can end its 50-year wait for the title by keeping the passion high and playing as a unit.

India, the eight-time Olympic champions, won their only World Cup in Kuala Lumpur in 1975 defeating Pakistan 2-1 with Surjit Singh Randhawa and Ashok Kumar netting the goals.

Right winger Philips, a key member of the title-winning team led by Ajitpal Singh, still remembers how every player played with the common passion for victory. "The Ajitpal Singh-led 1975 team was unique. The 16 players included Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians, and they all played as a family...as a unit for the country. The only goal was to win the title for the country," Philips, 75, told PTI Bhasha.

"Gurcharan Singh Bodhi was the coach, and Balbir Singh Sr., a three-time Olympic gold medalist, was the team manager. We were just following in their footsteps to bring glory. Despite losing to Argentina by one goal, our enthusiasm remained intact, and we were determined to win the final," said Philips, the younger brother of triple Olympic medalist VJ Peter.

"(On that day) we couldn't have been satisfied with anything less than victory. Even though we were friends with the Pakistani players off the field, we never let that come in our way on the field," he said.

Recalling the fervour of the Indian hockey fans, Philips said every countryman was praying for the team's win. "At that time, the entire country was praying for us, and we wanted to win for our countrymen. You'll be amazed with the passion and enthusiasm with which we played. We were like ambassadors of our country...we gave everything we had on the field to see the Indian flag fly high," said the bronze medalist at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

On what would be his advice to the Indian team for the World Cup, to be held in the Netherlands and Belgium in August next year, he said it is important to play as a unit and not as individuals.

"My advice is to play as a team and not as individuals...and not let your 'josh' (enthusiasm) wane. Nowadays, I see players don't talk to one another on the field, but this is very important. During our time, we used to abuse profusely if the ball slipped out of our hands," he said with a smile. He also said the team going to the World Cup should watch the footage of the 1975 matches to draw inspiration. "When our Tri-colour was hoisted during the award ceremony, we got goosebumps. That footage should be shown to every player going to the World Cup to demonstrate how we played and won. Every player should have the passion to win, and nothing is impossible," said Philips.

"As an Olympian and Arjuna Awardee, I would urge everyone to be prepared to give their all on the field for their country; only then will they win medals."

He said that it is important to formulate a strategy well in advance, and not just when the tournament is round the corner.

"We must understand what we need to do in the next World Cup or the next Olympics. If we don't formulate a strategy now, nothing will be achieved. This is a crucial time, where we must understand the mistakes we are making and correct them during practice," said the legendary player, who captained India in the 1978 World Cup. Describing the 100-year journey of Indian hockey as golden, he said, "I played from 1970 to 1986, and it was a wonderful journey. We have contributed to Indian hockey and there have been many great players before us too," he said. "We should win the World Cup and the Olympics in the future so that the next century can also be glorious," he added. (PTI)

WTL 2025: A chance for Indian tennis stars to learn closely from global icons

BENGALURU, Dec 16: The Indian tennis fraternity will get a golden chance to watch and learn up-close from an array of top stars including the former US Open champion Daniil Medvedev when the World Tennis League begins here on Wednesday.

The Indian names in the fourth edition of the four-day event, which is being played on these shores for the first time, are no less experienced on the circuit themselves.

But being part of the squad and getting a chance to exchange notes with some high-achievers will certainly help the tour regulars like Sumit Nagal, D Suresh, Ankita Raina and Sahaja Yamalappalli to add a new dimension to their game.

The younger names such as Shrivalli Bhamidipaty and Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi too will be eager to use the tournament as a study time to sharpen their skills ahead of the imminent new season.

Apart from the former world No 1 and current No 13 Medvedev, the Indian players are clubbed with world No 23



Denis Shapovalov and No 67 Gael Monfils.

Another notable name in the competition is of the temperamental Nick Kyrgios, who is currently ranked 652 in the ATP list.

But that's largely because he missed major parts of 2023 and 2024 due to an injury and a subsequent surgery, and his appearances this year too have been very limited.

It will be interesting to see how his ravaged body stands up to the challenge, particularly when he has expressed his desire to play in the Australian Open 2026, his home Grand Slam.

If the Aussie can revive some of his

sublime shot-making skills, then it will be a treat for fans here.

Among the women's names, world No 14 Elina Svitolina, No 25 Paula Badosa, a regular in Grand Slams, and No 26 Marta Kostyuk, who reached the round 4 of this year's US Open, will lead the show.

Teams and format
There will be four teams in the competition — Hawks, Falcons, Kites and Eagles, containing two men and two women players each.

The tournament will begin with a match between Hawks and Kites followed by the contest between Eagles and Falcons.

It will be played in the round robin format and each tie consists of four sets. The teams will get one point for each game they win in a tie.

If the team that wins the fourth set is trailing, the match will go to overtime.

If the overall game score is equal after four sets, a first to 10 super shootout tie-break will be played.

The top two teams will advance to the final on Saturday. (PTI)

Venkatesh Iyer's half-ton in vain as Punjab beat Madhya Pradesh

AMBI (PUNE), Dec 16: Out-of-favour India all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer made an impactful half-century for Madhya Pradesh but couldn't stop Punjab from winning the inconsequential Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Super League Group A tie by two wickets here on Tuesday. Interestingly, Venkatesh's knock came hours before he was set to go under the hammer at the mini IPL auction in Abu Dhabi.

With Venkatesh in full flow at the top, the soon-to-be 31 scored a 43-ball 70 studded with eight boundaries and two sixes as Madhya Pradesh scored a stiff 225 for 8.

However, young Harnoor Singh made quite a statement with his 36-ball 64 as he gave Punjab the momentum that led them to a thrilling win in 19.1 overs.

Billed as an all-rounder, Venkatesh was only given one over by his skipper Rajat Patidar in which he gave away 12 runs.

This was the first win for both the sides in three games, leaving them out of contention for a place in the final from Group A.

Venkatesh's half-century, which came just a couple of hours before the IPL mini-auction in Abu Dhabi, set the platform for the big total after their innings faltered with opener Harsh Gawli (7), Harpreet Singh (27) and

skipper Rajat Patidar (20) going cheaply.

At 93 for 3, a 200-plus scored looked a far cry but Venkatesh pulled out all stop to give a big push to the scoreboard.

Venkatesh's dismissal in the 17th over came after he had stitched together a 63-run stand with Aniket Verma (31) for the fifth wicket.

Late-order batters Mangesh Yadav (28 off 12 balls) and Tripuresh Singh (11 off 4) then took the total past 200.

Punjab's innings too faltered with skipper Prabhshirran Singh (9) going early but Harnoor and one-down batter Anmolpreet Singh (38 off 14 balls) steadied the ship after which Salil Arora (50 off 29 balls) played an innings littered with five sixes to take his team closer to the target.

Ramandeep Singh then completed the formalities with a well-made unbeaten 35.

Brief scores:
Madhya Pradesh 225 for 8 in 20 overs (Venkatesh Iyer 70; Gurnoor Brar 3/45, Ramandeep Singh 2/23).

Punjab 226 for 8 in 19.1 overs (Harnoor Singh 64, Anmolpreet Singh 38, Salil Arora 50; Shivam Shukla 3/39, Mangesh Yadav 2/38). (PTI)

Abhigyan Kundu hits first-ever double ton in Youth ODIs

DUBAI, Dec 16: Wicketkeeper-batter Abhigyan Kundu on Tuesday created history with first-ever double ton in Youth ODIs for India, scoring an unbeaten against Malaysia in the U-19 Asia Cup match here.

The 17-year-old Kundu thus recorded only the second instance of a double century in Youth ODIs after South Africa's Jorich Van Schaalkwyk, who had scored 215 off 153 balls against Zimbabwe earlier this year in Harare.

Batting at No 5, the left-handed Kundu hit an overall 19 fours and seven sixes to smash 209 not out off only 125 balls.

His knock powered India U-19 to a huge 408 for seven batting first.

Earlier in the same tournament, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi had scored a 95-ball 171 against the UAE, which is overall the ninth highest individual score in the format. (PTI)

Sticking to basics, internal competition has helped SA become competitive again: Nortje



LUCKNOW, Dec 16: Sticking to the basics and drawing from a larger talent pool, fighting for limited spots in the team has led to South Africa's resurgence across formats in the past couple years, according to pacer Anrich Nortje.

Buoyed by historic achievements, including their World Test Championship title and a maiden appearance in the T20 World Cup final last year, the Proteas have re-established themselves as one of world cricket's leading forces.

South Africa have carried forward the resurgence in the tour of India as they defeated the hosts 2-0 in the Test series, their first win in the country in 25 years.

"The team's been doing unbelievably well. The way they've locked up, there's some fresh faces, there's some old faces, guys have been on the fringes for a while, getting to play more cricket, more consistently," Nortje said on the eve of the fourth T20I against India here on Tuesday.

Although he has not been part of the Test setup recently, Nortje said the clarity of approach across teams stood out.

"I haven't been with the Test team for a while but just coming in and seeing how basic they keep it, trying to be as basic as possible let the moment play out."

The fast bowler also attributed South Africa's white-ball success to clearly defined roles and internal competition.

"I can only speak for the white ball team, but on the outside it just

looks like the guys are doing really well, getting along very well, and everyone knows their role in the team, and I think that's very important," Nortje said.

"There's a lot of competition as well, which creates opportunity and also creates a little bit of pressure for guys in the team, which is good, which is what you want."

"I think that's something that's built up over the last year or two as well, and just puts guys under pressure, and a lot of guys have to fight for a spot, which is great, which is what you want."

Nortje had been sidelined for an extended period due to a recurrence of a stress fracture but returned to the South African side for the ongoing T20I series, where he has gone wicketless in the two matches he has featured in so far.

"It's nice to be back, nice to be back in the Proteas shirt again, really missed it. Sort of happy with the progress, there's still a lot of cricket to play. We go back into some SA20 as well, which is quite a few games back to back."

The express pacer said he was focused on gradual improvement rather than instant returns as he continues his comeback.

"So, just trying to make progress on every game, trying to improve as much as I can, but just to be realistic as well. So far, I'm really happy with the progress, where I've come to, and just trying to build on whatever I can and whatever I'm working on, going forward into the next month or two." (PTI)

Pak Test skipper Masood declines PCB's offer to become 'players affairs' consultant

KARACHI, Dec 16: Pakistan Test skipper Shan Masood has declined the PCB's offer to take up the post of "Consultant International and Players Affairs", saying he will not be able to do justice to it while playing for the country.

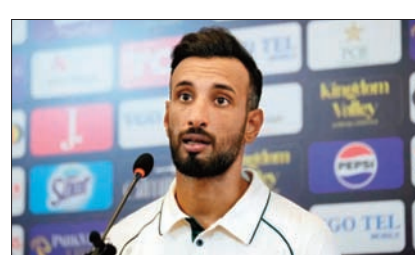
Last month, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had offered Masood the post with the assurance that he would be given a permanent designation of director after his retirement from cricket.

This is the first time a serving Test captain was offered the job by the PCB.

The idea was that Masood, with his education and management background, was the perfect fit for handling both the responsibilities.

A source close to the player said that after giving it much thought, Masood had conveyed to PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi that he wouldn't be able to do justice to both the responsibilities.

"Shan pointed out that Pakistan had a tight Test schedule in 2026 and 2027 leading up to the ICC World Test Championship, and he



wanted to do his best and focus on helping the team reach the final," the source said.

He said Masood had requested Naqvi to allow him to focus on his cricket responsibilities, and he would be open to working with the PCB after he steps down from cricket.

The source said that the PCB had put the offer on hold and let the existing staff handle the affairs.

"In all likelihood Usman Wahla, who was suspended during the Asia Cup as Director International Cricket Affairs and restored, and then given responsibilities in the Pakistan Super League secretariat, will look after the department until a final decision is made." (PTI)

US Kids Indian Championship to offer cash prizes, global pathway

GURUGRAM, Dec 16: Around 100 young golfers will tee off on Wednesday at the fifth edition of the U.S. Kids Golf Indian Championships, which will, for the first time, offer prize money in accordance with rules applicable to amateurs.

Each of the 13 categories will carry a prize which will be distributed up to the fifth place, in addition to a special 'Skills contest' to be held over two days during the three-day event at the Jack Nicklaus-designed Classic Golf & Country Club in Manesar.

The U.S. Kids Golf Indian Championship 2025, a WAGR-recognized event, will also help players aim for priority status, based on scores, to qualify for the US Kids Golf European in Scotland in May 2026 and US Kids Teen and World Championships in Pinehurst, United States in July-August 2026.

The winners in each age category will receive ₹25,000 without any deductions and Rs. 10,000 goes to the runner-up. The third, fourth and fifth place finishers will receive ₹5,000 each. Additionally there will be cash prizes in the Skills contest.

Some of the well-known names will include Arshvart Srivastava, Prince Bainsla, Bhavesh Nirwan in Boys 15-18; Vidit Aggarwal in Boys 13-14; Adit Veeramachaneni, Sohrab Talwar, Siddhant Sharma in in Boys 12; Drona Singh Dhull in Boys 11 and Vedaansh Jain in Boys 10.

Pocket dynamos Nihal Cheema and Zowra Sikand will compete in the Category Boys 8 and Naaysha S Sinha in Girls 8.

Among girls, Aahana Srivastava and Aadya Kaushal 9-10; Aanya Dandriyal in Girls 11-12; Shambhavi Chaturvedi, Rabab Kahlon and Naina Kapoor in Girls 13-14, and Kriti Parekh in 15-18 are some of the past winners in local events who will compete.

The golfers will come from all over Asia and include players from Singapore, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and hosts India.

They will compete in age categories ranging from Under-7 to Under 18 years and will play on a course, which has been adjusted for ages, as per US Kids Golf charter. (PTI)

Didn't have sleepless nights as player but India-NZ game in Women's WC was different: Coach Muzumdar

MUMBAI, Dec 16: India women's team head coach Amol Muzumdar has said he never had a sleepless night during his playing days but the must-win Women's ODI World Cup match against New Zealand did put him under pressure and unable to take a decent nap in the lead-up to the contest.

With three defeats on the trot, India faced a premature exit in their home World Cup but they defeated the White Ferns by 53 runs via DLS Method to secure the last semifinal berth. India women then went on to defeat seven-time champions Australia in the semifinals and South Africa in the final to lift their maiden World Cup recently.

"I didn't have a sleepless night before my (first-class) debut for Mumbai because Kadu bhai (former India player Karsan Ghavri) was my manager. I knew he would take care of it," Muzumdar recalled during a felicitation event at the Bombay Gymkhana on Monday.

Muzumdar said Jemimah Rodrigues' unbeaten 127 in semifinal was the turning point, which gave India the confidence to lift the prestigious trophy. "You can say so (beating Australia was the turning point)," he said.

"Before the New Zealand game, there were a couple of sleepless nights because that was the must-win game. We always believed that if we have to win the World Cup, we'll have to beat Australia somewhere down the line, either in the semifinal or in the final."

"We were all geared up for that game but Jemimah's knock was phenomenal...a knock for the ages, I guess," he added.

Muzumdar said the World Cup-winning moment still felt unreal, and added that it would have changed the lives of many in the team. "Lifting the World Cup has been a surreal moment and it has changed the lives of a lot of cricketers in India, including me. I don't



know about the film part. I really don't know where the parallels came from," said Muzumdar in response to a query if a Chak De-style movie was in the pipeline.

He said it was captain Harmanpreet Kaur's idea to give the World Cup trophy to former India players after the win.

"It was just a natural thing for

Harmanpreet to do that, and when she saw Jhulan Goswami...she just gave the World Cup in her hands and also Mithali (Raj) and Anjum Chopra was there, Reema Malhotra was there," he said.

"It's not just the 15 players who are playing. It's also important for the people or players who have laid the path for these 15 players to do

the honours," he said.

Muzumdar remembered the legendary Ramakant Achrekar, also his former coach, while discussing technology in coaching.

"I remember Achrekar sir every day, I think. He was the epitome...he had a different style of doing it (coaching)."

"Today, there is the laptop. That time, maybe a small chit and he used to scribble something. That's the only difference. But he did...things. I think he was ahead of his time."

He said no amount of coaching and technology can beat instinct and enthusiasm in a sport like cricket.

"There's data, there's analysis, there are statistics available. There are 195 parameters that you can tap into each day."

"I've realised that, as a player you don't need that many things. You just need to pick small little snippets out of it and then make a story," he said. (PTI)

KKR SPLURGE ON GREEN AND PATHIRANA

Uncapped Prashant Veer goes to CSK for ₹ 14.20 cr

ABU DHABI, Dec 16: Kolkata Knight Riders splurged a record-breaking ₹ 25.20 to land top Australian all-rounder Cameron Green and ₹ 18 crore to acquire the services of Sri Lankan pacer Matheesha Pathirana in the Indian Premier League players' auction here on Tuesday.

Uncapped Indian players were also a big hit with Uttar Pradesh's 20-year-old left-arm spinner Prashant Veer going to Chennai Super Kings for ₹ 14.20 crore. He became the highest paid uncapped player in the history of IPL auction after coming in at a base price of ₹ 30 lakh.

Jammu and Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi Dar also attracted a hefty sum of ₹ 8.40 crore from Delhi Capitals to be among the top gainers in the mini auction. Dar's base price was also ₹ 30 lakh.

Indian stars Prithvi Shaw and Sarfaraz Khan, however, went unsold in the auction despite their good run of form with the bat.

Green surpassed compatriot Mitchell Starc (₹ 24.75 crore) to become the most expensive overseas player at an IPL auction. This was after Kolkata Knight Riders and Chennai Super Kings were involved in an intense bidding war for him before the latter emerged winner.



KKR also went after Venkatesh Iyer before pulling out of the race against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who got the India all-rounder for ₹ 7 crore.

The three-time champions then entered the fray to buy Pathirana after Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants withdrew following an intense bidding war between the two franchises.

Entering the auction at a base

price of ₹ 2 crore, Pathirana became the most expensive Sri Lankan sold in an IPL auction.

As far as Green is concerned, his salary for the season would still be ₹ 18 crore (USD 1.9 million) as the rest of the amount will go towards the BCCI's player development programme as per the rules of the auction for foreign players. Pathirana will get the full amount as it falls within the salary cap.

Green, who previously turned up for Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, has so far played 29 matches in the IPL to aggregate 707 runs and take 16 wickets.

Shaw, however, went unsold despite his fine run of form in the domestic circuit lately, and so was the case with Sarfaraz, who smashed a 22-ball 73 in a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match for Mumbai on Tuesday.

Big-hitting South African batter David Miller was bought by Delhi Capitals for his base price of ₹ 2 crore, but New Zealand swash-buckler Devon Conway, whose base price was also ₹ 2 crore, went unsold in the auction.

Seasoned South African opener Quinton de Kock returned to his old base Mumbai Indians for a base price of ₹ 1 crore.

Spencer Johnson remained unsold, while Anrich Nortje, who came with a base price of ₹ 2 crore, was enlisted by LSG, who opened the bidding for the South Africa pacer.

A total of 359 players -- 246 Indians and 113 overseas players -- are part of the mini auction pool with the 10 franchises bidding to fill up a maximum of 77 slots, including 31 reserved for foreign players. (PTI)

Cummins, Lyon back but no place for Khawaja in Australia's team for the 3rd Ashes test



ADELAIDE, Dec 16: Veteran Usman Khawaja has missed selection to Australia's team for the third Ashes test against England with Travis Head kept at the top of the batting lineup with Jake Weatherald.

Just two days away from his 39th birthday, Khawaja was a notable omission Tuesday from Australia's XI for the test beginning Wednesday at Adelaide Oval.

Australia leads the five-test series 2-0 and can retain the Ashes with a win or draw in Adelaide. England named its team Monday.

Captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon will return to the bowling attack at the expense of

Brendan Doggett and Michael Neser, while the top seven is unchanged.

That means Josh Inglis will remain in the side at No. 7, while Khawaja was not included after missing the Brisbane test with back spasms.

Khawaja had enjoyed one of the great late-career resurgences since his recall to the test team at the start of 2022, starring at the top of the order. He averaged 58.7 in his first two years back in the side, but has now passed 50 just twice in his past 27 test innings.

Cummins said he doesn't feel Khawaja is finished as a test player.

"The selectors have been quite adamant about picking a side each week," Cummins said. "It doesn't necessarily mean it's got to be exactly the same team as the previous week. We do that with bowlers."

"One of Uzzy's great strengths is he's scored runs at the top. He's scored runs in the middle. So absolutely, I can see a path back at some point, if needed."

Steve Smith was the first in the nets to bat on Tuesday after missing Monday's session due to an unspecified illness. Smith captained Australia in the first two test victories due to Cummins' injury absence.

Cummins, playing his first test since mid-July in the West Indies, predicted Australia will be even better in the Adelaide test as it tries to wrap up the Ashes.

"It feels like everything has come together and we're not just hanging on until the end of the series, which sometimes you are," Cummins said Tuesday. "We're actually peaking and hopefully have heaps of resources available."

Lineups:
Australia: Jake Weatherald, Travis Head, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith (captain), Cameron Green, Alex Carey, Josh Inglis, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland.
England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith, Will Jacks, Josh Tongue, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer. (AP)

India would emerge as trustworthy host in 2030 CWG: Coal Minister speaks on sports ministry



NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Out of his comfort zone but not particularly out of depth, Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy listed the government's achievements in the Sports Ministry as part of a cross-ministerial sensitisation programme, expressing confidence that India would be a "trustworthy" host for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

Reddy spoke at length about the various government initiatives of the past decade and how they have had a "transformative impact" on India's sporting landscape.

He also highlighted the "positive role" that Gen Z is playing in nation-building to "support the vision and leadership" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"You must be wondering, how come the Coal Minister is holding a briefing for the Sports Ministry. It is the government's approach to have ministries learn about what's happening in other departments."

"It is an attempt to ensure there is awareness across ministries," Reddy said explaining the context of the morning gathering with

some unfamiliar media faces who cover the Sports ministry, which is currently helmed by Mansukh Mandaviya.

The 65-year-old Reddy then listed in great detail, the impact of initiatives such as the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), the Khelo India Scheme, the ground-breaking National Sports Governance Act and also the ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games in Ahmedabad, which has already bagged the 2030 CWG rights.

"Since 2015, 20 different cities have

played host to international sporting events in the country. Earlier, such events were limited to two or three major centres," Reddy said without getting into specifics.

"India will emerge as a trustworthy host in the 2030 Commonwealth Games," asserted the Lok Sabha representative from Telangana's Secunderabad.

"In our Olympic bid too, Bharat is moving forward in the bid process. We are giving our best efforts to bring the Games to India and it will take Indian sports to new

heights," he added.

During the briefing he was flanked by Joint Secretary (Sports) R Vineel Krishna and Joint Secretary (Youth Affairs) Nitesh Kumar Mishra, occasionally supplementing his assertions with their inputs, especially on CWG. When a question on whether the 2030 CWG would be expanded beyond Ahmedabad, Reddy was a tad evasive and reminded everyone what happened during the 2010 edition in Delhi, which was marred by allegations of corruption. (PTI)



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Cachar	S.M.Dev Civil Hospital, Silchar	Kamrup Metropolitan	District Hospital, Sonapur
Charaideo	District Civil Hospital, Sonari	Karbi Anglong	Diphu Medical College & Hospital
Chirang	JSB Civil Hospital, Kajalgaon	Kokrajhar	Kokrajhar Medical College & Hospital
Darrang	Mangaldai Civil Hospital	Lakhimpur	Lakhimpur Medical College & Hospital
Dhemaji	Dhemaji Civil Hospital	Majuli	Sri Sri Pitambardev Goswami District Hospital, Majuli
Dhubri	Dhubri Medical College & Hospital	Morigaon	Morigaon Civil Hospital
Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh State Dispensary & Urban Health Centre	Nagaon	Bhogeswari Phukanani Civil Hospital, Nagaon
Dima Hasao	Haflong Civil Hospital	Nalbari	Swahid Mukunda Kakati Civil Hospital, Nalbari
Goalpara	Goalpara Civil Hospital	Sivasagar	Sivasagar Civil Hospital
Golaghat	Swahid Kushal Konwar Civil Hospital, Golaghat	Sonitpur	Kanaklata Civil Hospital, Tezpur
		South Salmara	Hatsingimari SDC Hospital
		Sribhumi	Karimganj Civil Hospital
		Tinsukia	Tinsukia Civil Hospital
		Udalguri	Udalguri Civil Hospital
		West Karbi Anglong	Hamren SDC Hospital



108 for Ambulance Service

104 for Health Related Information

(NHM/D/2025-26/79)