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● India announces USD 450 mn package
● Major Russian drone and missile attack on Ukraine kills at least 3 people and cuts power

8 NATION
● Part-time politician Rahul defames constitutional bodies, disrespects country abroad: Nitin Nabin
● BJP to work unitedly for better results than 2017 in UP polls: State party chief

Kheroni continues to burn; fresh violence erupts

Police resort to lathicharge, fire tear gas shells ● Situation in Karbi Anglong very sensitive: CM ● Protestors call off stir after talks with Ranoj Pegu

DIPHU/GUWAHATI, Dec 23: Fresh violence erupted in Assam's trouble-torn Karbi Anglong district on Tuesday with at least eight people injured as two groups of protestors clashed and the police resorted to lathicharge and firing of tear-gas shells to disperse them, officials said.

Despite prohibitory orders in force, a large number of people, including women and children whose shops were burnt by a mob on Monday, came out to protest against the violence, while the agitators demanding eviction of encroachers from the tribal belt also gathered in the Kheroni market area.

Both the groups were agitated, and the security forces deployed in the area tried to pacify them, but suddenly stone pelting began from both sides, injuring several protestors, police personnel and media



persons covering the incident, a senior police officer said. As the situation spiralled out of control, the police resorted to lathi charge and then fired tear gas shells to disperse both groups of protesters, he said.

The situation is "tense" in the area, and additional forces have been rushed to the spot.

The protestors had earlier torched two motorcycles in the Kheroni area. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the "situation in Karbi Anglong was very sensitive".

"Senior minister Ranoj Pegu is present in the district. I believe that the matter will be resolved soon," Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme.

Earlier on Tuesday, protestors called off their hunger strike demanding eviction of encroachers from tribal belt areas following talks with Pegu.

The agitators, belonging to several political and social organisations, have been on a hunger strike for the last 15 days, demanding the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Internet services suspended in two dists

GUWAHATI, Dec 23: The Assam government on Tuesday temporarily suspended internet services in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, following fresh violence during clashes between two groups over the issue of eviction, officials said.

At least eight people were injured, as the two groups of protesters clashed, and the police resorted to lathicharge and fired tear-gas shells to disperse them.

In an official order, the Home and Political Department said in the interest of maintaining greater public peace and tranquility, and to prevent any deteriora-

tion of the present situation, internet services have been temporarily suspended.

The suspension will remain in force until further orders. "It is, however, clarified that voice calls and broadband connectivity based on fixed telephone lines shall remain functional during this period," the order stated.

The district magistrates of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts received reports regarding a serious law and order situation, and there is serious apprehension (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM distributes seed capital to over 43,000 SHG women in Upper Assam

HT Bureau DIBRUGARH, Dec 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday distributed seed capital cheques of ₹10,000 each to more than 43,000 women Self-Help Group (SHG) members in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts under the Chief Minister's Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan, aimed at economic empowerment of women.

At public meetings held at the Dinjoy Tea Garden playground in Chabua and the Janamukh playground in Tinsukia, the chief minister handed over cheques to

21,198 women of the Chabua-Lahowal Assembly Constituency in Dibrugarh district and 22,069 women of the Makum Assembly Constituency in Tinsukia district.

Of the beneficiaries in Chabua-Lahowal, 20,575 were from rural areas and 623 from urban areas, while in Makum, 20,900 beneficiaries were rural and 1,169 urban.

Addressing the gatherings, Sarma said the state government has so far distributed the first instalment of ₹10,000 each to around 15 lakh enterprising women across 55 Assembly constituencies, with

the remaining beneficiaries to receive the amount soon.

He said feedback indicated that most women had productively utilised the funds to take up income-generating activities.

The chief minister said the seed capital support is only the beginning of the scheme, which will continue until every beneficiary becomes a "Lakshpati Baideo".

He noted that over eight lakh women in Assam have already achieved lakshpati status through bank loans and SHG-linked activities, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Protests held near Bangladeshi missions in multiple cities over lynching of Hindu man

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Dec 23: Protests erupted on Tuesday in several parts of the country, including near the Bangladesh high commission in Delhi and its missions in other cities, against the lynching of a Hindu worker in the strife-torn neighbouring country.

Holding saffron flags and shouting slogans, the protesters belonging to right-wing outfits demanded strong diplomatic steps by India to ensure the safety of Hindus living in Bangladesh.

On December 18, Dipu Chandra Das, a 25-year-old garment factory worker, was lynched by a mob and his body set on fire over blasphemy in Baluka in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

The demonstrations were held in multiple cities including Kolkata, Mumbai and Jammu. Protesters also burnt effigies and photos of Muhammad Yunus, the chief advisor of the interim government in Bangladesh.

In the national capital, the epicentre of the protests, hundreds of supporters of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal broke through barricades and clashed with police near the fortified Bangladesh high Commission.

A sea of banners and placards bobbed in the air, reading denunciatory messages against the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

2.5 acres of encroached railway land cleared in Kokrajhar

Eviction drive paves way for station modernisation under Amrit Bharat Scheme

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Dec 23:

A major eviction drive was carried out on Tuesday at Kokrajhar Railway Station to remove illegal encroachments on railway land, as part of large-scale infrastructure development and railway modernisation in the Bodoland Territorial Council region and Lower Assam.

Official sources said several important railway stations across the BTC area and Lower Assam are set to be upgraded under central government initiatives.

Plans are also underway to introduce train services connecting Kokrajhar with neighbouring Bhutan, a move expected to enhance regional connectivity, trade and tourism.

Renovation and construction work at Kokrajhar Railway Station is currently progressing round the clock under the



Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, aimed at improving passenger amenities and overall infrastructure.

To facilitate smooth execution of the project, railway authorities initiated the eviction drive to clear encroached land around the station premises.

Beginning early in the morning, a joint team comprising Kokrajhar Police, the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and

Assam will become part of B'desh if number of immigrants rise by another 10 pc: CM

CHABUA, Dec 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that Assam will "automatically be included" in Bangladesh if the number of people from the neighbouring country residing in the northeastern state increased by another 10 per cent. Sarma, speaking to reporters after an official event here, said he has been raising this issue for the last five years.

"In Assam, 40 per cent of the population are Bangladeshi-origin people. If it increases 10 per cent more, we will automatically be included," he said when asked on a reported comment by a leader in Bangladesh about merging the northeast with the neighbouring nation. "That is why I have been shouting (about the issue) for the last five years," he added.

Earlier this month, Bangladesh's newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP) leader Hasnat Abdullah reportedly said 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.

Abdullah 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)

BJP national executive president Nitin Nabin to attend Assam State Executive Meet

Two-day meeting at Kalakshetra to chart roadmap for 2026 Assembly polls



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 23:

Newly elected National Executive President of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Nitin Nabin, will arrive in Assam on December 26 on a two-day visit to participate in the BJP Assam Pradesh State Executive Meeting to be held on December 26 and 27 at Kalakshetra Auditorium here.

The State Executive Meeting will deliberate on the prevailing political situation in Assam, review organisational matters and hold detailed discussions on electoral strategy and policy, laying down the roadmap for the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections.

This was stated by Manoj Baruah, Vice-President of BJP

Assam Pradesh, in a press statement issued on Monday.

The meeting will be attended by senior party leaders, including BL Santosh, BJP Assam Election in-charge and National vice-president Bajjayant Jay Panda, co-in-charge Sunil Sharma, BJP North East coordinator Sambit Patra, state in-charge Harish Dwivedi, National secretary Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, along with Rituraj Sharma, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Pabitra Margherita.

The meeting will feature a special address by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and will be presided over by BJP Assam Pradesh President Dilip Saikia.

All Members of Parliament and the Legislative Assembly, state office-bearers, executive and council members, along with nearly 800 party karyakartas, are expected to attend. The State Executive Meeting will begin at 2.30 pm on December 26 and conclude at 2.30 pm on December 27.

Meetings of the State Election Management Committee and the Manifesto Drafting Committee will also be held on December 27, followed by a BJP Assam Pradesh Core Committee meeting in the presence (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Leaders appeal for peace after arson attack on KAAC CEM's ancestral home

HT Correspondent DONGKAMUKAM, Dec 23:

Prominent political leaders and traditional representatives from Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong have come together to issue a strong appeal for peace and restraint following a violent escalation that led to the burning down of the ancestral residence of Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

The incident has left the region in a state of tension, with security stepped up across sensitive areas as local leaders and the administration work to prevent any further flare-up.

The arson took place amid escalating protests over the eviction of settlers from Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands in the Kheroni area of West Karbi Anglong.

According to reports, tensions sharply intensified after hunger strikers at the Phelangi protest site were picked up by authorities in the early hours of Monday, December 22.

The timing of the police action triggered widespread resentment, as the protesters were reportedly scheduled to hold formal talks with the authorities later the same day.

The perceived breakdown of trust and dialogue is believed to have fuelled anger among sections of the protesters, culminating in the attack on the CEM's ancestral property at Artukekang.

In an effort to calm the situation, an emergency peace meeting was convened at the Artukekang LP School playground, where senior political figures and traditional leaders addressed a large gathering of local residents.

Those present included Amar Sing Tisso, Member of Parliament

from the No 3 ST Autonomous Parliamentary Constituency; Darsing Ronghang, MLA from Howraghat; and Longsing Ronghang, the traditional Karbi King.

Addressing the gathering, MP Amar Sing Tisso strongly condemned the act of arson, describing it as "an act of madness" that could derail years of peace-building efforts in the region.

He recalled the role played by CEM Tuliram Ronghang in stabilising Karbi Anglong in the past, particularly his contribution to bringing six armed organisations into the mainstream.

Emphasising the need for unity, Tisso said violence only hampers development and appealed to the government, civil society organisations and community leaders to work collectively to maintain peace and harmony.

Other speakers also echoed similar sentiments, urging people not

to allow anger and rumours to deepen divisions, and stressed that all grievances related to land and eviction issues should be resolved through dialogue and constitutional means.

As of Tuesday, the overall situation in West Karbi Anglong remained tense but largely under control. While private vehicles have started returning to the roads, a sense of caution continues to prevail.

Most shops, business establishments and commercial centres remain closed as residents remain wary in the aftermath of the violence.

The administration said security forces are maintaining a close watch on the situation and that efforts are underway to create a conducive atmosphere for the resumption of dialogue on the VGR (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Countdown for launch of ISRO's BlueBird Block-2 Mission begins LVM3-M6 is set to launch the BlueBird Block-2 spacecraft today

SRIHARIKOTA (ANDHRA PRADESH), Dec 23: The 24-hour countdown for the launch of LVM3-M6 rocket, which will carry a new generation US communication satellite, commenced here on Tuesday, ISRO said.

In a dedicated commercial mission, ISRO is scheduled to launch the BlueBird Block-2 spacecraft on board its heavy lift launch vehicle LVM3-M6 at 8.54 am from the second launch pad at this spaceport on Wednesday.

Weighing 6,100 kg, the communication satellite would be the heaviest payload to be placed into the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in LVM3 launch history, the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said.

The previous heaviest was the



LVM3-M5 Communication Satellite 03, weighing about 4,400 kg that was successfully launched by ISRO on November 2 in the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO). Wednesday's mission is being

undertaken as part of the commercial agreement signed between NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) and US-based AST SpaceMobile (AST and Science, LLC). NewSpace India Ltd is the commercial arm of ISRO.

In an update on Tuesday, ISRO said, "LVM3-M6 is set to launch the BlueBird Block-2 spacecraft tomorrow from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. Final countdown begins. Launch on December 24, 2025 at 8.54 am IST."

Ahead of the launch, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan offered prayers at the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Tirumala on December 22.

The historic mission would deploy (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bangladesh summons Indian envoy over security concerns for its missions

DHAKA, Dec 23: Bangladesh Foreign Ministry on Tuesday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma to convey its "grave concern" over the security of its missions in India.

Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam summoned the Indian envoy to the Foreign Office.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said that Verma was conveyed Dhaka's "grave concern over the regrettable incidents" outside the perimeter of the Bangladesh High Commission and residence in New Delhi on December 20, 2025, and the "acts of vandalism at" its Visa Centre in Siliguri on December 22 by "different extremist elements."

"Bangladesh also expressed deep concern over violent protests staged outside the premises of the different Diplomatic Missions of Bangladesh in India," the statement said.

The statement said Bangladesh

condemns such acts against diplomatic establishments, "which not only endanger the safety of diplomatic personnel but also undermine the principles of mutual respect and values of peace and tolerance."

It urged India to conduct a thorough investigation into the incidents and take all necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such acts and to ensure the safety and security of Bangladesh's diplomatic missions and related facilities in the country.

The Indian envoy was summoned a day after Bangladesh suspended visa and consular services in New Delhi, Siliguri and Agartala. Foreign ministry officials said the suspension would remain in effect until further notice.

It was the second time in the past 10 days that Verma was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A statement issued by the Foreign

Ministry said that India's cooperation was sought to prevent the attackers who assaulted Inquilab Moncho convener Sharif Osman Hadi from fleeing to India, the local media reported.

Bangladesh requested that if the accused manages to enter Indian territory, they be immediately arrested and extradited to Bangladesh.

On December 17, India's Ministry of External Affairs summoned Bangladesh High Commissioner to India M Riaz Hamidullah, citing security concerns around the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

India's action followed after certain extremist elements announced plans to hold protests around the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

The MEA said that India "completely rejects the false narrative" sought to be created by extremist elements regarding certain recent events (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex slips 42 pts after two-day rally; IT, pharma shares fall on profit-taking

MUMBAI, Dec 23: Benchmark stock index BSE Sensex slipped by 42 points in a volatile trade on Tuesday following profit-taking in IT and pharma shares and mixed global cues.

Snapping the two-day gaining streak, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 42.64 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 85,524.84. The index moved in a range during the day, hitting a high of 85,704.93 and a low of 85,342.99.

The 50-share NSE Nifty closed marginally up by 4.75 points or 0.02 per cent to 26,177.15.

Metals, FMCG and energy shares witnessed buying interest, while IT and pharma saw selective pressure.

Among Sensex firms, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Adani Ports, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra, Eternal, Axis Bank and Maruti were the major laggards.

However, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel and HDFC Bank were among the gainers.

"The domestic market traded in a narrow range and ended flat amid mixed global cues. Selling pressure persisted across most sectors, though financials and FMCG offered marginal support.



"Going forward, investors are positioning for the next earnings season and monitoring evolving Fed policy expectations, as rate cut probabilities are slowly inching up for the January meeting," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE smallcap index climbed 0.38 per cent and midcap gauge went up marginally by 0.07 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, IT declined by 0.71 per cent, followed by BSE Focused IT (0.70 per

cent), realty (0.21 per cent), consumer durables (0.10 per cent).

However, BSE commodities climbed 0.68 per cent, followed by utilities (0.59 per cent), metal (0.52 per cent), power (0.40 per cent), financial services (0.36 per cent) and energy (0.36 per cent).

Markets traded in a subdued manner on the weekly expiry day and ended almost unchanged, taking a pause after the recent rebound, Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"Equity markets ended the session on a flat note, weighed down by broad-based profit-taking at higher levels in the absence of fresh positive triggers," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled in positive territory, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower. Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended higher on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 457.34 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, remained buyers as they bought equities worth ₹ 4,058.22 crore.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, went up by 0.10 per cent to USD 62.13 per barrel.

On Monday, the Sensex jumped 638.12 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 85,567.48. The Nifty climbed 206 points or 0.79 per cent to close above the 26,000 mark at 26,172.40. (PTI)

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Kheroni continues to

eviction of illegal settlers. Pegu held talks with protesters, and they called off their hunger strike following assurances from the government that tripartite talks will be held on the issue soon.

The chief minister will be present in the meeting, Pegu said. On Monday, four people were injured in police firing on protesters who went on a rampage, setting ablaze around 15 shops in Kheroni Bazaar.

The protesters also attempted to attack the police station in Kheroni on Monday, but it was foiled by security forces. Prohibitory order was imposed in Karbi Anglong and in neighbouring West Karbi Anglong district. Night curfew was also imposed in Karbi Anglong district with restrictions on the movement of any person or groups and private vehicles throughout the district from 5 pm to 6 am.

Pegu arrived at Kheroni on Monday night to review the situation. DGP Harmeet Singh also rushed to Karbi Anglong and visited the affected areas, and reviewed the prevailing situation.

Pegu said that additional forces have been rushed to the area from neighbouring districts and the "situation is under control". "A section of the people are angry that the encroachers are settling on PGR and VGR land, and there was an attempt to evict them last year, but a petition was filed in the Gauhati High Court, which passed an interim order staying the eviction process", he said.

The matter can be resolved only through dialogue, and, "We are holding discussions with both protesters and the encroachers", Pegu added.

The chief minister had said on Monday night that rumours began circulating that three protesters who were on hunger strike had been arrested, and they became agitated.

"No one has been arrested, but they were taken for treatment to Guwahati as their health deteriorated," he said. Sarma said that he was in touch with the district officials and leaders of the organisations protesting. "We hope to bring the situation under control by tonight," he added.

The protesters are demanding the eviction of encroachers, who mostly hail from Bihar, from Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) lands in the two districts.

The police allegedly tried to remove the protesters forcibly in the Kheroni area of Karbi Anglong, following which a clash ensued.

The protesters also alleged that the police had arrested three persons who were on hunger strike, but KAAC chief Tuliram Ronghang later told reporters that they were admitted to the Gauhati Medical College Hospital. As news of the clash spread, a group of protesters set ablaze the old residence of KAAC's CEM in Donkamokam, following which the security forces opened fire, in which three agitators and a policeman were injured, officials said. (PTI)

Internet services suspended

that there might be likelihood of breach of public peace and tranquility, it said. Social media and internet may be used to further spread inflammatory messages and rumours, which may lead to further aggravation of the situation, the department's Commissioner and Secretary Biswajit Pegu said in the order. Any violation of the promulgation will be punishable as per laws, it added.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said the situation in Karbi Anglong was "very sensitive".

"Senior minister Ranaj Pegu is present in the district. I believe the matter will be resolved soon," Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme. (PTI)

2.5 acres of

coordinated operation resulted in the clearance of approximately 2.5 acres of railway land that had been under unauthorised occupation for several years.

The eviction was carried out peacefully amid tight security arrangements. Nilen Kanti Das, Senior Section Engineer, Railway, New Alipurduar Division, said the eviction was essential for timely completion of development works and for ensuring safety and proper utilisation of railway property.

Circle Officer-cum-Magistrate Dorododi Dev Roy, who supervised the operation, said due procedure was followed and law and order was maintained throughout.

Local residents expressed mixed reactions, with some voicing concern over displacement, while others welcomed the move in view of long-term development and improved rail facilities for the region.

CM distributes seed

with some even earning over ₹10 lakh annually. Citing a local example, Sarma referred to Anita Sahu of Dikom Bazar under Chabua Development Block, who expanded her beauty parlour and cosmetics business with SHG support and a bank loan, earning around ₹25,000 per month.

He expressed confidence that women beneficiaries in Chabua-Lahowal and Makum would similarly leverage the seed capital to achieve financial self-reliance.

BJP national executive

of Nitin Nabin. Earlier on December 26, Nabin will be accorded a warm welcome by party workers at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport upon his arrival in Guwahati.

Leaders appeal for peace

and PGR land issues. Authorities expressed hope that with continued engagement and restraint from all sides, normalcy would gradually return to the area.

Bangladesh summons Indian

in Bangladesh. "It is unfortunate that the interim government has neither conducted a thorough investigation nor shared meaningful evidence with India regarding the incidents," it said shortly after summoning Hamidullah.

On Thursday, a group of angry protesters tried to storm India's assistant high commission in Chittagong, India subsequently suspended its visa services at the mission.

Bangladesh has witnessed a fresh wave of unrest following the death of student leader Hadi last week. Hadi was a prominent face in the anti-government protests that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government.

Some of the protesters last week also trained their anger against India. Amid the fresh protests, a Hindu man, Dipu Chandra Das, was killed in Bangladesh's Mymensingh. (PTI)

LVM3-M6 is set

the next generation communication satellite designed to provide high-speed cellular broadband directly to smartphones worldwide. AST SpaceMobile is building the first and only space-based cellular broadband network, which is accessible directly by smartphones and designed for both commercial and government applications.

According to the Indian space agency, the 43.5 metre tall LVM3, also known as Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mk III, is a three stage rocket with a cryogenic engine designed and developed by ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

The vehicle uses two S200 solid rocket boosters to provide the huge amount of thrust required for lift off. The booster has been developed by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

After a flight of about 15 minutes from liftoff, the BlueBird Block-2 satellite is expected to get separated from the launch vehicle. BlueBird Block-2 mission is part of a global LEO constellation to provide direct-to-mobile connectivity through satellite.

This constellation would enable 4G and 5G voice and video calls, texts, streaming and data for everyone, everywhere at all times. It features a 223 m 2 phased array, making it the largest commercial communications satellite ever deployed into low Earth Orbit, about 600 km altitude.

AST SpaceMobile had launched five satellites, BlueBird 1-5 in September 2024 which provide continuous internet coverage across the United States and other select countries.

The company has planned to launch similar satellites to augment its network support and has partnered with over 50 mobile operators across the globe. (PTI)

Protests held near

Bangladesh government. A placard read: "Hindu rakt ki ek ek boond ka hisaab chahiye (Each drop of blood of a Hindu must be accounted for)". The area around the high commission was secured with seven layers of barricades and a reinforced presence of police and paramilitary.

A 1,500-strong police force was deployed ahead of the demonstration, an officer said, adding that the police managed to hold the protesters about 800 metres from the high commission. Angry protesters accused the Bangladesh authorities of failing to protect minorities and demanded strong diplomatic steps by India to ensure the safety of Hindus in the neighbouring country.

"What can one do when the people in Bangladesh are keeping a jihadi mentality. Every single worker of VHP and Bajrang Dal stands in support of Hindu families in Bangladesh. We will cross all the barriers and protest in front of the Bangladesh high commission," a protester told PTI, as slogan shouting reached a crescendo. Several protesters claimed that the agitation would not be limited to a single day and warned of a intensified protest if their demands were not addressed.

Sumit Kashyap, a demonstrator, called for Hindu unity. "Several Bangladeshis are staying in the national capital illegally. Not even a single person has ever been harmed. But people in Bangladesh are killing our brothers now," he said.

Another protester Satish Gupta said they were protesting against the "terrorist mentality". Protesters were seen chanting the Hanuman Chalisa and raising religious slogans. Minor scuffles broke out as demonstrators pushed against the police cordon.

A VHP leader asserted that the protest was peaceful and lawful. "We demand proper protection of every single Hindu, compensation to the Hindu families, and proper rehabilitation for those families who were openly looted." In Kolkata, hundreds of supporters of a pro-Hindutva outfit tried to march to the Bangladesh deputy high commission here and clashed with the police when they were stopped.

The police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the protesters after they breached barricades in their attempts to move closer to the deputy high commission office at Beckbagan in central Kolkata.

In the clashes, several protesters and police personnel sustained minor injuries. At least 12 demonstrators were arrested as a preventive measure, police said.

The march titled "Hindu Hunkar Padayatra" was organised under the banner of 'Bongiyu Hindu Jagaran Manch' with protesters carrying saffron flags and shouting slogans against alleged violence on Hindus in Bangladesh. "The police here are acting like they want to protect those who are lynching our brothers in Bangladesh. They showed no such enthusiasm when Hindus were lynched in Murshidabad earlier this year," a protester alleged. (PTI)

PowerUp Money raises \$12 million in Series A funding

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 22: Mutual fund advisory wealthtech platform PowerUp Money has raised \$12 million in a Series A funding round led by Peak XV, with participation from existing investors Accel, Blume Ventures and Kae Capital, all of whom increased their commitments.

The round also saw continued backing from 8i Ventures and DevC, and comes just six months after the company raised \$7.2 million in seed funding. Founded in 2024 by Prateek Jindal, PowerUp Money is building a research-led, zero-commission mutual fund advisory platform aimed at expanding access to unbiased, long-term investment advice.

As a SEBI-registered Registered Investment Advisor, the company positions itself as aligned with investors' wealth creation goals rather than product commissions.

India has seen rapid growth in mutual fund participation, with nearly 60 million investors and record SIP inflows. However, the company noted that access to high-quality advisory services has not scaled proportionately, leaving many investors dependent on informal advice or short-term performance trends.

The PowerUp Money app allows users to review their mutual fund portfolios free of cost and assess portfolio health and performance.

Within eight months of launch, the platform has onboarded over five lakh users and is tracking more than ₹65,000 crore in assets.

Its flagship paid offering, PowerUp Elite, provides personalised advisory services through the app for an annual fee of ₹999 and has attracted over 25,000 subscribers so far.

Announcing the fundraise, Jindal said the fresh capital would be used to strengthen research and advisory capabilities, scale PowerUp Elite and launch a new fully managed offering, PowerUp Infinite. Investors said the company's technology-led approach to scaling mutual fund advisory addresses a critical gap in India's wealth management ecosystem. Over the next three years, PowerUp Money aims to onboard 10 million users and expand its role in retail wealth management across the country.

Govt to tap e-tailers, online sources for price data in new CPI series

NEW DELHI, Dec 23: The government proposes to include online sources as well as e-commerce platforms to compute retail inflation in a bid to substantially improve reliability, accuracy, and overall quality of the consumer price index (CPI). Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is in the process of revising the base years for computing CPI, Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The new series of CPI (consumer price index-based inflation) with base year (2024=100) data is scheduled to be released on February 12, 2026. The data on National Accounts with financial year 2022-23 as base year is scheduled to be released on February 27, 2026, while the new series of IIP data with base year 2022-23 will be released on May 28. MoSPI on Tuesday organised a pre-release consultative workshop on base revision of CPI, GDP and IIP.

On inclusion of new data sources in CPI, the ministry said in addition to the data collected from physical outlets as being done in the current series, prices would also be obtained from e-commerce platforms in 12 selected cities having a population of more than 25 lakh.

Efforts will also be made to procure administrative data in coordi-

nation with railways for rail fares, petroleum ministry for fuel prices, and postal department for postal tariffs.

For airfares, telecom services, and OTT platforms, price data is proposed to be compiled from online sources using web-based methods, MoSPI said.

"The adoption of these alternative and digital data sources is expected to substantially improve the representativeness, reliability, accuracy and overall quality of the CPI," it added. The ministry is also expanding coverage across urban and rural markets, while also incorporating e-commerce price data and other digital sources to better capture changing consumption patterns.

GDP base revision will also facilitate inclusion of new data sources and alignment of compilation process with methodological improvements, standards and classifications. Addressing the participants at the workshop, MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg said the ministry is not expecting GDP expectations to change significantly even after the release of the new data series in February.

"Too early to say, on its impact on GDP numbers. In general, we don't expect much changes from what our previous expectations

are," he said.

The availability of real-time data such as Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) filings will help states estimate growth more accurately under the revised GDP methodology, he said.

The Secretary further said the government now has the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) which will help further improve data quality.

He also informed that the government is working with states to develop satellite accounts in segments like culture, digital economy and tourism, in line with the upcoming System of National Accounts (SNA) 2025 revision.

MoSPI is also in the process to launch a new Annual Survey of Service Sector Enterprises shortly with an aim at improving measurement of the sectors that account for over half of India's output.

It is also mulling introducing Index of Service Production in 2026. In addition, the government will also compile a comprehensive National Product Classification, covering both goods and services over the next six months.

On IIP, MoSPI said the new series will have a comprehensive update of components to reflect latest patterns of industrial production. (PTI)

Industry consultations on mandatory labelling of AI-generated content over, rules soon: IT Secy

NEW DELHI, Dec 23: The government has completed consultations with the industry on the proposed mandatory labelling of AI-generated content, and the related rules are set to be issued shortly, IT Secretary S Krishnan has said.

Krishnan told PTI in an interview that the industry has been "fairly responsible", understands the logic behind labelling of AI content and that, as such, there has not been serious pushback against it.

The primary feedback from the industry is around wanting clarity on the degree of modification to make clear distinctions between substantive, material changes through AI, and routine technical enhancements.

"Based on the inputs we have received, we are just consulting the other ministries within government, saying that these are the changes which have been suggested... so which changes we accept, which changes we make and what tweaks we make... that portion is on right now, and I think we should come out with the new rules very shortly," Krishnan said.

About the feedback and inputs coming in from the industry on this, Krishnan said, "I don't think they are against it." "And again, this is not something which we are either asking them to register or go to a third party entity or placing some restriction of any kind. All



that is being asked is label the content," he said, asserting that citizens have the right to know whether a particular piece of content has been generated synthetically or is authentic.

Krishnan said, at times, even minor AI edits may significantly alter meanings, while routine technical enhancements, say smartphone's camera related improvements, may enhance quality without changing facts.

"Most of the reaction is the degree and what kind of change because now advanced technology is such that there is some modification or the other in some sense. In some cases, modification can be very small, but that, in itself, can make a difference... One word in a sentence can make a huge difference to what the outcome is," he explained.

As such, use of technology and modern devices involve some level of enhancements.

"...the way that you photograph or take a video or record something, the phone itself en-

changes to IT rules, mandating the clear labelling of AI-generated content and increasing the accountability of large platforms like Facebook and YouTube for verifying and flagging synthetic information, to curb user harm from deepfakes and misinformation.

The IT ministry noted that deepfake audio, videos, and synthetic media going viral on social platforms have demonstrated the potential of generative AI to create "convincing falsehoods", where such content can be "weaponised" to spread misinformation, damage reputations, manipulate or influence elections, or commit financial fraud.

The proposed amendments to IT rules provide a clear legal basis for labelling, traceability, and accountability related to synthetically-generated information, the ministry had said.

The ministry had invited comments from stakeholders on the draft amendment mandating labelling, visibility, and metadata embedding for synthetically generated or modified information to distinguish such content from authentic media.

The draft rules involved mandating platforms to label AI-generated content with prominent markers and identifiers, covering a minimum of 10 per cent of the visual display or the initial 10 per cent of the duration of an audio clip. (PTI)

CORRIGENDUM
It is hereby informed to all concerned that the advertisement titled "Short Notice Inviting Quotation" published in some newspapers on 20th December 2025 contained an inadvertent error regarding the last date for receipt of quotations. The last date for receipt of quotation, which was wrongly mentioned as 16th December 2025, may be read as 30th December 2025. All other terms and conditions of the said advertisement shall remain unchanged. This corrigendum is issued for general information and necessary action.

S & T ASSOCIATED WORK AT MALIGAON
E-Tender Notice No. 11 of 2025-26. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Tender No. N-2025-26-11-DY-CSTE-NW. Name of work: S and T associated work in connection with Development of existing pond with provision of park including afforestation & Landscaping in Central Golanagar Colony, Maligaon of NFR.
Tender Value: ₹13.41.381/- Earnest Money: ₹ 26,800/-. Date & Time of closing of tender: At 15.00 hrs. & opening at 15.30 hrs. on 09-01-2026. The complete information of above e-tender will be available in website www.irps.gov.in
Sr. Signal & Telecom Engineer/ Network, Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

United Christian Forum appeals for peace amid Karbi Anglong unrest

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 23: Following violent clashes in Kheroni and nearby areas on December 22 over eviction issues and the removal of hunger-striking protesters, the United Christian Forum (UCF) of Karbi Anglong has urged citizens to maintain peace.

The Forum expressed concern over the breakdown of law and order and appealed for protests to remain democratic and non-violent. Prayers were offered for the injured and the UCF called on the community to embrace the Christmas spirit of reconciliation and for government leaders to act with wisdom and fairness in addressing the disputes.

Karbi groups call for restraint following attack in West KA Social organisations condemn arson at KAAC CEM's residence



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 23: The attack on the ancestral home of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang by a mob on December 22 has been condemned

by social organisations in Karbi Anglong.

In the incident, a mob surrounded Ronghang's residence at Artukekang, West Karbi Anglong and set it on fire. Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) and Karbi Lammet

Amei (KLA), in a press conference at the KCS office on Monday evening, urged caution on both sides.

KCS secretary Sunil Tokbi said, "The picking up of hunger strikers at dawn by the authorities should not have been done. However, the attack on the CEM's house is wrong." The press conference was attended by KLA president Kamsing Hanse and former KCS president Chandra Sing Kro.

In a separate press briefing, Karbi Students Association president Buddha Terang said, "We support the demand, but the CEM's ancestral home should not have been burnt. The demand led by Litsong Rongphar is finished with the attack on the CEM's residence. We have no place for imitating the arson in Nepal and Bangladesh."

Police seized 62 kgs of banned beef in Panchali area, accused on run

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 23: Dibrugarh police seized a huge quantity of banned beef from Panchali during a raid on Tuesday early morning.

During the raid, police recovered 62 kilograms of prohibited meat from a house located near the Brahmaputra river in the Panchali area of the city.

Sensing the arrival of the police, the illegal meat trader identified as Meraj Khan fled the spot.

It is noteworthy that this riverside area of Panchali is notorious for various anti-social activities.

In recent times, many suspicious individuals have also settled in these riverbank localities, raising serious concerns about law and order.

The raid was conducted under the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021. The Act prohibits the slaughter of cattle and sale of beef near the temples and in Hindu-majority areas.

Sources said despite the strong law for protection against slaughtering of cattle, cattle smuggling and slaughtering has been going on in Dibrugarh in a organised way.

"The cattles were brought from the riverine area through boat and after secretly slaughtering them in the illegal slaughter house, they sale them to the people. It has been secretly going on and Meraj Khan, the notorious cattle thief doing such activity from a long time," said a source.



He added, "Meraj Khan is associated with all anti-social activity and many a times he was arrested by police for drug trafficking and other crimes."

Meanwhile, Dibrugarh police launched search operation against him in various places of Dibrugarh.

Indus annual function concludes: 'Pioneer' released

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Dec 23: The annual function of the only private CBSE senior secondary school in Jagiroad Co-District concludes on Monday with two days program. On the occasion, the annual exhibition was inaugurated by Mayong Circle Officer (CO) Priyanka Gogoi on Sunday. In her inaugural address, she expressed her gratitude towards the discipline, punctuality and the way of exposure and presentation of not only the science based models but also the arts subjects models displayed by the students here. The officer also expressed her delights to be present in such a prestigious school in Jagiroad under Mayong revenue circle. Chinmoy Bordoloi, Director, SPM IAS Academy, Guwahati, while delivering his speech as guest of honour highlighted the necessity of consistency to achieve goal of each and every student. He also expressed happiness by watching unique models of the exhibition in different fields. The cultural function on Monday began with lighting of ceremonial lamp by CDC, Jagiroad Co-District, Hriday Kumar Das, accompanied by Cultural Development Officer, Government of Assam, Achyut Kumar Bora. The inaugural session was also attended by guest of honour Dibyajoti Neog, Chairman, Jagiroad Development Authority, Sanjib Saikia, Chairman, Indus Educational Trust, secretary Manoranjan Mishra, Principal of Indus Academy Namita Sarma among others. The annual magazine of the school 'Pioneer: 2025-26' was also released on the occasion.

'Anti-colonial struggle in Assam: Voices from the periphery'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 23: The Discipline of History, Surya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) organised an academic talk on Tuesday, featuring Dr Akunthita Borthakur, Associate Professor, Department of History, Cotton University, who spoke on "Anti-Colonial Struggle in Assam: Voices from the Periphery." The session was attended by learners, research scholars and faculty members of the institution.

In her lecture, Dr Borthakur highlighted the contributions of marginalised voices and women in Assam's anti-colonial movement. She spoke about the active participation of women in the nationalist movement under Gandhi's leadership, breaking the confines of patriarchal norms and also shed light on numerous unsung women freedom fighters from different communities whose identities remain largely unknown. The lecture was followed by a discussion session where scholars, learners and faculty members interacted with Dr Borthakur. A formal vote of thanks was offered by Farhin Hashmi.

After the session, Dr Borthakur participated in a radio talk programme at the KKHSOU EMPC studio, coordinated by Epahi Baruah and Farhin Hashmi. Faculty members Dr Sukmaya Lama, Dr Priti Salila Rajkhowa, Epahi Baruah and Brihatrabar Pegu coordinated the entire programme.

AAU observes National Farmers' Day

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 23: Assam Agricultural University (AAU), under the initiative of the Directorate of Extension Education, observed National Farmers' Day on Tuesday at the auditorium of the university's Agricultural Technology Information Centre.

On the occasion, a live telecast of the central programme related to the Viksit Bharat G-RAM-G Bill was arranged. The programme featured an address by the Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, delivered from the ICAR Pusa Campus, New Delhi, during which he explained the key provisions of the proposed Bill to farmers across the country.

In addition to the telecast, discussions were held with participants highlighting the significance of National Farmers' Day and its relevance to the farming community, particularly in the context of rural development and farmer welfare.

It may be mentioned that the Viksit Bharat G-RAM-G Bill, 2025 proposes a new legislative framework in alignment with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, replacing the existing MGNREGA structure. Under the proposed framework, the guaranteed employment for each rural household has been increased to 125 days, thereby strengthening income security in rural areas. The programme was attended by farmers, faculty members and non-teaching staff of the university.

Women join in community paddy cutting for Sankardev Sangha

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 23: The venue of the upcoming 95th annual session of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha, scheduled to be held on February 6, 7 and 8 next year, has been named Jyoti-Bishnu Khetra. The venue is located between Soibari and Dhalabail to the northern part of Jamugurihat and has already attained sanctity due to the chanting of Harinaam and Ghosa by devotees.

As part of the preparations to ensure the success of the forthcoming event, all 35 sub-committees have geared up their respective primary works. In this connection, the women section of the area came forward with sickles (kachi) and joined the community stubble paddy cutting programme on Sunday, which continued throughout the day.

While cutting the straw, the women chanted Harinaam and Ghosa, turning the entire Jyoti-Bishnu Khetra into a spiritual ambience reminiscent of Brindaban. During the rest period, they sang the evergreen Maya Bini song of the legendary musician, paid tribute to the beloved icon and later participated in a community feast.

Notably, women participants from Udalguri and Biswanath districts also extended their cooperation, joining hands with women from Sonitpur district. This was informed by Bipul Bora, secretary of the reception committee, Bangshi Bhuyan, president of the cultural sub-committee and Ajit Saikia, president of the publication sub-committee.

English dept alumni meet held at Debraj Roy College

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT, Dec 23: As part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Debraj Roy College, the Alumni Association of the Department of English organised the Alumni Meet 2025 on Sunday at the college campus. Debraj Roy College, one of the leading institutions of Upper Assam, has secured NAAC 'A' grade and was conferred autonomous status by the UGC in 2024.

The programme began on a subdued note and was slightly delayed due to the sudden demise of Dr Rumi Sabhapandit, retired head of the Department of Statistics of the college, on the same day. As a mark of respect to the departed soul, the organisers decided to continue the programme without pomp and gaiety.

Principal Dr Jayanta Barukial addressed the gathering, highlighting the history and 75 years of ac-



ademic excellence of the college. He also inaugurated the art exhibition organised on the occasion. This was followed by the inauguration of the book exhibition by alumnus and working president of the managing committee, Ratneswar Saikia. The ceremonial lamp was lit by alumna Jaba Gohain.

After a chorus performance by past and present students of the college, the main programme titled "Sonnet of Souls" commenced.

The event included felicitation of former and present professors of the Department of English, followed by felicitation and interaction with alumni. Shiva Prasad Bora, alumnus and former head of the Department of English of HPB Girls' College, presided over the session. He was accompanied by the dais by Dr Anindita Dey, head of the Department of English, Dr Devojit Phukan, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Alumnus Ratneswar Saikia, alumna Jaba Gohain and artiste

Manjit Rajkhowa.

Hemanta Kumar Bora, alumnus and president of the central committee of the Alumni Association of the Department of English, delivered the inaugural address, extending warm greetings to all participants. Dr Devojit Phukan lauded the arrangements and appealed to alumni who had come from different parts of the state to actively participate in making the closing ceremony of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, scheduled from February 5 to 7 next year, a success.

The programme was coordinated by alumna Principiya Phukan along with Parikhit Borah, Sanjib Kumar Das, Dulendra Chetia, Ankur Borah, Gargi Garima Sonowal, Lakhimi Devi Agosti, Rashmita Saikia, Mousum Tamuly, Saikat Chakraborty and several other alumni of the department.

Sadou Asom Lekhika Samaroh Samiti to confer golden jubilee awards

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 23: Sadou Asom Lekhika Samaroh Samiti has announced several awards to be conferred during its Golden Jubilee celebrations and the 30th biennial state conference to be held from January 2 to 5 at the Padma Shri Dr Sheela Borthakur Memorial Field, Kuworitol Gandhi Playground, Kaliabor. Founded in 1974, the Samiti is completing 50 years this year.

The celebrations will feature the release of 1,111 e-books along with printed publications. The inaugural day on January 2 will include plantation of 50 Nahar saplings, inauguration of the main stage by Kaliabor Co-District Commissioner Raj Barua and lighting of the ceremonial lamp by social worker Bimal Barua, followed by cultural programmes.

On January 3, the Samiti flag will be hoisted by president Subarna Saikia Bordoloi, followed by tributes to founder president Dr Sheela Borthakur. The day will also feature a book fair, exhibition, young writers' conclave and a poetry meet inaugu-

rated by Sahitya Akademi Award winner Kamal Kumar Tanti.

January 4 will witness a cultural procession and the first open session, to be inaugurated by Minister Keshab Mahanta with Chhattisgarh Governor Ramen Deka as chief guest. The concluding open session on January 5 will be inaugurated by former president Dr Charu Saharia Nath, with Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa as chief guest.

The Samiti announced key award recipients, including the Kabya Bharati Nalini Bala Devi Award to poet Lutfa Hanum Selima Begum, the Padma Shri Chandraprabha Saikiani Award to writer Dr Charu Saharia Nath, the Jinnu Konwar Memorial Sanskriti Sadhana Award to singer Tarali Sarma and the Samajik Sangbadikota Bota to journalist Pankaj Baruah. The Jorhat District unit and Doomsdooma branch will receive awards for best district and best branch.

The Golden Jubilee celebrations are expected to be a major literary event marking the Samiti's contribution to Assamese language and culture.

Yuva Lekhak Award to writer, columnist Gautam Sarmah

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 23: Young writer and columnist Gautam Sarmah, faculty member of the Department of History at Rabindranath Tagore University has been selected for the prestigious 'Yuva Lekhak Award for 2025' celebrations organised by the Government of Assam. He is among 818 young writers below the age of 40 selected from across the state for their notable literary contributions.

The award recognises creative writing in multiple languages, including Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and indigenous languages such as Mising, Karbi and Nepali. Sarmah's selection has been warmly welcomed by the people of his hometown Dhemaji and by the academic fraternity of Rabindranath Tagore University.

In a special message, Vice-Chancellor Professor Manabendra Dutta Choudhury congratulated the awardee, while Registrar (i/c) cum Academic Registrar Dr Sandip Ratna described him as a matter of pride for the university. Gautam Sarmah has authored

six books and written over 500 articles on history, nature and tourism. His writings appear regularly in leading newspapers and magazines including The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, The Eastern Chronicle, Asomiya Pratinid, Niyomiya Barta, Amar Asom, Dainik Asam, Sadin, Satoroi and others. The award ceremony will be held on December 24 at 4:00 PM at the Assam Book Fair, Khanapara, where Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will felicitate the awardees with Rs 25,000 each.

Initiative marks National Farmers' Day, focuses on productivity and income security Cairn supports farmers in Jorhat through integrated farm initiatives



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 23: Marking National Farmers' Day, Cairn Oil & Gas, a part of

the Vedanta Group, reaffirmed its commitment to rural development by supporting farmers in Jorhat through access to high-yielding rice seeds, organic inputs and crop facilitation. The initiative was highlighted during an awareness session organised for farmers in collaboration with the Jorhat Agriculture Department, Government of Assam, along with Cairn's ongoing engagement with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Jorhat and the Assam Agricultural University-Assam Rice Research Institute (ARRI), Titabar.

The programme aims to enhance crop productivity, improve income security and promote scientific agricultural practices across the region. Through the initiative, Cairn has worked to bridge institutions, government schemes and local communities, ensuring farmers gain access to quality inputs, knowledge transfer and market-linked confidence.

Speaking on the collaboration, Priyank

Majumdar, ADO, Nakachari, Jorhat Agriculture Department, Government of Assam, said that high-yielding varieties such as Ranjit and Bahadur have consistently demonstrated strong performance in Assam. He added that helping farmers access quality seed and scientific practices strengthens productivity, reduces risk and supports long-term farm sustainability.

Under its CSR programme, Cairn supported the procurement and distribution of the widely adopted Ranjit and Bahadur rice varieties developed under the Regional Rice Research Institute system. Nearly 100 farmers cultivating around 110 acres of land benefited from the initiative and recorded significant yield improvements.

Sharing his experience, Ratul Gogoi, a farmer from Naginjan, said that farmers received good quality seeds, compost and guidance, which led to increased yields. He added that crop insurance provided confidence to invest more in farming and move

forward with hope.

The initiative builds on an earlier seed distribution drive conducted in Naginjan earlier this year, where Cairn and ARRI introduced high-yielding varieties and promoted organic farming practices through the distribution of vermicompost. With support from the Jorhat Agriculture Department, all participating farmers were also enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, extending crop insurance coverage and financial security.

Preliminary field assessments indicate a significant increase in agricultural output, with even higher yields anticipated. A detailed report will be released by KVK after the completion of the harvesting season.

By improving yields, promoting organic inputs, strengthening institutional collaboration and expanding crop insurance coverage, Cairn aims to enhance farm incomes, reduce risks and support self-reliance among rural communities in Assam.

AJYCP stages protest against drug menace in Margherita



HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Dec 23: Members of the Assam Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Margherita Regional Committee, along with local residents of Ledo, staged a protest programme on Tuesday at NH-315 near Ledo College Tinali, demanding an immediate and complete halt to the alleged unrestricted drug trade in the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency under Tinsukia district.

The protest was organised at NH-315 near the Ledo College Tinali road under the Margherita co-district. As part of the agitation, AJYCP members took out a procession that began from the Ledo College Tinali road, passed through the busy Ledo market area near the petrol pump and culminated at the same location.

The protest programme was led by Kanchan Bora, vice-president of the AJYCP Tinsukia District Committee, along with advisor Jadu Sonowal and Bimal Singh, president of the AJYCP Margherita Regional Committee. A large number of student activists participated in the programme, raising slogans against drug peddling and demanding strict action from the authorities. AJYCP leaders alleged that the drug menace has been steadily increasing in areas under the jurisdiction of the Margherita Police Station and the Ledo Police Outpost. They accused the Margherita co-district administration, Margherita police and Ledo police outpost of failing to effectively curb the illegal trade and warned that continued inaction would have serious consequences for the youth and the social fabric of the region.

Addressing the protesters, Kanchan Bora said it was unfortunate and painful that educated youths of the Margherita region were falling prey to illicit banned drugs and other intoxicants. He warned that if the situation continues, the future of Margherita and its adjoining areas would be severely affected. He urged the Margherita MLA, the co-district administration and the police to take immediate action against drug traders and peddlers, failing which the organisation would launch stronger agitational programmes across the Margherita region in the coming days.

The protesters also called upon the concerned authorities to intensify surveillance, take decisive action against drug networks and ensure a drug-free environment in the coal belt areas of the 83rd Margherita LAC under Tinsukia district.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

There's no use doing a kindness if you do it a day too late. - Charles Kingsley

HC relief foe Kerala CM

Yet another attempt to discredit the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala has failed with the High Court staying, for three months, proceedings on the show-cause notice the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had issued to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, former finance minister Thomas Isaac, and the CEO of Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) K. M. Abraham on the usage of funds mobilized by the Board through masala bonds for infrastructure development in the State. The stay order came on a joint petition they had filed challenging the notice the ED had issued a month ago in connection with the masala bonds issue. The notice was issued to the Chief Minister in his position as the chairman of KIIFB. It may be mentioned that, while granting interim relief to KIIFB on December 16, a single judge had observed that, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s External Commercial Borrowings (ECB), which came into effect from January 15, 2019, and governed the masala bonds, the definition of real estate activity does not include activities related to the infrastructure sector. The ED, however, argued that the acquisition of land for infrastructure projects constituted a real estate activity and cannot be carried out using masala bond funds.

In November this year, the ED had issued a FEMA contravention show-cause notice to the CM, Isaac and Abraham in the masala bond case. The notice was for alleged contravention of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) provisions by KIIFB and its authorities, amounting to ₹ 466.91 crore. KIIFB is the primary agency of the State Government for financing large and critical infrastructure projects. It had raised ₹ 2,150 crore in 2019 through its debut masala bond issue as part of the plan to mobilise ₹ 50,000 crore to fund large and critical infrastructure projects in the State. The High Court also issued notice to the ED and listed KIIFB's plea challenging the notice for further hearing on January 20, 2026. KIIFB had earlier moved the High Court seeking to quash the notice. Its contention was that the ED was in the habit of issuing such notices during election time. There was no hassle in spending the funds to purchase land for infra development and that everything was being done in adherence to the RBI norms. Land acquisition for infra projects, KIIFB argued, cannot be equated with real estate activity or land purchase for commercial use.

In another attempt to harass the Kerala Government, the Union Government had cut the borrowing limit of the State by ₹ 5,900 crore in the current quarter. In a letter issued on December 17, the Union Government informed the State Government that ₹ 5,900 crore had been reduced from the borrowing limit.

Why 2026 will feel different

By: Narvijay Yadav

India is entering a new phase of governance. It is not loud. Yet, it is real and already underway. Across cities, a shift is visible in how systems respond to stress. The old habit of reacting after damage is slowly giving way to anticipation. For decades, Indian cities have functioned in response mode. Pollution rises; restrictions follow. Traffic collapses; advisories come later. Heat waves hit; schools adjust after discomfort spreads. Health systems step in only after harm is visible. This model has reached its limits. Urban pressure has grown too complex for delayed responses. Today's challenges are no longer isolated. Air quality affects health. Health affects productivity. Productivity affects mobility. Mobility affects mental well-being. No single department or ministry can solve these in parts. What India is witnessing now is the early formation of integrated governance; systems beginning to talk to each other. The next governance shift will not be about technology headlines. It will be about reducing daily shocks for citizens. Technology will work quietly in the background.

A National Pattern Takes Shape
This shift is not limited to one city. Signals are emerging across India's metros. Hybrid work is no longer treated as an exception. It is slowly becoming a structural choice. Companies are adjusting work hours. Institutions are rethinking physical attendance. This is about managing stress. Environmental data is influencing decisions more directly. School timings are adjusted during heat waves. Construction pauses during pollution peaks. Traffic rules change during emergencies. These steps may look temporary, but together they indicate a bigger change. Cities are beginning to respond to conditions.

India's digital public infrastructure has matured. Sensors exist. Real-time data exists. What was missing earlier was coordination. Now, citizen pressure is forcing alignment. People want fewer surprises. Less chaos. More predictability in daily life. This is where AI quietly enters governance. It links pollution levels with traffic flow. It connects health stress with commuting time. Each city will adapt this differently. Mumbai will focus on movement and space. Chennai will prioritise climate re-

silience. Bengaluru will work on distributing work locations. Hyderabad will deepen digital delivery. The model will vary, but the principle remains the same. Anticipate early. Adjust gradually. Reduce harm before it escalates.

Delhi Tests Nation's Future
Delhi faces maximum stress with maximum visibility. It has little choice but to adapt. Air pollution forced an early change. Real-time air quality monitoring is active. GRAP protocols respond to data, not opinion. Schools close. Construction stops. Traffic is restricted. These measures are imperfect, but they mark a move toward predictive governance. The Integrated Command and Control Centre brings multiple data streams together. Traffic cameras. Emergency response. Civic complaints. Surveillance inputs. The system is not seamless yet, but the architecture exists. That matters.

Delhi's electric vehicle policy shows another layer of integration. It links pollution control with incentives and behavior change. Citizens are nudged rather than ordered. This soft governance approach is more sustainable. Work patterns are shifting, too. During high pollution days, hybrid work is advised. Schools move online. Timings are altered. The environment now influences how the city functions, not just how it reacts. Health data is also entering the system. Mohalla Clinics digitised primary care. Telemedicine expanded access. E-health records began connecting patient histories. These initiatives work independently today. The opportunity lies in bringing them together.

The Delhi Model of 2026
AI-assisted city management will operate quietly in the background. Pollution peaks can be predicted days in advance. Traffic flow can adjust automatically. Office hours can stagger. Public transport frequency can change dynamically. Work will decentralise further. Neighbourhood work hubs can reduce daily commuting. Hybrid becomes the default. Health, environment, and mobility data will inform each other. Citizens will face fewer emergency bans and fewer sudden disruptions. Delhi will not become perfect. But it can become smarter. If Delhi stabilises, other metros will adopt the approach. Delhi becomes the pilot. India becomes the network. This is not a promise. It is a trajectory. And 2026 is where the lines begin to meet.

Talatal Ghar: History, Mazes and lost tunnels

Nestled in the heart of Assam's Sivasagar district, near the historic town once known as Rangpur, stands the Talatal Ghar, a monumental testament to the ingenuity and resilience of the Ahom dynasty. This sprawling palace complex, the largest surviving structure from the Ahom era, evokes a sense of awe and intrigue among visitors who wander its corridors and descend into its shadowy depths. Built primarily in the 18th century, it combines elements of royal residence, administrative hub, and military fortress, reflecting the strategic mindset of a kingdom that ruled the Brahmaputra Valley for nearly six centuries.

The Ahom dynasty's story begins in the early 13th century when Sukaphaa, a Shan prince from present-day Myanmar and Yunnan regions, crossed the Patkai mountains with a small band of followers and established a foothold in Upper Assam. Over generations, the Ahoms expanded their territory, blending Tai-Shan traditions with local Assamese culture, and repelling numerous invasions, including seventeen attempts by the mighty Mughals. By the late 17th century, under King Rudra Singha, the Ahoms had reached the zenith of their power. Seeking to consolidate his capital and showcase his grandeur, Rudra Singha shifted the royal seat from Garhgaon to Rangpur around 1707. He commissioned the initial construction of what would become the Rangpur Palace, employing an architect named Ghanashyam from Cooch Behar to design a new capital befitting his ambitions.

Originally conceived as a military base, the structure was built using semi-permanent materials like wood and bamboo. Rudra Singha's vision included multi-storied buildings, but his death in 1714 left the project incomplete. It fell to his successors to elevate it into something extraordinary. King Rajeswar Singha, reigning from 1751 to 1769, undertook extensive renovations and expansions around 1765, fortifying the palace with bricks and transforming it into a durable edifice. Using an indigenous cement made from sticky rice (bora chaul), duck or swan eggs, limestone, and other local ingredients, the builders created a mortar that has withstood centuries of humidity and earthquakes. This organic binding agent exemplifies the Ahoms' resourceful engineering, allowing massive brick walls to endure where wooden elements have long decayed.

The palace derives its name from its distinctive design: "Talatal" meaning underground levels in Assamese, while the above-ground portion is called Kareng Ghar. Originally a seven-storied complex, it featured four floors above ground for royal apartments, administrative chambers, and ceremonial spaces, and three subterranean floors for defense and storage. The upper Kareng Ghar included ornate rooms, an octagonal prayer house dedicated to Lord Shiva on the northern wing, stables,



and granaries. A nearby Gola Ghar, built in the traditional do-chala roof style, served as an ammunition storehouse. The entire complex was once encircled by brick fortifications and earthen ramparts filled with water, forming a moat-like defense.

What truly sets Talatal Ghar apart is its labyrinthine underground architecture, designed with military precision. The lower three floors housed guard rooms, servant quarters, warehouses, and a network of corridors intended to confuse intruders. Historical accounts describe a maze so intricate that enemies breaching the palace would become disoriented, wandering endlessly in the dim passages. This design reflected the Ahoms' experience in guerrilla warfare and fortification, honed during conflicts like the Moamoria rebellions and Burmese incursions.

The most captivating aspect of Talatal Ghar, however, lies in its reputed secret tunnels. Legends persist of two hidden passages emerging from the underground levels: one stretching approximately three kilometers to the nearby Dikhow River for water access and escape by boat, and another extending sixteen kilometers to the old capital at Garhgaon for reinforcement or retreat. These tunnels were allegedly used during wars as emergency exits for the king, his family, and troops. Stories abound of royal evacuations through these hidden routes, allowing the Ahoms to evade capture and regroup. The underground chambers also served practical purposes, such as isolation rooms for prisoners or confinement during internal strife.

These tunnels contribute significantly to the palace's aura of mystery. Over time, popular imagination has woven tales of untold riches hidden in sealed chambers. One enduring legend claims that a royal treas-

ure, or Rajbharal, brimming with gold, jewels, and artifacts from the Ahom conquests, remains concealed in an upper sealed room or deep underground vault. Whispers suggest that the Ahoms, foreseeing the kingdom's fall, buried their wealth to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. During the Moamoria rebellion in the late 18th century, which severely weakened the Ahom monarchy, and subsequent Burmese invasions in the early 19th century, such precautions would have been prudent.

The British arrival added another layer to the enigma. After the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, which ended the First Anglo-Burmese War and brought Assam under East India Company control, British officers explored the palace. Fearing the maze-like underground could harbor rebels or hide dangers, they reportedly sealed many entrances and filled some passages with earth. Accounts from the colonial era mention people venturing into the depths and never returning, lost in the bewildering corridors. This led to restrictions on access, preserving the mystery but also limiting exploration.

Modern investigations have sought to separate fact from folklore. Archaeological excavations in 2000-2001 uncovered buried platforms, pathways, long walls, terracotta pipes for drainage, and ceramic artifacts, confirming the site's complexity. In 2015, a groundbreaking Ground Penetrating Radar survey conducted by IIT Kanpur in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India scanned Talatal Ghar and nearby sites. Surprisingly, it found no evidence of long secret tunnels, suggesting that while underground chambers and short passages exist, the extensive escape routes may be exaggerated legends or perhaps collapsed over time.

Nevertheless, the absence of confirmed tunnels has not diminished the allure. Vis-

itors today can explore the open ground and first floors, descending into dimly lit underground corridors that branch unpredictably, evoking the disorientation described in old tales. The irregular shape of the surviving structure, with its thick brick walls and arched doorways, hints at additions and alterations over decades. Floral motifs and remnants of carvings on walls speak to a once-opulent interior, blending Ahom, Hindu, and subtle Islamic influences from interactions with Mughal frontiers.

Talatal Ghar's historical significance extends beyond architecture. It symbolizes the Ahom kingdom's military prowess and administrative efficiency at its peak. As the seat of the royal court and strategic headquarters, it witnessed key decisions during turbulent times. The palace complex, including nearby attractions like the Rang Ghar amphitheater for royal entertainment, illustrates a sophisticated society that invested in public works, tanks, temples, and roads. The Ahoms' innovative use of local materials and sustainable construction techniques influenced regional building practices.

In its ruined state, with upper wooden floors destroyed by rebellions, invasions, and natural decay, Talatal Ghar stands as a poignant reminder of impermanence. Earthquakes, floods from the Brahmaputra, and neglect have taken their toll, yet the core brick structure endures. Managed by the Archaeological Survey of India, it attracts historians, architects, and tourists eager to unravel its secrets. The site's mythic status persists in local folklore, with stories of ghostly guardians protecting hidden treasures or echoes of ancient footsteps in the tunnels.

Exploring Talatal Ghar today offers a journey through layers of time. From the elevated roof providing panoramic views of surrounding ponds and ruins, to the cool, echoing underground halls, one senses the palace's dual nature: a symbol of glory and a fortress of shadows. The mystery of the unconfirmed tunnels and potential lost treasure invites speculation. Were they deliberately obscured to safeguard secrets? Or did erosion and time erase their traces? Such questions fuel ongoing interest, drawing researchers to propose further non-invasive surveys.

Talatal Ghar encapsulates the Ahom legacy: a blend of pragmatism, innovation, and enigma. In an era when empires rose and fell swiftly, the Ahoms maintained sovereignty for 600 years through adaptability and foresight. This palace, with its visible grandeur and hidden depths, mirrors that enduring spirit. As visitors emerge from the underground, blinking into the Assam sunlight, they carry away not just photographs but a profound appreciation for a civilization that was built not only to rule but to mystify and survive. The Talatal Ghar remains a living chronicle, its history etched in brick and legend, inviting generations to ponder its untold stories.

Elephant deaths expose a systemic failure

When development derails conservation in Assam

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the wee hours of a fog-laden Saturday, a chilling reminder of the cost of unplanned development unfolded in Sangjurai village of Assam's Hojai district. Eight elephants, moving as a herd through paddy fields and habitations, were struck by the Mizoram-Delhi Rajdhani Express. Seven died instantly, and the lone survivor succumbed the next day despite treatment. Five of the dead were calves, underscoring the scale of the loss. Visibility was severely compromised due to dense fog, and although the locomotive pilot applied emergency brakes, the force of the collision derailed the engine and the first five bogies. The train remained stranded for nearly four hours until the derailed coaches were replaced. What followed, as has become routine in such incidents, was a familiar exchange of blame between the Forest Department and the Railways, even as the deeper structural causes of such tragedies remained unaddressed.

Sangjurai is not officially notified as an elephant crossing corridor, yet the movement of elephant herds through its fields and clusters of houses is far from rare. The tragedy exposes a critical disconnect between official classifications and ecological realities. Assam's Chief Wildlife Warden, Dr Vinay Gupta, has pointed out that the state has already recognised multiple elephant corridors where trains are required to move at a restricted speed of 20 kilometres per hour, monitored by technological systems. However, he argues that it is impractical to declare every railway stretch in the state an elephant corridor. He has also highlighted a crucial factor in the Sangjurai incident: the railway track runs elevated through paddy fields, leaving elephants little time or space to move off the track even if alerted by a whistle or the sound of an approaching train. While he has expressed hope that a forthcoming brainstorming session with railway officials may yield solutions, such assurances ring hollow against the backdrop of repeated fatalities.

Local forest officials have provided additional details that complicate the official narrative. The Range Forest Officer of Kamrup division has stated that the collision site lies roughly three-fourths of a kilometre from a recognised potential crossing point near pillar number 125. AI-enabled intrusion detection systems are installed in several parts of Assam to alert train drivers of animal presence, but the nearest such system to Sangjurai is located 32 kilometres away, between Hawaitpur and Limdung on the route linking central Assam to the Barak Valley and Mizoram. Villagers argue that had a similar system been installed at Sangjurai, the tragedy might have been averted. They also stress that elephants regularly leave forested areas between November and February in search of food such as paddy and sugarcane, and that authorities have repeatedly been urged to acknowledge this route formally. Their warnings, it appears, went unheeded.

The Sangjurai incident is not an aberration but part of a grim pattern. Since 2019-20, at least 94 elephants have been killed in Assam alone in train collisions. The situation is even more precarious in the Jalpaiguri belt of West Bengal, where elephants are exceptionally vulnerable to railway accidents, and the most recent such cases have been recorded. A comprehensive report titled Suggested

Measures to Mitigate Elephant and Other Wildlife Train Collisions on Vulnerable Railway Stretches in India has identified 127 vulnerable stretches covering over 3,452 kilometres. Of these, 77 stretches spanning nearly 1,965 kilometres across 14 states have been prioritised for mitigation. Despite the availability of such detailed assessments and recommendations, accidents continue unabated, revealing alarming laxity and poor coordination between the Railway and Forest departments.

At the heart of the problem lies the relentless expansion of linear infrastructure. Roads, railways and canals slice through forests, wildlife reserves and age-old migration corridors, fragmenting habitats and disrupting ecological continuity. While widening roads and converting single railway lines into double tracks are often justified in the name of economic growth and national development, the ecological costs are rarely factored in with equal seriousness. Mining, industrial expansion and the spread of agriculture have further accelerated deforestation and forest degradation. As natural habitats shrink and fragment, wild animals are left with little choice but to stray beyond pro-



TECTED areas, bringing them into deadly conflict with trains, vehicles and human settlements.

Assam's forests present a particularly stark example of this process. Large tracts have been fragmented due to development projects and agricultural expansion. The period of Bodo agitation inflicted additional damage, with widespread deforestation reported during those years. Across the North-east, shifting cultivation remains a common practice. Forests are cleared and burned to grow crops, and once soil fertility declines after a few years, cultivators move on to new areas, repeating the cycle. After a gap of around fifteen years, when vegetation and humus regenerate, the original plots are reclaimed and cleared again. This cyclical clearing ensures that large landscapes remain perpetually disturbed. What survives as relatively intact forest is often confined to hilltops, where cultivation is not viable, leaving wildlife with fragmented and insufficient habitats.

The situation has been further complicated by the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006. While intended to correct historical injustices faced by forest-dwelling communities, the Act has been widely misused in the North-east, parts of central India and coastal regions. Claims over forest land have frequently extended beyond the stipulated cut-off date of December 13, 2005, enabling large-scale occupation of forest areas through clearing and burning. More than two decades

have passed since the cut-off, yet the misuse continues, fostering a culture of land grabbing and accelerating deforestation. In practice, the Act has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of forest loss in post-Independence India, with serious consequences for wildlife conservation.

Personal experience from within the system reveals how institutional priorities often skew against ecological concerns. A proposal by Central Coalfields Limited to lay a railway line through forests in Jharkhand was once scrutinised and rejected because the alignment had been deliberately chosen to pass through forest land to reduce the cost of acquiring private property. After a transfer of authority, the same proposal was eventually approved. A similar fate befell the Daitari-Banspani railway line through the forests of Odisha's Keonjhar district, initially rejected but later sanctioned, leading to a sharp rise in human-wildlife conflict and elephant fatalities. The proposal to double this line now threatens to exacerbate the problem further.

Elsewhere, resistance has been sustained but not decisive. The proposed Hubballi-Ankola railway line through the biodiverse forests of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka has been rejected multiple times over two decades due to its potential ecological damage. Yet the proposal continues to resurface with political backing each time there is a change in leadership. Similarly, the Sharavathi pump storage project, which would submerge 200 hectares of pristine forest in the Western Ghats, has been repeatedly revived despite earlier rejections. Such projects, if approved, would not only devastate ecosystems but also undermine the livelihoods of local communities and intensify human-wildlife conflict.

Land is undeniably scarce, and development inevitably demands space. However, this reality cannot justify the unchecked diversion of forest land. Wherever diversion is unavoidable, robust mitigation measures must be integral to project design. Highways and railway lines need adequately spaced underpasses and overpasses to allow safe movement of wildlife. In elephant landscapes, new roads and railways should be elevated to prevent animals from being trapped on embankments. Existing lines must be retrofitted with modern detection systems, speed regulations and real-time coordination between railway and forest authorities. The cost of such measures is marginal compared to the irreversible loss of wildlife and biodiversity.

The stakes extend beyond wildlife conservation alone. Forests and wildlife are mutually reinforcing, and intact forests play a crucial role in climate regulation. At a time when the world has failed to transition away from fossil fuels at the necessary scale, forests remain among the most effective natural carbon sinks, capable of absorbing nearly one-third of human-generated greenhouse gas emissions. Destroying them for short-term gains undermines not only biodiversity but also long-term climate resilience. The deaths of elephants on railway tracks are not isolated accidents; they are symptoms of a deeper failure to reconcile development with ecological responsibility. Unless that balance is urgently restored, the tracks of progress will continue to be stained with avoidable tragedy. (the writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

Invisible, Exploited and Women's reality in India's digital workforce

By: Ambika Sharma

Over the last few decades, the future of work and the corporate industry has completely changed in a drastic manner, from off-line corporate offices to digital workspaces. In India, women's workforce participation has increased, especially with them taking part in the gig economy, professional digital roles, online internships and freelancing forums.

While these spaces might offer freedom, flexibility to work and foster a sense of independence and empowerment for women, they often come at the price of being paid less, harassed virtually, gendered biases and facing invisibility at workplaces.

Women are often viewed as a group of people who are "flexible to work with", "easy to manage" or "fortunate to get growth opportunities" at virtual work platforms, which makes them more prone to digital labour exploitation. Along with this, online workplace harassment, hierarchical biases and algorithmic abuse, being forms of digital gendered violence, can impact women's careers, mental health negatively and could make virtual workspaces unsafe and precarious to navigate for young working women.

Invisible Digital Labour and Gender Exploitation:

Across the country of India, the gig workers and freelancers have contributed significantly towards the creation and establishment of the digital economy, but they still remain invisible or ignored in terms of fair pay, proper recognition and job security and stability. According to an article by Women Entrepreneur's Review, in 2022, Indian Women earned only 81 per cent of what their male counterparts earned, with an average income of \$22/hour for women and \$27/hour for men in the digital and gig economy, showing the systemic and gendered undervaluation of women's work. Many women have reported being given low-skilled or low-profile tasks to do at work, and their contributions going unnoticed or uncredited in this

sector.

Shriya*, a 20-year-old freelance writer, says, "Clients which I get through Upwork and Fiverr, the platforms where I do freelance work, often assume that I will agree upon lower pay just because I am "starting out" or "easy to work with" though I possess the skills and competencies to do the freelance writing work. I am always negotiating and struggling to get fair pay and most of them refuse to pay fairly primarily due to their gendered mindsets and perceptions."

Professional work done through remote platforms also functions similarly in terms of safety and compensation. Women working as professionals or interns digitally at several organisations face digital workplace harassment in virtual meetings or large messaging platforms through being sent inappropriate and coercive requests or being excessively monitored under the pretext of "flexibility" and "essential performance".

Pooja*, a 27 year old remote professional, remembers, "My senior manager kept asking me to work late hours and talk to him personally over calls and one-to-one meeting because I was "easy and flexible to work". When I refused and resisted, I was given threats about downgrading my performance report at end of year. It felt extremely isolating and I couldn't even talk or discuss about this openly with anyone and eventually, I left the organization."

These real-life experiences reveal that digital labour exploitation and invisibility are deeply intertwined with gendered violence as it comes in forms of undervaluation, underrecognition of women's contribution, constant digital harassment, invisibility at work and coercive expectations across the workplace environments in the freelance, gig and remote professional sectors.

The Effects on Women's Careers and Lives:

The after-effects of facing and going through the digitalised gender labour exploitation are extreme and multi-layered in nature. Economically, it is often



seen that women are paid less than their male counterparts and their work is often undervalued, which could lead to limitations in career growth, ability to save more money for themselves and their family and become more financially independent and stable.

Alongside, the social factors such as gendered mindsets and rigid work expectations, combined with factors like invisibility, are tagged as "easy to manage" and constant harassment can lead to low self-esteem, stress, anxiety and self-doubt about one's abilities to work effectively.

Megha*, a social media intern, puts out, "Due to fear of being ignored or judged or mocked immensely by my colleagues, I have stopped sharing my ideas in virtual meetings and team messaging groups. Now, it has become extremely complicated and tiring that I have to keep justifying the significance of my presence in the company and proving my capabilities to work in the organization."

Also, my friend Anika*, a freelancer, explains, "It is not really about

being paid less or overworked, it is more about having mindset issues. People often view women as a group of people who are more 'adjusting', 'flexible' and easier to work with. I feel that this perception is deeply rooted within the gendered societal mindset, and this makes it easier for them to undervalue women's work and violate both personal and professional boundaries. Unless we change this mindset or perception, women will keep facing exploitation and invisibility in digital spaces.

In the gig economy, the invisibility of labour and the efforts put in by women at work can often result in burnout as women juggle many freelance projects or essential gig work, domestic duties, and underpaid work, while facing several questions about timeliness and the quality of their task completion. This often creates systematic gender inequality and limits women from participating altogether in digital job and labour markets.

Moreover, the digital gender harassment being faced through trolling, in-

appropriate messages being sent and hierarchical gender discrimination on digital team groups violates the standard procedures set for women in workplaces and often creates an unsafe work environment. The mindset of women being viewed as "adjustable" or "flexible" normalises the digital exploitation and blurs the boundary between growth opportunity and virtual gender abuse.

These experiences affect the confidence level, professional goals and willingness to pursue a career in the digital world in a negative way and leave working women professionals ignored and underrepresented in the virtual economy.

Creating Safer Digital Workplaces:

Addressing the issue of gendered digital labour exploitation and invisibility requires necessary policy and systemic measures at the grassroots levels:

Fair Pay and Recognition: Freelance and gig platforms and organisations must ensure that there is equal and fair

pay or compensation for equal work, provide visibility and credibility for essential contributions and keep the payment structure for work transparent for all genders.

Policy and Reporting Methods: There must be clear anti-harassment policies and safe reporting channels for employees at digital platforms and workplaces, this can be done through establishing a "Platform of Platforms", a set of policies that outline workplace culture and regulation for platforms and organizations. Also, these reporting channels must be accessible and responsive to complaints being sent regarding virtual workplace harassment or exploitation.

Community and Support Networks: Creating freelance, gig work and digital professional communities and networks for women in virtual labour can help women connect across various arenas, providing peer and legal support, women's empowerment and advocacy for and amongst each other.

Conclusion: Virtual Economy holds immense power to change careers of working women for the better, but unacknowledged and ignored gender digital exploitation and invisibility have threatened to undermine this ability. By acknowledging the workplace challenges faced by women in freelance, gig and remote professional roles and working towards ending digital gender violence faced by women at digital workspaces can help in creating more equitable and safer digital workplaces.

Also, empowering women in digital labour, creating intersectional and dynamic policies, and supportive community groups can turn digital workspaces from areas of gendered digital labour exploitation and violence to platforms of encouragement and emancipation.

Lastly, recognising digital labour exploitation and invisibility as a form of gendered digital violence is essential to ensure the safety, equity and dignity for women at work in the digital economy. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

The role of Women's nutrition literacy in food security in South Asia

By: Shoba Suri, Sajusha Ashok

The world is currently far from achieving the second of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), zero hunger (which subsumes the issue of access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food), by 2030. The United Nations estimates that 8.9 percent of the present global population suffers from hunger. Certain marginalised groups—for instance, based on gender, religion, class, caste, and region—experience food insecurity more acutely than others, thereby highlighting the link between the second SDG and other goals, such as SDG-5 (gender equality). The gender gap in food security, which was already stark before the COVID-19 pandemic, has only worsened. In 2021, the gender gap was 4.3 percent, and 31.9 percent of all women in the world were moderately or severely food insecure, compared to 27.6 percent of all men.

Even as South Asia has experienced economic growth in recent decades, nutrition and food security outcomes continue to be inadequate in the region. In 2020, 19.9 percent of the population suffered from severe food insecurity, rising from 13.5 percent in 2017. Regional and gender considerations intersect to impose a double burden on South Asian women. While the global average rate of poverty is 104 women for every 100 men, in South Asia, it is 109 women for every 100 men. Among the working population in South and Southwest Asia, 30.9 percent of women and 25.4 percent of men live in poverty, the highest rates in the Asia-Pacific region.

These statistics raise pertinent questions about the link between gender, and food and nutrition insecurity in South Asia, which this brief attempts to explore. To view these issues in isolation would be naive and pernicious. This brief examines how factors such as nutrition illiteracy and unemployment determine food security outcomes among women. It also presents certain policy recommendations to overcome these issues in South Asia.

Food Insecurity in South Asia

Despite its strong economic growth in recent years, South Asia fares poorly in the Global Hunger Index (GHI), recording the world's highest regional hunger level of 27.4 in 2022. According to GHI 2022, South Asian countries reported the highest levels of stunting and wasting. These trends are worrying for a region that is home to 600 million children and where over 33 percent of the population faces extreme poverty, a situation exacerbated by the pandemic. Of the 136 countries assessed, Afghanistan is the worst-ranked (109), followed by India (107), Pakistan (99), Bangladesh (84), Nepal (81), and Sri Lanka (64). Both Afghanistan and India face serious levels of hunger, with scores of 29.9 and 29.1, respectively. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka also face moderate levels of hunger.

Stunting is the highest in Afghanistan (38.2 percent), followed by Pakistan (37.6 percent), and India (35.5 percent), while wasting among children under five years of age is the highest in India (19.3 percent) and Sri Lanka (15 percent), and the lowest in Afghanistan (5.1 percent) (see Figure 1). In 2022, Afghanistan recorded an estimated 1.1 million malnourished children due to natural calamities such as droughts, political and economic instability, and food and fuel price increases in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war. Afghanistan is also home to the world's largest undernourished

population (29.8 percent). Indeed, the poor nutritional status of mothers and low levels of education have been identified as crucial factors for high stunting in children under five years in South Asian countries.

Women, Food and Nutrition Literacy, and Food Security

Food literacy can be defined as "the ability to make appropriate food decisions to support individual health and a sustainable food system, considering environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political contexts". Nutrition literacy, on the other hand, is the ability to procure, process, and comprehend basic nutritional information necessary to make suitable nutrition decisions. Food literacy subsumes a larger set of skills and knowledge, whereas nutrition literacy is a prerequisite to attain the former. Both terms are complementary in nature and fall within the umbrella term of "health literacy."

The relationship between food and nutrition literacy and food security is twofold: insufficiency in the former can lead to an exacerbation of the latter; and being food insecure can thwart an individual's ability to use food literacy behaviours to achieve good diet quality. However, even as food literacy can enhance food security through knowledge and skills that can help increase income, food insecurity issues are complex and multidimensional, of which food and nutrition illiteracy is but one dimension. The role of women in various dimensions of food security cannot be overemphasised. Women play a vital role in sustaining the four dimensions (availability, access, utilisation, and stability) of food security—as food producers, farmers and entrepreneurs; as "gatekeepers" who invest time and income and make crucial decisions that ensure the food and nutrition security of their households and communities; and as managers of food resources in instances of economic crises. Nutrition security—i.e., ensuring sufficient protein, minerals, energy, and micronutrients for all members of a household—remains primarily the domain of women, especially in developing countries. There is an element of care or affective labour involved in ensuring that household members' nutritional, social and psychological needs are met, which then affects nutrition security through feeding practices and health and hygiene measures. Further, a woman's nutrition status also determines her child's post-partum nutrition status. Household food security is also contingent on who earns the income that is spent on food; research has shown that a greater proportion of women's earnings than men's are spent on food for the family. Gender inequality and discrimination can thus severely affect the nutrition and food outcomes of individuals worldwide.

Links Between Women's Empowerment and Food Security

A 2020 scoping paper on 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition' details the significant connection between gender equality and female empowerment, and countries' economic growth and ability to mitigate food insecurity. For instance, Bangladesh deployed a rights-based, livelihood approach to mitigate gender inequalities in nutrition. Research found links between women's empowerment policies and reduced low birth weight, mortality, infant stunting, and child malnutrition. Evidence also points to a positive correlation between women's empowerment and

enhanced diversity of production. This illustrates that focusing on the role of women during food production and providing them with the agency to make decisions can lead to significant improvements in nutrition outcomes.

Another case in point is EKATA, a project implemented in Burundi to understand how women's autonomy changes food outcomes. It found that when women took charge of decision making, those assessed experienced lesser food deficit during lean seasons.

Another study conducted in farm households in Tunisia indicated that, although 30 percent of women residing in smallholder households feel "disempowered" (as measured by the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index, and which includes decisions about agricultural production and over productive resources, and control over income, leadership and time use), there was a positive association between women's empowerment and dietary diversity, even when factors such as household standards, education, and production diversity were controlled. A study undertaken in the Gedarif and Rahad localities in Sudan also found that households where women engaged in income-generating and farm activities had a greater potential to improve household food security.

There is also a link between women's empowerment and food access and availability. For instance, the Agrifood Support Program implemented in Nicaragua focused specifically on livestock transfer by providing a livestock package and other specialised assistance in management, commercialisation, and financial literacy. Beneficiaries of the programme, of which 90 percent were women, were given the freedom to choose livestock packages as per the size of their farms and other requirements via non-reimbursable vouchers. The results indicate that food availability increased through improvements in agricultural productivity and livestock production, food access through higher income from the sale of livestock and consumption, and food consumption through increased protein intake. Additionally, the initiative promoted the creation of farmer groups for training, and women organised and assimilated into communities even after the programme ended.

Assessing Existing Food Security Policies in South Asia

The South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative (SAFANSI), which aims to confront the 'South Asian enigma' of high chronic malnutrition rates despite economic growth, is the most significant food security policy in the region. SAFANSI was implemented in two phases—first, between 2010 and 2015, to push the nutrition and food security agenda in South Asia; and second, beginning in December 2014, which focused on capacity building and driving behavioral changes to improve food security outcomes. The initiative included community-based nutrition programmes that enabled people to control their own nutritional choices and habits rather than relying on centralised actions. Many South Asian countries also have policies that are geared to improve women's nutrition and the food security of their families, but there are still many gaps to overcome. In India, for instance, although women constitute almost half of the population (48 percent) as per 2011 Census, they contribute only 18 percent to the GDP as of 2018, indicating the need for significant measures to address the challenges faced by women. (Courtesy: ORF)

Tips for travelling in winter

By: Shahnaz Husain

Winter is upon us. The season of blankets, quilts and snow is finally here!

Well, several people must have already planned their winter travel to experience snow-covered landscapes, festive vibes, and cosy moments.

As the weather tends to change quickly, especially during winter, travelling during the season can make the skin dry and dull.

The drop in temperature, low humidity levels, and harsh winds strip moisture from the skin, leading to dryness, irritation, and worsening of existing skin conditions.

Winter vacations sound delightful, yet your travel plans may throw unexpected and unpleasant surprises if you are not sufficiently prepared.

Whether you're exploring picturesque mountain towns or bustling winter markets, taking care of your skin and hair should be your top priority.

Winter air is notoriously dry, and dehydration can sneak up on you. The changing weather during travel can affect the skin, causing allergies, dryness, chapping, and conditions like eczema.

1. Hydrations

Proper hydration in winter is just as important as in warm weather. Contrary to popular belief, the cold doesn't spare your body from water depletion, and the risk of dehydration is just as high. Dry air, heating, and low temperatures contribute to silent dehydration.

Carry an insulated bottle that keeps drinks warm and opt for herbal teas (ginger, chamomile), warm water with lemon, soups, and water-rich foods (citrus, soups) to hydrate comfortably. Drink water first thing in the morning to rehydrate after sleep. Flavoured seltzer, herbal tea and milk are all excellent alternatives to plain water if you're looking to mix things up. These flavoured waters allow you to vary your fluid intake.

Citrus fruits (lemon, grapefruit, clementine, etc.), apples, cabbage, carrots, and pumpkin naturally provide water to the body. Incorporating these foods into your diet is a simple first step to staying well-hydrated.

Satisfy the urge to snack with hydrating foods such as sliced fruit, pre-cut veggies or a container of yoghurt.

Avoid dehydrating caffeine/tea/alcohol, which increases urine production and leads to additional fluid loss. But they should be consumed in moderation only.

To hydrate your skin during cold weather, apply a rich moisturising cream daily. Opt for oils or balms for sensitive areas (lips, hands). Humidify the indoor air

with a bowl of water or a humidifier. Wear soft, non-irritating clothing to limit skin water loss and protect the skin from the cold.

2. Facial scrub

Winter can leave your skin in a catch-22 situation. If you are going for a longer duration of 10-15 days, then carry a facial scrub that will exfoliate the skin, remove the dead cells, remove impurities, and lighten dark spots and blemishes. Strictly choose the products as per the expert's recommendation.

A good exfoliator or face scrub will gently remove the dead skin cells, purify and cleanse away grime and revitalise dull skin for a healthy glow; all this while retaining the skin's natural oil content, and further enhancing the properties of your moisturiser.

Pamper your skin with some skin-loving sugar scrubs that fight dryness, flakiness and dullness, and leave your skin healthy, hydrated and happy even if it is freezing outside.

While using a physical scrub, wet your fingers and massage them over your face. Once you've worked the exfoliator into your skin in small, circular motions, rinse using lukewarm water and pat your face dry.

Think about travel essentials and how to limit your grooming needs, so that you look pleasing and enjoy your trip. Travelling light is an advantage, so you need items that are compact and portable. Get yourself a spacious shoulder bag and two small, plastic-lined cases for your toiletries and make-up. Your beauty aids should be within easy reach, so that you can freshen up your make-up and alight from your journey looking attractive and self-confident. Searching for a lipstick or comb in a cluttered handbag can really test your patience.

A short hairdo that you can just brush and arrange is good, while for long hair, take along a headband and hair clips, to keep your hair tidy. Remember to take a scarf along to protect your hair from over-exposure to the sun, as well as from wind and dust. You will need it if you are out motor-ing, boating or even walking by the seaside or hills.

The make-up items and clothes you carry depend on what your trip entails. If you are holidaying in a big city and expect to meet people, you will need a few good clothes and accessories for dining out. Take a few in-between outfits that are neither too casual nor too dressy. You will also need makeup cosmetics for the night.

The lighting at night demands more colour, so include darker shades of lipstick, blush-on, eye-shadow and mascara. A hairpiece can provide instant glamour. Don't forget to take your perfume, one or two good accessories and a neutral evening purse that goes

with your dressy outfits. These will help to add the finishing touches.

If you are on a sightseeing trip or on a vacation by the sea or mountains, the emphasis will be on comfort. Casual wrinkle-free clothes, lightweight shoes and sunglasses will be needed. On a vacation, one probably needs to carry more skin care cosmetics and fewer makeup aids. An anti-tan sunscreen or sunblock would be good. The effects of sun exposure are greater by the waterside or near snow, because water and snow are reflective surfaces. By the sea, avoid sun-exposure between noon and 3 p.m. Apply broad-spectrum sunscreen when out in the sun, not only on the face, but on all exposed areas. Apply the sunscreen 20 minutes before going out. If you are out in the sun for more than an hour, reapply the sunscreen. Use a high SPF of 30 or above for sensitive skin.

Apart from sunscreen, you need skin and hair care essentials, like cleanser, moisturiser, leave-on conditioner and hair serum. For your make-up, carry a powder compact, eye pencil, kajal stick and lipsticks that are suitable for day wear. Perhaps a lip gloss will do. By the beach, you need makeup products that are "waterproof" or "long lasting" and provide a matte finish.

Remember to pack lip balm, saline nasal spray and travel-size hand cream, too. If you usually wear contacts, opt for a pair of glasses on the plane to avoid dry eyes.

You will also need pressed powder (compact) and powder blush-on. Remember to take a few tissues. If you have oily skin, pre-moistened tissues are what you need. Carry them in your handbag when you go out, to clean and refresh your skin. Apart from these, take a deodorant and talcum powder.

Travel adds a wonderful dimension to one's life and personality. It enriches our experience and broadens our outlook. Travel also means a time that is refreshing and renewing. There is nothing more enjoyable than getting away from everyday and unwinding. If you have taken care of your travel needs, all you have to do is relax and enjoy!



India announces USD 450 mn package

COLOMBO, Dec 23: India on Tuesday announced a reconstruction package of USD 450 million to Cyclone Ditwah-hit Sri Lanka, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met with the island nation's top leaders and assured Delhi's steadfast commitment to Colombo's rebuilding post-cyclone.

Jaishankar, who arrived here as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Special Envoy, said that it was natural for India to step forward at a time when Sri Lanka faced a crisis. The minister called President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and conveyed PM Modi's warm wishes and message of solidarity in the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah.

"The Letter from Prime Minister Modi that I handed over builds on our First Responder role and commits a reconstruction package of USD 450 million to Sri Lanka," Jaishankar said while addressing the press alongside Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath.

Jaishankar said he had a detailed discussion with the President on the damage caused by Cyclone Ditwah and their talks centred around how expeditiously India's assistance package can be delivered.

"The assistance package that we have proposed is worth USD 450

million. It will include USD 350 million in concessional Lines of Credit and USD 100 million of grants," he said.

He said that the assistance will cover sectors worst affected by the cyclone, including rehabilitation and restoration of road, railway and bridge connectivity; support for the construction of damaged houses, support for health and education systems, agriculture, and working towards better disaster response and preparedness.

"We are conscious that work towards mitigating the impact of Cyclone Ditwah on the people of Sri Lanka must be done in the quickest time possible. We are discussing an effective coordination mechanism for the earliest possible delivery," he said.

Jaishankar and his counterpart Herath jointly inaugurated a 120-foot dual carriageway Bailey Bridge in the Kilinochchi District of Northern Province, one of the areas severely affected by the cyclone, in the presence of President Dissanayake. The 110-tonne bridge was air-lifted from India and installed as part of Operation Sagar Bandhu.

Given the scale of damage, restoring connectivity was clearly an immediate priority, and this was in fact discussed between President Dissanayake and PM Modi in



their telephone call, Jaishankar said. He said that a large number of Army Engineers erected the Bailey bridge, transported by C-17 aircraft at Killinochchi. One more Bailey bridge at Chilaw is currently under construction.

He said India's relief and assistance mission - Operation Sagar Bandhu - commenced on the very day that Cyclone Ditwah made landfall.

"Overall, Operation Sagar Bandhu delivered over 1100 tonnes of relief material, including dry rations, tents, tarpaulins, hygiene kits, essential clothing and water purification kits. About 14.5 tons of medicines and medical

equipment were also provided. Yet another 60 tons of equipment was brought to Sri Lanka to assist the relief operations," he said.

He also met Health Minister Nalinda Jayatissa, Labour & Deputy Finance Minister Anil Jayantha and Deputy Tourism Minister Ruwan Ranasinghe and discussed the implementation of the reconstruction package offered and further relief measures. He reiterated India's full support to Sri Lanka's recovery and rebuilding.

The minister also interacted with members of the Indian Business community based in Sri Lanka and applauded their contributions towards providing relief during Cyclone Ditwah.

He met Leader of Opposition Sajith Premadasa and discussed India's proposed reconstruction package.

"In difficult times, true neighbours always come forward. Thank you @DrSJaishankar for India's support to Sri Lanka when it mattered most. May we always choose to stand together as the best of neighbours," Premadasa said.

Jaishankar, who is on a two-day visit to the island nation, said, "Just as Sri Lanka was recovering from the economic crisis of 2022, this natural disaster has created 'new' difficulties."

He said India's relief and assistance mission commenced on the

very day that Cyclone Ditwah made landfall.

The aircraft carrier INS Vikrant and another ship, INS Udayagiri, delivered relief material. Several Mi-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force were active for a period of more than two weeks in Sri Lanka.

An 80-member National Disaster Response Force contingent arrived simultaneously and conducted rescue and relief operations. The Indian Army set up a field hospital with 85 medical personnel near Kandy, giving emergency care to more than 8,000 people. Two modular BHISHM emergency care units were also air-lifted to Sri Lanka and utilised.

In terms of other ways to assist Sri Lanka, Jaishankar said India would encourage Indian tourism to Sri Lanka, as the island nation is a significant tourism economy.

"Similarly, an increase in Foreign Direct Investment from India can also boost your economy at a critical time. Our discussions will therefore keep in mind promoting a deeper cooperative relationship between our two countries," he said. Noting that this is a very difficult period for Sri Lanka, Jaishankar assured that India stands firmly with Sri Lanka more than ever before.

"We have seen in the past the strong resolve and strength among

the people of Sri Lanka to overcome challenges and to march ahead," he said, adding that he was sure that Sri Lankans will once again demonstrate great resilience in recovering from this adversity.

Foreign Minister Herath appreciated Jaishankar's visit as the PM's Special Envoy, saying his trip "underscores India's steadfast solidarity with Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the adverse weather conditions caused by Cyclone Ditwah".

Sri Lanka and India share a long-standing, multi-dimensional relationship rooted in geographical proximity, deep historical and cultural ties, shared values and expanding economic linkages, Herath said.

"We deeply value India's continued support in stabilising the Sri Lankan economy through multi-pronged assistance, including emergency financing and foreign exchange support, as well as USD 20.66 million extended to settle payments due for projects completed under existing lines of credit."

"We also sincerely appreciate India's crucial role in Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process, including as co-chair of the Officer Creditors Committee, which enabled the timely conclusion of discussions," he said. (PTI)

Major Russian drone and missile attack on Ukraine kills at least 3 people and cuts power

KYIV, Dec 23: Russia fired more than 650 drones and three dozen missiles at Ukraine in a large-scale attack that began during the night and stretched into daylight hours Tuesday, officials said. At least three people were killed, including a 4-year-old child.

The barrage struck homes and the power grid in 13 regions of Ukraine, causing widespread outages in bitter temperatures, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, a day after he described recent progress on finding a peace deal "quite solid."

The bombardment demonstrated Russian President Vladimir Putin's intention of prosecuting the invasion of Ukraine, Zelenskyy said in a post on the Telegram messaging app. Ukrainian and European officials have complained that Putin is not sincerely engaging with US-led peace efforts.

The attack "is an extremely clear signal of Russian priorities," Zelenskyy said. "A strike before Christmas, when people want to be with their families, at home, in safety. A strike, in fact, in the midst of negotiations that are being conducted to end this war. Putin cannot accept the fact that we must stop killing."



US President Donald Trump has for months been pressing for a peace agreement, but the negotiations have become entangled in the very different demands from Moscow and Kyiv.

US envoy Steve Witkoff said Sunday he held "productive and constructive" talks in Florida with Ukrainian and European representatives. Trump was less effusive Monday, saying, "The talks are going along."

Initial reports from Ukrainian emergency services said the toddler died in Ukraine's northwestern Zhytomyr region, while a drone

killed a woman in the Kyiv region, and another civilian death was recorded in the western Khmelnytskyi region, according to Zelenskyy. Authorities in the western regions of Rivne, Ternopil and Lviv, as well as the northern Sumsy region, reported damage to energy infrastructure or power outages after the attack.

In the southern Odesa region, Russia struck energy, port, transport, industrial and residential infrastructure, according to regional head Oleh Kiper.

A merchant ship and over 120 homes were damaged, he said. (AP)

S Korea lawmakers pass bill to establish rebellion courts after complaints about Yoon case

SEOUL, Dec 23: South Korea's legislature on Tuesday passed a bill mandating specialised panels in Seoul's district and high courts for cases involving rebellion, treason and foreign subversion after complaints about the pace of the rebellion trial of jailed former President Yoon Suk Yeol.

But the bill, which is likely to be signed into law by President Lee Jae Myung, would fall short of the effect the Democratic Party initially sought from the liberal-led legislature. Lawmakers altered the wording to ensure the measure would not apply to ongoing trials. Critics have said the original draft risked infringing on judicial independence.

The law would require the Seoul Central District Court and the Seoul High Court to establish at least two specialised panels for cases involving rebellion, treason and foreign subversion. Each panel must consist of a three-judge bench selected by the judges' council at each court.

The bill passed the legislature 175-2 with two abstentions after many conservatives boycotted the vote.

The vote was delayed after Jang Dong-hyuk, the leader of the conservative People Power Party, staged a



24-hour filibuster, arguing that the bill remained unconstitutional even after repeated revisions and accusing Democrats of pressuring courts to create benches they favour. Following Tuesday's vote, PPP leaders called on Lee to veto the bill.

The law would go into effect immediately after Lee signs the bill, but it will not apply to Yoon's ongoing

rebellion trial, which is expected to reach a verdict in early 2026. If Yoon's case reaches the high court, it would be handled by the specialised panels.

Yoon was a staunch conservative who declared martial law in December 2024 to suppress what he called the "anti-state" liberals obstructing his agenda. He was removed from of-

fice in April and re-arrested in July over his botched power grab that lasted only hours. He faces a slew of serious charges, including rebellion, which is punishable by life in prison or the death penalty.

The Democratic Party has repeatedly criticised a judge at the Seoul Central District Court who is handling Yoon's rebellion case, claiming he has delayed proceedings by spacing out hearings and arguing that courts should reconsider the long-standing practice of randomly assigning judges in cases of exceptional importance such as rebellion.

The judge, Jee Kui-youn, initially drew the ire of liberals in March by approving Yoon's release from prison following his first arrest, allowing him to stand trial without detention until his rearrest in July.

The liberals' complaints grew after other judges rejected investigators' requests for arrest warrants on some key figures close to Yoon, including former Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and senior conservative lawmaker Choo Kyung-ho. Han and Choo were accused, respectively, of aiding Yoon's declaration of martial law and obstructing lawmakers from participating in a vote to lift the measure. (AP)

At least 5 killed after Mexican Navy plane on medical mission crashes in Texas



GALVESTON (US), Dec 23: A small Mexican Navy plane transporting a young medical patient and seven others crashed Monday near Galveston, killing at least five people and setting off a search in waters along the Texas coast, officials said.

Four of the people aboard were Navy officers, and four were civilians, including a child, Mexico's Navy said in a statement to The Associated Press. Two of the passengers were from a nonprofit that provides aid to Mexican children with severe burns, including transports to a Galveston hospital.

US Coast Guard Petty Officer Luke Baker said at least five passengers had died but did not identify which passengers.

The cause of the crash is under investigation. Mexico's Marines said in a statement that it is sending "its deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in this tragic accident."

The crash took place Monday afternoon in Galveston Bay near the base of the causeway that connects Galveston Island to the mainland. Emergency responders and search teams rushed to the scene near the popular beach destination along the Texas coast that is about 50 miles (80.5 kilometres) southeast of Houston.

Sky Decker, a professional yacht captain who lives about a mile (1.6 kilometres) from the crash site, said he jumped in his boat to see if he could help. He said he picked up two police officers who directed him through thick fog to a nearly completely submerged plane. Decker

jumped in the water and found a badly injured woman trapped beneath chairs and other debris.

"I couldn't believe. She had maybe 3 inches of air gap to breathe in," he said. "And there was jet fuel in there mixed with the water; the fumes were really bad. She was really fighting for her life."

He said he also pulled out a man sitting in front of her who had already died. He described both of them as dressed in civilian clothes.

Mexico's Navy said the plane was helping with a medical mission in coordination with the Michou and Mau Foundation, which provides emergency transports to children with life-threatening burns to Shriners Children's Hospital in Galveston, according to the nonprofit's website.

The foundation said in a post on social media, "We express our deepest solidarity with the families in light of these events. We share their grief with respect and compassion, honouring their memory and reaffirming our commitment to providing humane, sensitive, and dignified care to children with burns."

The statement from Mexico's Navy said the plane had an "accident" during its approach to Galveston but did not elaborate.

Teams from the Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board have arrived at the scene of the crash, the Texas Department of Public Safety said on the social platform X.

A spokesperson from NTSB said they are "aware of this accident and are gathering information about it." The Galveston County Sheriff's Office said officials from its dive team, crime scene unit, drone unit and patrol were responding to the crash.

It's not immediately clear if the weather was a factor. The area has been experiencing foggy conditions over the past few days, according to Cameron Battiste, a National Weather Service meteorologist. He said that at about 2:30 pm on Monday, fog came in that had about a half-mile visibility. (AP)

Imran Khan directs KPK CM Afridi to prepare for street movement against 'Asim Law'

LAHORE, Dec 23: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has directed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi of his party to prepare for a street movement against "Asim Law", in an apparent reference to Chief of Defence Forces Asim Munir.

Khan, 73, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces multiple cases launched against him since his ouster from power in April 2022. He and his wife, Bushra Bibi, were sentenced to 17 years in jail each by a court on Saturday in the Toshakhana 2 corruption case.

"My message for Sohail Afridi is to prepare for a street movement. The entire nation must rise for its rights. To strive for justice is a sacred duty, and I am ready to lay down my life for Haqqeqi Azadi (true freedom) of my nation," Khan said in a post on X on Monday.

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) founder further said that Pakistan is being governed solely under "Asim Law".

"Here, verdicts are pre-written and merely announced aloud. Like the baseless decisions and sentences of the past three years, the Toshakhana 2 verdict is nothing new for me. This ruling, too, was delivered in haste, without any evidence and without fulfilling legal requirements," Khan

said. Khan said that the solitary confinement imposed on him and his wife constitutes severe mental torture.

"We are barred from books, television, and meetings. Although television access is granted to every other prisoner, even this fundamental facility has been withheld from Bushra Bibi and me. The books sent by my family are confiscated by jail authorities, and we are kept in solitary confinement for weeks at a time," he said.

"This treatment is inhumane, yet all this oppression and brutality cannot weaken my resolve," he said, adding that it is not "our tradition to target women and children as our religion mandates mercy toward women even during warfare, yet here they are being persecuted purely out of political vendetta."

Khan also lambasted the military-backed government of Shehbaz Sharif.

"When I criticise Asim Munir, it is criticism of an individual, just as past dictators were criticised. Asim Munir did not come into power through a public referendum or popular vote. Whatever is happening to me in jail is being carried out on the instructions of a colonel acting under Asim Munir's orders," he claimed. (PTI)

Japan gets local consent, clearing last major hurdle to restart the world's largest nuclear plant

TOKYO, Dec 23: The governor of Niigata on Tuesday formally gave local consent to put two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in the north-central prefecture back online, clearing a last hurdle toward restarting the plant idled for more than a decade following the 2011 meltdowns at another plant managed by the same utility.

Gov. Hideyo Hanazumi, in his meeting with Economy and Industry Minister Ryosei Akazawa, conveyed the prefecture's "endorsement" to restart the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, accepting the government's pledge to ensure safety, emergency response and understanding of the residents.

Restart preparations for No. 6 reactor have moved ahead, and utility company TEPCO is expected to apply for a final safety inspection by the Nuclear Safety Authority later this week, ahead of a possible resumption



in January. Work at the other reactor is expected to take a few more years.

The move comes one day after the Niigata prefectural assembly adopted a budget bill that included funding necessary for a restart, supporting the governor's earlier consent.

"It was a heavy and difficult decision," Hanazumi told reporters. Hanazumi also met with Prime

Minister Sanae Takaichi, who also supports nuclear energy, and asked her to visit to observe the safety at the plant. Japan once planned to phase out atomic power following the disaster at the Fukushima plant caused by an earthquake and tsunami. But in the face of global fuel shortages, rising prices and pressure to reduce carbon emissions, the government has

reversed its policy and is now seeking to increase nuclear energy use by accelerating reactor restarts, extending their operational lifespan and considering building new ones.

Of the 57 commercial reactors, 13 are currently in operation, 20 are offline, and 24 others are being decommissioned, according to the nuclear authorities. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, which comprises seven reactors, is the world's biggest. The plant has been offline since 2012 as part of nationwide reactor shutdowns in response to the March 2011 triple meltdowns at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Reactors No. 6 and 7 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa had cleared safety tests in 2017, but their restart preparations were suspended after a series of safeguarding problems were found in 2021. The Nuclear Regulation Authority lifted an operational ban at the plant in 2023. Its resumption again

faced uncertainty following the Jan 1, 2024, earthquake in the nearby Noto region that rekindled safety concerns among local residents about the plant and evacuation in case of a major disaster. The industry ministry sought an early resumption approval from Niigata two months later.

In Japan, a reactor restart is subject to the local community's consent.

TEPCO, heavily burdened with the growing cost of decades-long decommissioning and compensation for residents affected by the Fukushima disaster, has been anxious to resume its only workable nuclear plant to improve its business. TEPCO has been struggling to regain public trust in safely running a nuclear power plant.

Aside from plant safety, experts say acceleration of reactor restarts also raises concern in a country without full nuclear fuel reprocessing or plans for radioactive waste management. (AP)

Itanagar Police detain two more from J&K; investigation ongoing

Five arrested in Arunachal espionage probe with Pakistan links



ITANAGAR, Dec 23: The Itanagar Police has arrested two persons from Jammu and Kashmir for alleged espionage activities in Arunachal Pradesh, an officer said on Tuesday. Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) Chukhu Apa said the two persons were arrested from Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir on December 18, and they have been brought to the state, where they are currently in police custody.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Aijaz Ahmed Bhat and Bashir Ahmad Ganai.

The IGP said that another person who was earlier detained from Miao in Changlang district has been released after investigators found no material evidence linking him to the espionage activities.

According to the police officer, the accused were allegedly involved in collecting sensitive information from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh and sharing it with handlers based in Pakistan.

The case first came to light on November 21, when police arrested Nazir Ahmad Malik and Sabir Ahmed Mir, both residents of Kupwara district in Jammu and Kashmir, following specific intelligence inputs about their suspected involvement in spying activities.

Malik was initially detained from Ganga village in Itanagar, and based on information obtained from him, Mir was arrested later the same day from Abotani colony, in the state capital.

West Siang police arrested one Hilal Ahmed, also from Kupwara district, from a shop at Aalo, the district headquarters town, who was running a cloth shop at the trade fair in Old Market.

Changlang police had also arrested one Gulam Md Mir from Miao, who was later released by police.

The arrested individuals were mostly blanket sellers who travelled to various parts of the state to collect information, the IGP said. "We were working based on credible infor-

mation about a spy ring operating out of Arunachal Pradesh. Under the leadership of Itanagar SP Jummur Basar, the team worked diligently and made these arrests. Two have been arrested from Kupwara and three from different locations in the Itanagar Capital Region," Apa said.

On the possibility of further arrests, the IGP said that interrogation of the accused is continuing, and forensic examination reports are awaited.

"We will proceed further based on evidence in the coming days. The arrested individuals are mostly blanket sellers who visited various parts of the state to collect information," he added. Expressing concern over lax verification practices, Apa urged citizens to remain vigilant.

"I appeal to the people of Arunachal Pradesh to carry out police verification before allowing anyone to stay on your property for safety reasons. Do not let people stay in your house without proper verification," he said. (PTI)

ASMITA City League Football Tournament kicks off in Itanagar



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 23: The ASMITA City League Football Tournament among Khelo India Centres (KICs) of Arunachal Pradesh was formally inaugurated on Tuesday at the Football Ground of Sangay Lhaden Sports Academy (SLSA), Itanagar.

The tournament features participation from 13 Khelo India Centres with a total of 210 athletes and coaches competing in the league. On the opening day, two matches were played. KIC Tawang defeated KIC Miao, Changlang 1-0, while KIC Golden Jubilee School, Pasigat edged past KIC Namsai by the same scoreline.

The opening ceremony was graced by Lokam Sikio, newly elected Corporator of Ward No 1, Itanagar Municipal Corporation, as the chief guest. Other dignitaries present included Mala Lingi, Deputy Director (Sports); Karbia Dodum, Assistant Director (Sports); Likha Vidha, Principal, SLSA and Nada Apa, Sports Officer (HQ).

The Arunachal Pradesh Football Association (APFA) deputed Nani Halyi, Head Coach of the State Junior Girls Football Team to scout promising talent during the tournament. Addressing the athletes and coaches, Chief Guest Sikio encouraged young girls to actively participate in sports, particularly football, highlighting women's growing achievements across various fields as a positive development for the state and nation.

The ASMITA City League Football Tournament will continue until December 27, 2025.

Workshop on good governance held in Upper Siang

Event organised under Good Governance Week campaign 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur'

HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, Dec 23: As part of the nationwide Good Governance Week (GGW) celebrations being observed from December 19 to 25, 2025, the District Administration, Upper Siang, organised a workshop on good governance practices and initiatives under the week-long campaign "Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur" at the DC office conference hall in Yingkiang.

Kabit Apang, APCS AG (Retd), graced the programme as the chief guest. Addressing the gathering, Apang expressed happiness at being invited to a workshop focused on introspection and re-dedication towards public service. He underscored the importance of accountability, punctuality, diligence and sincerity in the discharge of official duties and called upon all participants to work with commitment for the welfare of the general public and the holistic development of the district and the nation.

Deputy Commissioner of Upper Siang, Talo Jerang, elaborated on the objectives of observing Good Governance Week and highlighted the series of activities planned during the week in accordance with GGW guidelines. He emphasised the government's mission of ensuring that all welfare schemes and services reach the last person standing, right at the doorstep of beneficiaries.

Speaking on the behavioural aspects of government employees, the Deputy Commissioner stressed that courteous manners and benevolent behaviour towards public visitors are integral components of good governance. He urged all officials to inculcate such values to create a public-friendly office environment.

The Deputy Commissioner also expressed sincere gratitude to administrative officers, heads of departments, government officials, police, security personnel and the general public for their cooperation and support in ensuring the peaceful and successful conduct of the Panchayat Elections 2025 in Upper Siang district, attributing the success to the collective proactiveness and dedication of all stakeholders.

During the interaction session, DDSE Duhon Tekseng and ADTH Onam Darang



Pertin apprised the gathering of their respective departmental initiatives undertaken as part of good governance practices. Dr India Modi highlighted various initiatives of the Health Department, while Dr Ahik Miyu, DTO (NTEP), spoke on the government's TB Elimination Programme, explaining the Nikshay Mitra initiative and appealed to participants to

come forward as donors.

Kasimang Jopir Pazing, president of APWWS Yingkiang, expressed gratitude to the district administration for involving women's organisations in such programmes and reaffirmed her commitment to work for the economic and social upliftment of women. Yaham Tali Nangkar, president of the Adi Bane Kebang Women

Wing, Upper Siang and also a Nikshay Mitra, highlighted the need to curb drug abuse and called upon the district administration to intensify anti-drug campaigns, assuring her full support.

The workshop was attended by all administrative officers, heads of departments, government officials and other stakeholders.

KT Parnaik calls for sustained vigilance to thwart attempts to disrupt stability

Governor urges community-focused security to safeguard peace along Arunachal Pradesh's borders

ITANAGAR, Dec 23: Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik on Tuesday called for sustained vigilance to counter any attempt to disturb the stability of the border state.

Chairing a high-level security review meeting at Lok Bhavan here, the governor said the administration and security agencies must adopt a people-centric approach to eliminate fear and instil confidence among the people.

He stressed that people can progress only when they feel safe in their homes and communities, particularly in sensitive and border areas and urged district administrations to remain constantly alert and responsive, an official statement said.

Parnaik cautioned that "external forces and elements from neighbouring states" could attempt to create disturbances. Referring to recent arrests of alleged Pakistani agents, he said preparedness and vigilance were essential to safeguard peace and stability.

The meeting was attended by Home Minister Mama Natung, Chief Secretary Manish Gupta, senior state government officials, representatives of the state police, Assam Rifles, Border Roads Organisation and the Central Reserve Police Force, besides the deputy commissioners and superintend-



ents of police of Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts. The review was a follow-up to

the security meet held at Namsai on July 26, the statement said. The home minister highlighted

key initiatives of the state government aimed at strengthening internal security. (PTI)

Arunachal Pradesh launches AI & ML skilling programme for students and youth

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 23: The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has announced the launch of an Artificial Intelligence (AI-ML) Skilling Programme in collaboration with Rancho-nation Labs Pvt Ltd., supported by IIT Delhi. The initiative aims to equip students and youths of the state with cutting-edge AI and ML skills, enhancing their employability in emerging technology sectors.

The programme offers a 60-hour AI Job Ready course designed for college students, graduates and young professionals, focusing on practical skills and industry-relevant knowledge. In addition, a 5-day AI Explorer Bootcamp has been introduced for school students from Classes 6 to 12, providing them with an early exposure to AI concepts and hands-on learning experiences.

The training programme is scheduled to commence on 12 January 2026 and interested participants are encouraged to enroll to benefit from this state-supported initiative aimed at building a skilled workforce in artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Siang district reviews water conservation and protection measures under Jal Jeevan Mission



HT Correspondent

BOLENG, Dec 23: A meeting of the District Water & Sanitation Mission (DWSM), Siang District was held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Tayi Taggu, Deputy Commissioner, Siang District. The meeting focused on reviewing the implementation of Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB) 2.0 and discussing legal and administrative measures for the protection of rural drinking water supply infrastructure under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

During the meeting, participants deliberated on community-led water conservation initiatives, rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge activities. The preparation of district work plans for the financial year 2025-26

and reporting of works through the JSJB portal were also discussed. Special emphasis was laid on safeguarding drinking water sources and infrastructure, including intake points, pipelines, reservoirs and treatment plants.

The Deputy Commissioner highlighted the importance of declaring drinking water sources as Protected Drinking Water Zones and strengthening enforcement to prevent contamination, vandalism and illegal activities. He also stressed enhancing community participation through Pani Samitis and Village Water & Sanitation Committees to ensure sustainable water management.

The meeting was attended by members of the District Executive Committee and officers from the concerned line departments.

Part-time politician Rahul defames constitutional bodies, disrespects country abroad: Nitin Nabin



PATNA, Dec 23: BJP working president Nitin Nabin on Tuesday called Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi a "part-time politician", who defamed "constitutional bodies" like the Election Commission while in the country, and spoke ill of his motherland on trips abroad.

Without mentioning RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav by name, Nabin also remarked "there is another part-time politician in Bihar, too", who failed to attend the recent state assembly session, and was "enjoying a trip abroad".

"In contrast, we, in the BJP, are full-time politicians who believe in working 24x7. The time has come for the public to punish these political part-timers. A beginning was made in Bihar, and it shall continue in West Bengal and Kerala," said the Bankipur MLA, who visited his constituency for the first time since getting elevated to the top party post 10 days ago.

Nabin, 45, was addressing BJP workers at a grand felicitation ceremony organised to cele-

brate the first son of Bihar making it to the top in the saffron party.

He is expected to succeed J P Nadda as the BJP president.

"The BJP has powerful watch towers. No hard-working member goes unnoticed and unrewarded," Nabin asserted.

The former Bihar minister remembered his father Nabin Chandra Sinha, whose death in 2006 had led him to take the political plunge and retain the Patna Central assembly seat, which had fallen vacant upon Sinha's demise.

"My father was not around to guide me when I joined the BJP. But, I was tutored by all the BJP workers present here. Whatever I am today, it is because of the support of party cadres and blessings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah," said Nabin.

The BJP leader hailed the work culture in the party where "people worked full time, 24x7,

unlike part-time politicians like Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who heaps scorn on constitutional bodies like the Election Commission and continues to speak ill of his own country on foreign soil".

"Just look at the way the Leader of the Opposition chose to be in Germany while the Parliament was in session. We have a similar part-timer in Bihar, who remained absent when the House was in session, and was still enjoying a vacation abroad," said Nabin, in an obvious reference to RJD's Tejashwi Yadav.

Hailing the NDA's 202-seat haul in the recent assembly polls, Nabin claimed "the process of punishing these part-time politicians began in Bihar, and it shall continue in West Bengal and Kerala".

Nabin, who took charge as BJP national working president on December 15, also voiced satisfaction over the party's good show in local body polls in Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh.

"We must strive to ensure that our flag flies high, in the words of Amit Shah, from panchayats to Parliament," he said.

Nabin reached the venue, situated a few kilometres away from the airport, in a massive roadshow. He was flanked, on either side, atop an open vehicle by state BJP president Sanjay Saraogi and Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha.

Thousands of party workers marched ahead of the vehicle, which took nearly three hours to reach the destination, waving BJP flags and saffron 'gamchhas', a style popularised by the PM during his recent visits to the state.

On the dais erected at the Miller High School ground, the venue of the function, Nabin was joined by senior party leaders like Union ministers Giriraj Singh and Nityanand Rai, besides former ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad, Radha Mohan Singh and Ashwini Choubey. (PTI)

BJP to work unitedly for better results than 2017 in UP polls: State party chief



LUCKNOW, Dec 23: Uttar Pradesh BJP president Pankaj Chaudhary on Tuesday said the state is the centre of national politics and the party will work unitedly to secure better results than the 2017 Assembly elections in the 2027 polls.

Addressing a press conference at the state BJP headquarters here, Chaudhary said the party will observe former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary on December 25 under the 'Atal Jann Shatabdi Samaroh Abhiyan'.

He said party office-bearers, workers and public representatives along with local citizens will carry out cleanliness drives at the memorials of great personalities on Wednesday.

Lamps will also be lit at places associated with Vajpayee and at the BJP district offices to pay tribute.

Chaudhary said Vajpayee established good governance and launched several welfare initiatives, including subsidised rations for the poor, Kisan Credit Cards for farmers, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and the Golden Quadrilateral project, which paved the way for national progress through the uplift of villages, the poor and farmers.

He said that from December 25 to 31, the BJP will organise 'Atal Smriti Sammelans' in all 403 assembly constituencies of the state as part of 'Good Governance Week'.

The state BJP chief said Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Lucknow on December 25, where he will inaugurate the newly constructed Rashtriya Prema Sthal and unveil 65-foot-tall statues of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and Vajpayee. The prime minister will also address a public meeting.

Chaudhary said that Prime Minister Modi had pledged in 2022, on the occasion of Guru Nanak Jayanti, to take the immortal saga of the sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh, to the younger generation.

He said various programmes will begin from December 26 to mark the martyrdom days of the Sahibzadas, with district-level meetings and outreach in schools, colleges and universities.

He said BJP workers and office-bearers are actively participating in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral campaign to ensure the removal of the names of the deceased, displaced and ineligible persons from electoral rolls and the inclusion of all eligible voters.

Responding to questions, Chaudhary said the opposition's 'Pichhda, Dalit, Aapsankhyak (PDA)' was actually a "Parivarik Dal Alliance", claiming that parties in the INDIA bloc, including the Samajwadi Party, Congress, RJD and TMC, are run by families.

"The Samajwadi Party was registered in 1992, and long before that, in 1984, the BJP had appointed Kalyan Singh as the leader of the opposition. Whenever the Samajwadi Party had the opportunity, Mulayam Singh Yadav consistently served as chief minister, and when the party again secured a majority in 2012, Akhilesh Yadav was made chief minister despite Azam Khan being much more senior," he said.

Taking a swipe at SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, he said one will have to take rebirth if he wants to become the national president of the Samajwadi Party. (PTI)

Delhi: Narco smuggler wanted in 2024 drug haul repatriated from UAE

NEW DELHI, Dec 23: An alleged narcotics smuggler facing an Interpol Red Notice was repatriated from the UAE on Tuesday in an operation coordinated in collaboration with the ministries of home affairs and external affairs, officials said.

Ritik Bajaj (36), wanted by the Delhi Police in connection with a major narcotics haul in 2024 in which more than 1,289 kg of cocaine and mephedrone and nearly 40 kg of Thai marijuana were seized, had fled the country, following which a Red Notice was issued by the Interpol on October 9 on the request of the CBI.

An FIR was registered on October 2, 2024 at the Special Cell police station.

The accused, declared proclaimed offender by a court on May 19, 2025, after he evaded arrest in connection with alleged smuggling and supply of narcotic substances, had been absconding since the drugs were seized, police said.

The Red Notice alerted global law enforcement authorities and NCB Bangkok informed the CBI that Bajaj was moving towards the UAE.

"CBI coordinated with NCB Bangkok and got information about the travel movement of the subject towards the UAE. Thereafter, CBI coordinated with NCB Abu Dhabi to locate the subject," the CBI said in a statement.

Acting on the Red Corner Notice, INTERPOL authorities detained Bajaj in Dubai, a senior Delhi Police officer said. (PTI)

Chaos at Bangladesh High Commission as VHP, Bajrang Dal protesters clash with police

NEW DELHI, Dec 23: Holding saffron flags and shouting slogans against the lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh, hundreds of supporters of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal broke barricades and clashed with police near the fortified Bangladesh High Commission on Tuesday.

Several barricades lay in disarray as police struggled to contain the surge.

The high security area witnessed a beefed-up police presence in the morning ahead of the protest announced by the Hindu right against the lynching of a Hindu man in the strife-torn neighbouring nation.

The area had been secured with seven layers of barricades and a reinforced presence of police and paramilitary.

An officer said a 1,500-strong police force was deployed ahead of the demonstration.

He said police managed to hold the protesters about 800 metres from the high commission.

DTC buses were parked as an obstacle to thwart the protesters' bid to reach the high commission.

A sea of banners and placards bobbed in the air, reading denunciatory messages against the Bangladesh government.

A placard read: "Hindu rakt ki ek ek boond ka hisaab chahiye (Each drop of blood of a Hindu must be accounted for)".

On December 18, Dipu Chandra Das, a 25-year-old garment factory worker, was lynched by a mob and his body set on fire over blasphemy in Baluka in Mymensingh.

According to the police, Das was first beaten by a mob outside the factory and then hanged from a tree. The crowd left the body by the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway and later set it on fire.

"A Hindu man was brutally assaulted and killed. We request the government to take strict action against those who are behind the killing. We also demand that the Bangladesh



police take strict action against those who are behind the killing," a protester said.

Another said, "We in India consider every community as our brothers and sisters. Every Hindu in every country must be treated in the same way."

Angry protesters accused the Bangladesh authorities of failing to protect minorities and demanded strong diplomatic steps by India to ensure the safety of Hindus living in the neighbouring country.

"What can one do when the people in Bangladesh are keeping a jihadi mentality. Every single worker of VHP and Bajrang Dal stands in support of Hindu families in Bangladesh. We will cross all the barriers and will protest in front of the Bangladesh High Commission," a protester told PTI, as slogan shouting reached a crescendo.

Several protesters claimed that the agitation would not be limited to a single day and warned of a ratcheting up if their demands were not addressed.

Sumit Kashyap, a demonstrator, called for Hindu unity.

"Hindu Ekta is important. Several Bangladeshis are staying in the national capital illegally. Not even a single person has ever been harmed. Every Indian loves peace and stays peacefully. But people in Bangladesh are killing our brothers now," he said.

Satish Gupta said they were protesting against the "terrorist mentality."

India's maternal mortality rate dropped significantly due to rise in institutional deliveries: J P Nadda

DHAR/INDORE (MP), Dec 23: Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Tuesday said the institutional delivery rate in the country has increased to 89 per cent, which led to a significant reduction in the maternal mortality rate during childbirth.

He said the Narendra Modi government is striving, through its healthcare services, to ensure that citizens do not fall ill in the first place, and added that for this purpose, measures have been taken to prevent diseases.

Addressing a function after laying the foundation stone for a medical college in Dhar district, around 65 kms from Indore, on a public-private partnership (PPP) model, Nadda also said that 11 years ago, India was considered one of the 'fragile five' economies, but has now become the world's fourth largest economy.

"The rate of institutional deliveries in the country has increased to 89 per cent, which led to a significant reduction in the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR)," Nadda said.



The MMR measures deaths from pregnancy/childbirth complications per 100,000 live births, indicating maternal health.

"The Narendra Modi government is striving through its healthcare services to ensure that citizens remain healthy and do not fall ill in the first place," the minister added.

According to him, the medical college being built in Dhar on PPP model will be the first of its kind in the country, ensuring access of doctors in every village.

Dhar district is considered

of development is slow worldwide, but India stands tall. The World Bank describes India's economic policy as a shining ray of hope, he added.

Nadda, who is also the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief, accused the Congress of neglecting the development of this tribal region in MP and asked, "Our tribal brothers and sisters have supported the Congress for a long time, but has this party done anything to bring about a change in the lives of this community?"

The Union minister's visit to Madhya Pradesh comes days after the BJP government led by Mohan Yadav completed two years in office on December 13.

Listing the various achievements of the BJP-led central and state governments, he said, "We believe in a culture of accountability, and we say with conviction that we have delivered on what we promised, and even done things that we didn't promise. We are in politics with a spirit of service and not to indulge in power." (PTI)

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (PHE), KAAC ZONE, DIPHU
KARBI ANGLONG**

Dated: - 23/12/2025

NOTIFICATION

On approval of the KAAC authority, it is information to all concerned that the following Roll Number of the candidates who have applied for and has appeared in the written test for the post of Junior Assistant. Sectional Assistant, Assistant Driller, Stenographer under the Department of Public Health Engineering under KAAC has been selected for Viva-Voice & Computer Test which will be held on 10/01/2026 and 11/01/2026 from 10.00 AM to 4.00 PM at the Office of the Additional Chief Engineer (PHE), KAAC Zone, Rongmirjeng, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

Roll Number of the Selected Candidates for Viva Voice & Computer Test

Name of Post: **Junior Assistant**

223	34	374	305	623	26	738	65	540
162	63	491	309	644	37	10	83	547
105	200	52	368	743	67	31	99	664
405	481	86	422	745	78	81	192	705
648	43	88	514	27	157	93	197	731
8	96	205	528	89	183	98	270	736
47	155	429	529	107	241	108	324	11
168	213	509	577	139	244	140	506	15
146	230	523	605	158	258	242	522	109
294	298	544	611	167	438	266	558	136
456	382	624	620	199	525	274	576	206
588	516	212	672	255	553	278	621	208
261	567	280	711	349	579	281	629	225
444	697	369	719	442	627	299	640	284
181	21	376	726	589	32	314	691	320
162	63	491	309	644	37	10	83	547
105	200	52	368	743	67	31	99	664
569	59	448	734	597	144	321	735	328
625	94	473	373	95	550	22	62	693
152	466	29	346	17	248	503	44	357
390	177	698	117	48	342	510	76	431
480	209	104	160	128	427	535	123	434
559	211	124	172	135	449	538	185	455
561	214	154	176	142	457	554	247	459
570	215	273	254	143	548	556	279	560
598	338	289	260	184	573	596	303	617
202	339	360	318	362	607	637	327	694
673	416	500	398	381	669	690	331	700
51	675	580	492	392	683	732	461	
203	80	628	583	520	687	740	472	
587	288	115	618	530	706	3	504	
657	296	130	622	663	709	57	519	

Name of Post: **Sectional Assistant**

81	373	31	315	61	384
49	161	62	40	68	
1	53	96	46	86	
87	326	312	200	321	

Name of Post: **Stenographer**

8	1	3	9	4	6
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Name of Post: **Assistant Driller**

2	8	1	9	13	16
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The Following Roll Nos of the candidates who have applied for the post of Peon and Chowkidar has been selected on merit

Name of Post: **Peon**

Selected List- (Peon)				
531	486	507		
Waiting List- (Peon)				
480	84	274	101	11
Selected List- Chowkidar				
Selected List- (Chowkidar)				
70	118	38		
Waiting List- (Chowkidar)				
84	11	53	47	207

NB: Date for verification of all documents shall be intimated later on for the post of Peon & Chowkidar. Appointments shall be made only after verification process is completed.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer (PHE)
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
Diphu
Dated: - 23/12/2025

Memo No. Addl. CPHE/KAAC/ESTT-73/2025-26/1617-24

The Chief Minister laid special emphasis on identifying priority areas for the development of the northeastern states

Tripura CM bats for execution of Kaladan multimodal transit project



AGARTALA, Dec 23: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has laid emphasis on the implementation of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTP) for strengthening multimodal corridors connecting the northeast with the rest of the country and its neighbours, a CMO release said.

The KMTP is a strategic India-Myanmar initiative to connect

India's Northeast (NER) with the sea via Haldia, using sea, river (Kaladan), and road transport through Myanmar (Sittwe Port, Paletwa) to Zorinpui (Mizoram), bypassing the congested Siliguri Corridor to boost regional trade and development.

The KMTP is developed to bypass Bangladesh, keeping in mind the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in the region.

The chief minister's statement came at a meeting of the high-level task force for infrastructure and connectivity development in the Northeast held on Monday. DoNER minister Jyotiraditya Scindia chaired the meeting from Delhi virtually on Monday.

Saha asserted that the northeast region has huge potential for progress and development of infrastructure and communication systems.

He said it is necessary to take coordinated steps by identifying the problems faced by the Northeastern states in the areas of road, rail, air connectivity, waterways, electricity, gas, and digital connectivity.

The chief minister laid special emphasis on identifying priority areas for the development of the northeastern states, including regional infrastructure macro-grids, power, oil, natural gas, tourism, border trade space, etc, and presented the proposed outline for the development of these areas through the report.

"The implementation of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project for strengthening the multimodal corridors connecting the northeast with the rest of the country and neighbours will play a key role in boosting the regional and international connectivity with the northeastern states.

Apart from the Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), senior officials of the DoNER Ministry, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, participated in the meeting. (PTI)

Blackmailing won't work: Tripura CM hits out at ally Tipra Motha

AGARTALA, Dec 23: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha hit out at ally Tipra Motha on Tuesday, asserting that blackmailing would not work with him.

Speaking at a BJP event in Bijbari in Khowai district, he said that sometimes the outfit wants "Tipra-land", sometimes "Greater Tipra-land", and nowadays advocates for "one Northeast".

Stating that the BJP believes in "peaceful coexistence" with its allies, Saha said that recently, it was declared that national parties will not be allowed to enter the areas administered by the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

"We won the election in 2018 in alliance with the IPFT. In the 2023 elections, we managed to win with the same ally. You have joined the coalition after the elections. One cannot succeed by blackmailing or fooling the elder brother," he said, hitting out at the Pradyot Debbarma-led party, without naming it.

Saha said the people know how the BJP had defeated the Communists in 2018 after forging an alliance with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT).

Debbarma recently said national parties will not be allowed to enter tribal council areas, as they do not care for regional outfits.

The IPFT and Tipra Motha are rivals in the tribal council area, but part of the BJP-led government in the state.

Saha alleged the Tipra Motha-controlled TTAADC has erased Bengali from schools under its control.

"If you have reservations about the Bengali script for Kokborok, then go for an alternative, but no Roman script will be allowed as foreign script is not allowed under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. We know who is behind this Roman script plan for Kokborok. The government will not allow any instigation or blackmail on this issue," he said. (PTI)

Tripura Minister urges Arunachal Pradesh to rescue 30 trafficked child labourers, FIR filed

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 23: Tripura Labour Minister Tinku Roy on Tuesday wrote to Arunachal Pradesh Labour & Employment Minister Nyato Dukam, urging immediate intervention to rescue and safely repatriate around 30 labourers, including several minors, allegedly trafficked from Tripura to Arunachal Pradesh.

In his letter, Roy emphasised that the employment of children is strictly prohibited under law and constitutes a serious violation of human rights. He informed that a case has been registered at Kailashahar Police Station in Unakoti district following reports that labourers from Rangrung Tea Garden and another tea estate in the Kalishasan area were taken out of the state under false promises of employment. "The families are in deep anguish and are desperately seeking the safe and early return of their loved ones," Roy said, urging the Arunachal Pradesh government to provide all necessary assistance for the rescue and protection of the affected children.

According to the complaint, the victims were lured with assurances of monthly wages ranging from ₹ 12,000 to ₹ 14,000 and were paid an advance of ₹ 2,000 before being taken away. However, once at their destination, they were allegedly denied wages and subjected to exploitation and inhuman living conditions. Family members alleged that the labourers, including children, are being forced to work in remote forest areas of Meghalaya or Arunachal Pradesh in orange plantations. They reportedly live in makeshift polythene shelters amid harsh winter conditions, receive inadequate food, and have no access to basic hygiene facilities. The victims also claimed they were beaten if oranges fell during work and are constantly monitored, preventing them from speaking freely over the phone.

The families of the victims lodged an FIR at Kailashahar Police Station on Tuesday. According to them, the incident began on December 9, 2025, when several youths and minors went missing from the Kalishasan and Rangrung tea garden areas under Rangrung Gram Panchayat while their family members were at work. Officer-in-Charge of Kailashahar Police Station, Tapas Roy, said a case has been registered against two individuals — Budhuram Urang and Om Prakash Upadhyay — for allegedly handing over the labourers to employers outside the state. "We are investigating the matter and trying to establish contact with the victims," the officer said.

List of Missing Labourers From Kalishasan Tea Garden area are Budhuram Goala (50), Manik Bauri (43), Sanjay Bakti (17), Sajen Bauri (16), Sanjay Bauri (18), Ajit Roy (17), Biswajit Bhumij (24), Vishnu Urang (18), Babul Bauri (20), Kishan Sabar (22).

From Rangrung Tea Garden area Krishna Sabar (16), Nayan Sabar (17), Ravi Sabar (50), Sainik Sabar (15), Shukra Sabar (21), Tarjen Sabar (14), Sunil Sabar (50), Raju Sabar (20), Dhanu Sabar (28), Ruman Urang, Sanjit Urang, Sujit Urang, Sunia Urang, Rathu Urang.

Meghalaya govt orders stricter border security

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, Dec 23: In response to a recent armed robbery targeting residents of Umniuh Tmar, Deputy Chief Minister incharge Home (Police) Prestone Tynsong has announced that the state government has ordered the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Meghalaya Police to intensify patrolling and strengthen security along the 444-kilometre international border with Bangladesh.

The directive follows an incident on 17 December, when five villagers—including four women—were robbed at gunpoint by Bangladeshi criminals who forcibly seized gold earrings, mobile phones, and tablets.

"We express concern that such incidents have taken place. We have directed the BSF and police to intensify patrolling and beef up security along the 444 km international border with

Bangladesh," Tynsong told reporters. He added that a meeting has been convened with the Inspector General of the BSF and the Director General of Police (DGP) to discuss the Umniuh Tmar attack and to further intensify border surveillance. "We have to stay alert and vigilant, especially in view of the prevailing situation in neighbouring Bangladesh," Tynsong emphasised.

The Deputy Chief Minister also highlighted recurring issues with Bangladeshi nationals crossing the border in large numbers to steal agricultural produce and harass border residents. "The Bangladeshi nationals are committing these illegal activities whenever BSF presence is not there," he said, noting that the DGP and IG BSF are coordinating at their level to enhance border security measures and prevent illegal infiltration.

Wokha issues new directive to regulate parking



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 23: Wokha DC Vineet Kumar on Monday issued a fresh directive to regulate parking and ensure emergency access in Wokha town, aimed at improving urban mobility, ensuring public safety, and enhancing disaster preparedness.

The order, issued in continuation of an earlier notification, highlighted the urgent need for a regulated parking system in light of the rapid increase in the number of vehicles and the limited availability of public space in the town.

Kumar said several commercial structures have emerged in recent years without adequate parking provisions for customers and staff.

As a result, he stated, public spaces are increasingly being misused for indiscriminate parking, leading to severe traffic congestion, restricted pedestrian movement, and obstruction of emergency access routes.

He stressed that the situation has raised serious concerns regarding public safety, especially in the event of accidents, natural disasters, or other emergencies where the timely movement

of ambulances, fire services, and emergency response teams is critical.

To address these concerns, the district administration has called for immediate action, directing all private and commercial vehicle owners, currently using public spaces for parking, to make alternative arrangements within 45 days, with the deadline set for January 31, 2026.

The administration has also advised prospective vehicle buyers to consider parking availability before making purchases.

It also asked the shopping complexes, commercial establishments, and all new constructions to incorporate adequate parking facilities within their premises.

The Wokha Town Council has been instructed to review and streamline the approval process for new commercial structures in accordance with the Municipal Act to ensure compliance with this requirement. The order said from February 1, 2026, onward, parking along the National Highway passing through Wokha town will be strictly monitored.

A task force comprising representatives from the administration, police, traffic department, town council, and transport office will be constituted to enforce this regulation. In addition, the town council, in coordination with the traffic police, will undertake a comprehensive review of parking arrangements across all town roads.

Necessary steps will be taken to regulate and identify suitable parking zones, ensuring that emergency vehicles can move without obstruction at all times, the order added.

Christmas reminds us of enduring values of love, compassion: Guv Bhalla

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 23: Nagaland Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Tuesday said Christmas reminds us of the enduring values of love, compassion, humility, forgiveness and service to humanity, the values that have long guided the people of the state in fostering harmony, resilience and mutual respect.

In his Christmas and New Year message to the people of the state, Bhalla said that Christmas, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, holds special significance in Nagaland.

"On the joyous occasion of Christmas and as we welcome the New Year, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to the people

of Nagaland," the message read. Bhalla said the New Year is an opportune moment to reflect on the collective journey and renew commitment to peace, unity and inclusive development.

"Let us continue to work together to strengthen social cohesion, uphold our rich cultural heritage, and contribute meaningfully to the progress and prosperity of Nagaland, he appealed. Bhalla wished that the coming year bring peace, prosperity, good health and happiness to every household. "I pray that the spirit of Christmas fills our hearts with hope and goodwill, and the New Year ushers in new opportunities and renewed optimism for all," he added.

Yuletide spirit grips Mizoram as state gears up for Christmas, New Year celebration

AIZAWL, Dec 23: Christian-majority Mizoram has fully soaked in the yuletide spirit, with Christmas carols and songs echoing in the streets, churches and almost every household, and people both old and young eagerly waiting to celebrate the festival.

This time, Mizoram will witness the 155th year of the Christmas celebration. Preparations have begun in all churches, with the buildings and courtyards being decorated.

Members of different churches, mostly youths, were seen singing Christmas songs and hymns, spreading the message of peace and joy.

All streets in the state capital and other towns have been decked up to mark the festive season.

Many NGOs, churches and groups have been gathering charity and reaching out to orphanages, jails, rehabilitation centres and hospitals with generous gifts. In the state capital Aizawl and some district head-

quarters, music concerts are being organised to collect donations to help the poor and the needy.

"Giving presents is one of the true essences of Christmas as it symbolises the love of God," Reverend Lalhmimgawia, a pastor from Mizoram Presbyterian Church, said.

People came out in large numbers for pre-Christmas shopping in the markets in the capital as well as district headquarters.

The state government has imposed a "no vehicle zone" in busy places in Aizawl and other district headquarters on December 23, 24 and 31 for the benefit of the public during pre-Christmas and New Year shopping. "Markets and malls are reporting higher footfalls than previous years," Lalhmimpui, who runs a garment shop in Aizawl's Bara Bazaar, told PTI. The government has also organised a Christmas-related costume parade mass carol on Tuesday to convey the message of love, peace and joy on



the occasion of Christ's birth. For Mizos, Christmas is also a time for family reunion as they give due importance to celebrating the event with their families. Many residents, including students, who worked and studied in towns or outside the state, returned to their villages to be reunited with their families. "I am happy to reunite with my family this Christmas for the first time since I

have been away from home for more than 10 years," Lalthinghlimi, a 26-year-old youth from Saifulak district who works in Goa, said.

Historians recorded that the first Christmas was celebrated in Mizoram's soil in 1871, not by Mizos but by the invading colonial British troops near Tuivai River on the present Mizoram-Manipur border and the Mizo warriors attacked the sol-

diers during the celebrations.

In Mizoram, three-day Christmas celebration starts from the evening of December 24, with 'urlawk zan' or pre-night celebration, and ends on December 26.

While December 25 is usually sanctified for worship, during which church services, sermons and 'zaikhawm' (congregational singing service) are held to mark the celebration, December 26 is generally marked with traditional community feasts, an integral part of Christmas for the Mizos.

While bigger denominations like Presbyterian Church and Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) will hold traditional community feasts on December 26, some indigenous churches will organise traditional feasts from December 25.

The spirit of Christmas is fervently high in rural areas where the celebration sometimes lasts even a week. (PTI)

Conrad sangma plays 'Santa' in Tura market

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, Dec 23: In an impromptu display of generosity, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma turned the Tura Bazaar into a scene of festive joy on Wednesday, personally buying and gifting clothes and shoes to economically weaker sections of the community.

Driving his own vehicle to the bustling market, the Chief Minister walked through supermarkets and other sections of the bazaar in the afternoon.

He warmly greeted shopkeepers and members of the public, exchanging Christmas wishes and engaging with people from all walks of life, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere.

Described by many as an "impromptu Santa Claus," Sangma reached out to those in need with compassion and



goodwill, embodying the true spirit of the Christmas season.

His simple, approachable demeanor and direct grassroots engagement were widely appreciated.

Shoppers and traders expressed happiness at the unexpected visit, calling it a meaningful moment of connection between the leadership and the public, especially during this festive season.

Several shops gutted in Kohima

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 23: Several commercial establishments at Series Colony in Kohima were damaged in a fire on Monday, an Assam Rifles release said.

However, no loss of life or serious injuries were reported in the incident.

The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. On receiving information, Assam Rifles responded promptly and immediately deployed a water bowser along with adequate manpower to the site.

The Assam Rifles personnel worked in close coordination with the local fire services and civil administration, providing critical support in firefighting

operations. Due to the timely availability of water and effective manpower assistance, the fire was brought under control quickly and prevented from spreading to nearby residential houses and other establishments. Cooling operations were also carried out to rule out any possibility of re-ignition. Fortunately,

As a precautionary measure, affected shop owners and nearby residents were safely evacuated, and the area was secured to ensure public safety and smooth movement.

Meanwhile, the district administration has appealed to the public to adhere to fire safety norms and report emergencies promptly.

MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

Notification

New Delhi, the 19 December 2025

S.O. 5932 (E).—Whereas by the notification of the Government of India in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highway, S.O. 4476 Dated:30 September 2025 published in Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3, sub-section (ii) issued under sub-section (1) of section 3A of the National Highway Act, 1956 (48 of 1956) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act), the Central Government declared its intention to acquire the land specified in the Schedule annexed to the said notification for building (widening/ four-laning, etc.), maintenance, management and operation of NH37 in the stretch of land from Km. 315.315 to Km. 403 in the village(s) namely-Bordeka Taluk-Phuloni in the district of KARBI ANGLONG in the state of ASSAM

And whereas the substance of the said notification has been published in "The Hills Times" dated 30/10/2025, "Purvanchal Prahari" dated 30/10/2025; under sub-section (3) of section 3A of the said Act;

And whereas the Competent Authority has received objections filed under Section 3-C, considered and settled the same appropriately;

And whereas, in pursuance of sub-section (1) of section 3D of the said Act, the Competent Authority has submitted its report to the Central Government;

Now, therefore, upon receipt of the said report of the Competent Authority and in exercise of the powers conferred by the sub-section (1) of section 3D of the said Act, the Central Government hereby declares that the land specified in the said Schedule should be acquired for the aforesaid purpose;

And further, in pursuance of sub-section (2) of section 3D of the said Act, the Central Government hereby declares that on publication of this notification in the Official Gazette, the land specified in the said Schedule shall vest absolutely in the Central Government, free from all encumbrances.

SCHEDULE

Brief Description of the land to be acquired with or without structures falling NH37 in the stretch of land from Km. 315.315 to Km. 403 in the village(s) namely- Bordeka Taluk-Phuloni in the district of KARBI ANGLONG in the state of ASSAM.

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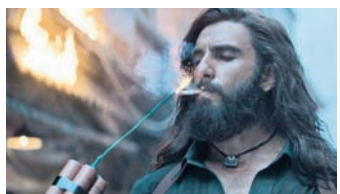
Note: The physical copy of this notification is also available at the office of CALA/PIU/RO and Landowners may also see the notification there.

Would love to find the right thing for her: Gurinder Chadha on working with Priyanka Chopra Jonas

Filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, who collaborated with actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas on a song for her new film "Christmas Karma", says she doffs her hat to the actor for the way she has built a remarkable career in Hollywood and would love to work with her again on a movie. Chopra Jonas has sung the Hindi version of George Michael's "Last Christmas" for Chadha's new film. The "Bend It Like Beckham" director said the actor was initially hesitant to sing.

"I had lunch with the George Michael Estate (people). And they said, 'What are you doing now?' I said, 'I'm doing a Christmas film'. They said, 'Well, why don't you use 'Last Christmas'? And I said, 'Well, I don't have 250,000 pounds to give you'. And they said, 'Well, if you're nice, we'll give it to you. And why don't you do a Bollywood version?' And I was like, 'What?' It was their idea." Priyanka supported me for so long and has been such a great supporter of all NRIs, particularly Punjabi's, and particularly women. I called her. And she said, 'Are you mad? No, I'm not a singer anymore. I'm in a different space'. And I said, 'Look, it'll be a laugh. It's at the end of the film. It's the fun end titles. We're all singing along... And then she kind of said, 'You know what? I'll do it to support you'. Chadha told PTI in an interview. The director then spoke to sitarist Anoushka Shankar for the background

music of the movie, which is an adaptation of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". Is there a movie collaboration on cards between Chadha and Chopra Jonas? "I would love to do that, too. And there are definitely plans. PC and I have met a few times. There are certainly stories that she has told me about. There are certainly stories that I have. I would love to find the right thing for her," Chadha said. According to the director, Chopra Jonas is an incredible actress. Her favourite performance of the actor is in "Barfi". I think it's been interesting watching her in the West. It's not easy to go from being at the top here (Hindi cinema) and then go there (Hollywood) where nobody knows who you are and to do all the work to build up your career in the West whilst you've been a big star here. So, I really take my hat off to her. She's done incredibly well," Chadha said. Chadha said as a fellow Punjabi, she has come to value their friendship and it was amazing to watch Chopra Jonas as a mother to daughter Malti Marie. ".... Seeing Priyanka as a mother is a wonderful thing. I've spent time with her at home, with her, with the baby, going out for lunch with all of them. It's a whole different side that people don't get to see (of Priyanka). But it's wonderful to see her as a mother. Wonderful," she said. Kunal Nayyar of "Big Bang Theory" stars as the desi Scrooge in the movie, which is currently playing in theatres. (PTI)



DHURANDHAR CROSSES ANIMAL'S BOX OFFICE NUMBERS TO BECOME 10TH HIGHEST GROSSING FILM IN INDIA

Aaditya Dhar's directorial "Dhurandhar", featuring Ranveer Singh, has surpassed the box office collection of Ranbir Kapoor-starrer Animal to emerge as the 10th highest grossing film in India by earning over ₹ 560 crore by Monday.

On Sunday, the movie earned an estimated ₹ 555.75 crore to nudge out Ranbir Kapoor-starrer "Animal" (₹ 553.87 crore) from the 10th spot in the top 10 list, which is ruled by "Pushpa 2" with its ₹ 1234.1 crore collection, followed by "Baahubali 2" at ₹ 1030 crore, according to box office tracking website Sacnilk.

Other movies in the top 10 list are "KGF Chapter 2", "RRR", "Kalki 2898 AD", "Jawan", "Kantara: A Legend Chapter-1", "Chhaava" and "Street 2".

Dhurandhar added another over ₹ 9 crore on Monday but the final figures are yet to be out. Also starring Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun, R Madhavan and Rakesh Bedi, the film, set in Karachi's Lyari town's underworld where the lives of a network of criminals, informants and operatives intersect. Directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, Animal released in 2023.

Dhurandhar is produced by Dhar and his brother Lokesh Dhar through their banner B62 Studios alongside Jyoti Deshpande of Jio Studios. (PTI)

Mumtaz reveals why she didn't attend Dharmendra's last rites: 'I wouldn't have been able to...'



Mumtaz and the late Dharmendra were one of Bollywood's most beloved on-screen pairs in the 1960s and 70s, starring together in hits such as Loafer (1973) and Jheel Ke Us Paar (1973). But the actor was woefully missing from Dharmendra's last rites, and now we finally know why.

"I went to the hospital..." In an interview with Vicky Lalwani, Mumtaz revealed that she met the actor shortly before his death when he was admitted to the hospital. "Yes, I went to the hospital. When I went there, I was told that doctors have said that he is on a ventilator - 'Aap kya dekhengi unko?' I just said that I would just like to see his glimpse. So, I went inside, saw him, he was looking good at that time as well, while lying down," she said.

Mumtaz added that she informed his acquaintances present there to let the family know she had come to visit him. "Then, I left and went home..."

"I wouldn't have been able to see his mortal remains..." The veteran star further shared that she chose not to attend Dharmendra's funeral because she didn't want to see him lifeless. "I didn't go for the last rites. I wouldn't have been able to see his

mortal remains. When Dev sahab passed away... his hotel was near my house and many people rang the bell to call me to meet him, but I said no. He was such a chirpy and lively person, he taught me everything," she recalled.

Mumtaz also spoke fondly of visiting Dharmendra and his first wife, Prakash Kaur, at their Mumbai residence a few years ago. "Yes, I met his wife. She was sitting with us. She met me very nicely and treated me well - asked properly to eat, drink, everything. My sister and Dharmendra ji were also sitting there," she said. Speaking about Hema Malini, Mumtaz expressed her sympathy for the family. "I feel sorry for his family, and for Hema ji. She was always devoted to him. She must be feeling this loss very deeply. She was truly in love with him," she said, calling Dharmendra an "irreplaceable, wonderful co-star".

About Dharmendra's passing Dharmendra passed away on November 24 at his Mumbai residence at the age of 89 after battling health issues. His sons, Sunny and Bobby Deol, hosted a prayer meet in Mumbai, while Hema Malini and her daughters, Esha and Ahana Deol, organised a separate service in Delhi. (Agency)

Delhi HC issues notice on plea to stop release of 'UP 77' web series allegedly based on gangster Vikas Dubey

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday sought the response of the Centre and web series producers on a plea by the wife of slain gangster Vikas Dubey to stop the release and streaming of 'UP 77', which she claimed is based on his life.

The web series is scheduled to be released on the Waves OTT platform on December 25.

Justice Sachin Datta issued notice on Richa Dubey's petition, which claimed the web series is an unauthorised biographical depiction containing sensationalised and defamatory content that would cause irreparable harm to her, and listed the matter for further hear-

Wednesday and take a decision.

In the morning, the plea was mentioned before a bench headed by Chief Justice Devenra Kumar Upadhyaya seeking an urgent listing. The bench allowed it to be listed during the day itself.

During the hearing before Justice Datta, the counsel for petitioner Richa Dubey, wife of Vikas Dubey, said she recently came to know about the web series which, she claimed, is based on her personal life as well as on the life of her deceased husband.

On being asked by the judge as to how the petitioner knows that the web series is based on her husband, the lawyer said the



pictures and visuals uploaded on social media are of the alleged encounter incident which made it clear that it is on Dubey.

The petition said, "Respondent no. 2 and 3 (Waves OTT and Director OTT services) are producing a cinematographic film titled 'UP 77', the story behind India's most talked about encounter purportedly based on the real life of the petitioner's deceased husband Vikas Dubey and intimate aspects of the petitioner's marital and personal life without her consent."

It claimed the web series "is an unauthorised biographical depiction, containing dramatised, sensationalised and defamatory content and its release would cause irreparable harm to the petitioner".

The petitioner sought protection of her right to privacy, dignity, reputation and personality rights. (PTI)

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It claimed the web series "is an unauthorised biographical depiction, containing dramatised, sensationalised and defamatory content and its release would cause irreparable harm to the petitioner".

The petitioner sought protection of her right to privacy, dignity, reputation and personality rights. (PTI)

Amitabh Bachchan lauds grandson's performance in 'Ikki's'



Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan penned a heartfelt note for his grandson Agastya Nanda, praising his performance in "Ikki's", and said its nothing but the perfection in every shot.

In "Ikki's", the 24-year-old actor essays the role of Khetarpal, who was martyred at the age of 21 during the Battle of Basantar in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. For his courage and sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, making him the youngest recipient of India's highest military honour at the time.

Bachchan, who attended the screening of the film on Monday in Mumbai, shared a note on his personal blog, lauding Nanda's maturity and unfiltered honesty in his performance. (PTI)

Jharkhand minister inaugurates 'Tribal Self-Governance Festival' in Ranchi

Jharkhand Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister Deepika Pandey Singh on Tuesday inaugurated a two-day 'Tribal Self-Governance Festival' in Ranchi, aimed at empowering the tribal community.

She also launched the 'Chief Minister Panchayat Award Portal' during the event.

While launching the portal, the minister said that under the Chief Minister Panchayat Incentive Scheme (2024-25), clean and healthy panchayats and active gram sabhas will be provided cash incentives to make the gram sabha the axis of development.

"This initiative is an important step towards strengthening the spirit of tribal self-governance, and fortifying the traditional decision-making processes of tribal society in accordance with the constitutional framework," Pandey said.

In addition, decisive community participation in matters related to 'Jal-Jungle-Jamin' (water-forest-land) and local resources is the core objective of this initiative, she added. (PTI)

Most challenging part was to play authority: Vipin Sharma on 'Maharani 4' role

Actor Vipin Sharma says the most challenging aspect of his role in "Maharani 4" was to convey authority as a politician up against Huma Qureshi's main protagonist Rani Bharti.

In the popular SonyLIV series, directed by Puneet Prakash, Sharma played the character of Prime Minister Sudhakar Srinivasa Joshi. "Maharani" is a fictional story set in Bihar politics with Qureshi playing a housewife, who is appointed the chief minister of the state by her politician husband after he is jailed.

"The most challenging part was to play authority with grace and dignity because in my personal life, I'm not that kind of person. I am a bit more relaxed, fun, and casual. Puneet would often tell me, 'Sir, you sit, people will come to you. You don't have to go to people'. But it was challenging to understand how I have to hold my place," he told PTI in a video interview.

Sharma reunited with his "Gangs of Wasseypur" co-star Qureshi for the series and the actor said he had a great time working with her.

"We've known each other for quite a long period of time, since 'Gangs of Wasseypur'. I did a workshop with the entire cast for 'Gangs of Wasseypur' for 10 days, and that's when I first met Huma. And she had just come from Delhi. And we stayed in touch. So I'm very happy that we got to work to-

gether.

"We did another film together, 'Luv Shuv Tey Chicken Khurana', directed by a very dear friend, Sameer Sharma. But we didn't have a scene together. So this time we worked together, and it was great, actually," Sharma, who was also seen in "The Family Man 3" as Sambit, the PM's secretary, is an alumnus of the National School of Drama. He made his acting debut with Doordarshan's television series "Bharat Ek Khoj" in 1989.

The actor said he knew from childhood that he wanted to act but he took a break from the profession for 12 years.

He made a comeback with the Aamir Khan-directed 2007 film "Taare Zameen Par" as the stern father to Darshel Safary's character of Ishaan.

Sharma credits Irrfan Khan for convincing him to return.

"Irrfan was a very big influence on me in regards to me coming back to acting... I always chatted with him whenever we met. I wasn't acting at that time. But I would see his films, then 'Maqbool' came, and I saw it, and I got very excited. He said, 'You know cinema, you should come back'. That's when I decided to come back," he said.

The actor was also seen in the Kapil Sharma-starrer "Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2".

Sharma now hopes to direct a film from a script that he has written. (PTI)



Salah scores Egypt's late winner to beat Zimbabwe 2-1 in Africa Cup

RABAT (MOROCCO), Dec 23: Mohamed Salah got Egypt off to a winning start in the Africa Cup of Nations by scoring late for 2-1 against Zimbabwe.

Salah captained the team in his first start for nearly a month and fired inside the bottom corner in stoppage time to spare Egypt embarrassment against a team ranked 129th in the world.

Egypt, the record seven-time champion, was thwarted for long periods in the coastal city of Agadir by Zimbabwe's stubborn defending and an outstanding performance from goalkeeper Washington Arubi.

"We wasted several scoring chances and we didn't have luck on our side," Egypt coach Hos-

sam Hassan said. "That's football. We were the better team throughout the match. Opening games are always difficult."

Prince Dube stunned the favorites in the 20th minute when he took Emmanuel Jalai's cross with his first touch and spun around a defender to flick it past Egypt keeper Mohamed El-Shenawy with his next.

Salah tried riling his teammates. They kept missing chances. Hassan hooked Emam Ashour in the 33rd, leaving the midfielder in tears on the bench.

Arubi tipped over a fierce strike from Marmouh, Trézéguet dived in an attempt to win a penalty and was booked, then Salah, Mar-

mouh, and Mostafa Mohamed — who had gone on for the ineffective Ashour — all had efforts blocked before the break.

The game resumed in the same manner after until Marmouh finally found a way to score from a difficult angle in the 64th.

Salah's winner gave the Pharaohs three points in Group B. The Liverpool star has never won Africa's premier competition. This is his fifth edition.

South Africa also wins

Lyle Foster earned South Africa a hard-fought 2-1 over Angola in the other group game.

The Bafana Bafana ended a six-game winless streak against Angola, which had won three and drawn three of their meetings since a World Cup qualifier



in November 2015. South Africa's Oswin Appollis opened the scoring in Marrakech with a low strike inside the left

post in the 21st minute, but midfielder Show equalized some minutes later when he deflected Fredy's free kick from the wing inside the near post.

Tempers frayed after a foul by South Africa's Aubrey Modiba before the break.

Tshepang Moremi thought he scored a brilliant goal after it. The goal was ruled out for offside after a VAR review, and Mbekezeli Mbokazi struck the crossbar with a fierce strike as South Africa kept pushing.

Angola coach Patrice Beaumelle refreshed his attacking lineup by sending on Mbululu and Milson in the 76th but it was Foster who scored at the other end when he curled the ball beyond Hugo Marques' out-

stretched arm in the 79th.

Mali frustrated

Patson Daka scored in stoppage time for 2012 champion Zambia to grab a 1-1 draw against Mali in the early game in Casablanca.

Mali dominated and missed a penalty before the break when Willard Mwanza saved El Bilal Touré's effort — the second saved penalty in as many games at the tournament.

Lassine Sinayoko finally broke the deadlock around the hour mark, but Daka had the final say with a header to earn Zambia a point in Group A.

Host nation Morocco leads the group with three after opening with a 2-0 win over Comoros on Sunday. (AP)

PM meets Neeraj Chopra

NEW DELHI, Dec 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday met two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and his wife Himani Mor here.

Chopra, who married former tennis player Mor in an intimate ceremony earlier this year, is currently on a break from competition.

"Met Neeraj Chopra and his wife, Himani Mor at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg earlier today. We had a great interaction on various issues including sports of course!" Modi posted on 'X'.

The 27-year-old Chopra endured a mixed year in which he breached the 90m mark at the Doha Diamond League but, hampered by fitness issues, could not defend his World Championship crown in September, ending up eighth overall.

He also hosted and won a javelin throw event instituted in his name in Bengaluru.

At the start of the season, the superstar roped in a new coach in Czech legend Jan Zelezny, the owner of three Olympic gold medals and the javelin throw world record of 98.48m throw. (PTI)

Jackie Chan carries the Milan Cortina Olympic torch

POMPEII (ITALY), Dec 23: Actor Jackie Chan carried the Olympic torch through the ruins of Pompeii during the relay for the Milan Cortina Winter Games.

The day's route also passed along the picturesque Amalfi Coast.

On Tuesday, Italian soccer standouts Fabio Cannavaro and Ciro Ferrara will carry the torch through their native Naples, where the relay will pause for Christmas.

In all, the relay will cover 12,000 kilometers (nearly 7,500 miles) and wind its way through all 110 Italian provinces before reaching Milan's San Siro Stadium for the opening ceremony on Feb. 6.

An ancient Roman city, Pompeii was buried by ash and lava when Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79. (AP)

Deepti Sharma becomes No 1 T20I bowler in ICC rankings for first time



DUBAI, Dec 23: Star India all-rounder Deepti Sharma on Tuesday rose to the top of the ICC women's T20I bowling rankings for the first time in her career.

The 28-year-old's haul of 1 for 20 in the opening T20I of their home series against Sri Lanka in Visakhapatnam was enough for the off-spinner to overtake Aus-

tralia fast bowler Annabel Sutherland, pipping her by one rating point to sit at the top of the table with 737 points.

Pacer Arundhati Reddy has

climbed up five places to be 36th while spinner Shree Charani is up 19 places to 69th.

Jemimah Rodrigues, who was adjudged the player of the match in Visakhapatnam for her unbeaten 69 off 44 balls, moved up five spots to ninth among T20I batters while vice-captain Smriti Mandhana continues to be the top ranked Indian, occupying the third spot. Shefali Verma who has moved down a spot to 10.

On the other hand, South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt has replaced Mandhana as the No.1 batter in the women's ODI batting rankings.

Wolvaardt slammed successive centuries in the second and third matches of their home series against Ireland — 124 and 100 not out — to run up a nine-point lead over the India opener and reach a career-best 820 rating points.

In the ODI rankings, Ireland captain Gaby Lewis has advanced four places to 18th after knocks of 45 and 64.

Her team-mate Amy Hunter has moved up from 31st to 28th while Sune Luus (up seven places to 34th) and Dane van Niekerk (up 24 places to 95th) are the other South African players to make progress. (PTI)

Sharjah Warriorz beat Abu Dhabi Knight Riders in low-scoring thriller

ABU DHABI, Dec 23: Sharjah Warriorz held their nerve to clinch a dramatic four-wicket win over Abu Dhabi Knight Riders to stay alive in playoff race of the T20 here.

The Warriorz moved to six points, and have two games remaining.

Taskin Ahmed and Wasim Akram reduced the Knight Riders to 10 for 4 on Monday night, with Adil Rashid's three wickets later restricting them to 134 for 9 despite Sherfane Rutherford's 44 off 36.

Then, James Rew's unbeaten 42 off 29 balls with four fours and a six, coupled with Raza's 28 off 25 balls took Sharjah Warriorz to victory on the final ball.

In the second innings, Jason Holder got the early wicket of Johnson Charles (0 off 6) in the second over, and Monank Patel (7 off 8) soon followed in the third

over, bowled by Ajay Kumar.

Tom Kohler-Cadmore (30 off 35) then hit three boundaries in a single over. Charles along with Tom Abell (13 off 13) guided the Warriorz to 38 for 2 by the end of the powerplay.

Oilly Stone delivered a breakthrough for the Knight Riders by removing Tom Abell, while Sunil Narine kept Kohler-Cadmore and Sikandar Raza in check. The Warriorz eventually reached 58 for 3 at the halfway stage of the chase.

Sunil Narine finally broke the resistance by trapping Kohler-Cadmore LBW. His 35-run stand off 32 balls with Raza kept the Warriorz in the chase.

Rew then struck a pair of boundaries off Andre Russell in the 14th over and continued to rotate the strike alongside Raza as the Warriorz reached 91 for 4 after 15 overs. (PTI)

over, bowled by Ajay Kumar.

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AITA drops Sriram Balaji from Davis Cup tie



NEW DELHI, Dec 23: The AITA selection committee on Tuesday dropped N Sriram Balaji for the upcoming Davis Cup against the Netherlands but other selections were on expected lines.

The first round Qualifiers tie will be played in Bengaluru on February 7 and 8.

India's singles challenge will be led by Sumit Nagal, while the squad also features doubles specialist Yuki Bhambri along with Dhakshinewar Suresh and Karan Singh.

Experienced doubles player Balaji has been left out of the squad, with the selection committee opting to look ahead as part of a longer-term plan.

Explaining the decision, India captain Rohit Rajpal said the selectors wanted to invest in younger options.

"The selection committee felt it was time to look ahead. Sriram Balaji has been a very good servant for Indian tennis, but it was felt that he has become a bit soft and we need to groom players who can take the team forward," Rajpal told PTI.

In this scenario, Yuki will play with Rithvik Bollipalli.

The reserve players named for the tie are Aryan Shah, left-handed Aniruddh Chandrashekar and Digvijay Singh.

Local player Prajwal Dev and young prospect Arnab Paparkar will also be called to the training camp as practice partners.

Squad : Sumit Nagal, Dhakshinewar Suresh, Karan Singh, Yuki Bhambri and Rithvik Bollipalli.

Reserves: Aryan Shah, Aniruddh Chandrashekar and Digvijay Singh. (PTI)

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Liverpool's Alexander Isak sidelined for two months after 'reckless' tackle, Slot says



LIVERPOOL (ENGLAND), Dec 23: Liverpool striker Alexander Isak will be laid up for two months with a broken ankle and fibula from a tackle that coach Arne Slot described as reckless on Tuesday.

Isak had surgery on Monday, two days after he was injured in the act of scoring the opening goal of a 2-1 win over Tottenham in the Premier League.

"It's going to be a long injury, for a couple of months," Slot said. "It's a big disappointment for him and,

as a result, for us.

"This was, for me, a reckless challenge. I've said a lot about the tackle of Xavi Simons (who was sent off for dragging his studs down the calf of Virgil van Dijk in the same game) which for me was completely unintentional.

"I don't think you will ever get an injury out of a tackle like that. But the tackle of (Micky) van de Ven (on Isak), if you make a tackle like that 10 times, 10 times there is a serious chance the player gets a

serious injury."

Van de Ven slid into Isak and trapped his shooting foot just after he'd shot.

TV analyst and Liverpool great Jamie Carragher defended Van de Ven.

"There's a lot been made about a lot of the challenges in the game from Tottenham players and a lot of them weren't clever," Carragher told Sky Sports on Monday.

"I've put myself in Van de Ven's position and that's a challenge I'd

probably make. He's trying to block it, it's just the follow through. I don't know where else anyone thinks his foot's going to go. He has to make that challenge. You can't let the striker just get a shot away there in that situation.

"It's just really bad luck for Isak. It's probably one of the first glimpses we've seen of his real quality in a Liverpool shirt."

Slot was doubly disappointed for Isak because the Sweden international was just getting up to speed.

The \$170 million British record signing didn't have a preseason because of his dispute with Newcastle then his fitness was set back by a groin injury in October.

Liverpool was patiently building him up and he'd started five of the last nine games but Slot, who expects Isak back before the end of the season, doesn't believe he'll be as sharp as he was last season for Newcastle.

"It's been a really challenging and difficult period for him. Usually when you join a new club — he was very excited as well — you want to show all the qualities you have but that was simply impossible," Slot said.

"Maybe no one understands but if you haven't trained on a serious level for three or four months with the team and you are playing in this league you have to be on top of your game to impact a game of football. (AP)

Team official to investigate drinking habits of England cricketers during Ashes tour



MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA), Dec 23: England's managing director of men's cricket Rob Key says he will investigate the drinking habits of the England team following reports that their mid-Ashes beach resort break may have involved over-indulging of alcohol.

England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action.

The England squad visited the resort town of Noosa on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane between the second and third tests, a long-planned part of the itinerary designed to help players relax and unwind on the long tour.

Key, who did not join the players in Noosa, said he had no problem with the break, but would not be happy if he found evidence of over-indulging.

"If there's things where people are saying that our players went out and drank excessively, then of course we'll be looking into that," he said Tuesday in Melbourne, where the fourth test begins Friday.

"Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol for an international cricket team is not something that I'd expect to see at any stage and it

would be a fault not to look into what happened there. From everything that I've heard so far, they actually were pretty well behaved. Very well behaved."

He added: "We've got enough ways of finding out exactly what happened and everything that I've heard so far that they sat down, had lunch, had dinner, didn't go out late, all of that, had the odd drink. I don't mind that. If it goes past that, then that's an issue as far as I'm concerned."

Key also said he had previously looked into reports that players had been spotted drinking the night before a match in New Zealand shortly before the Ashes.

A short clip of white-ball captain Harry Brook and Jacob Bethell was shared by a member of the public on social media, said to have been taken while they were out in Wellington before the third one-day international on Nov. 1.

"I didn't feel like that was worthy of formal warnings, but it was probably worthy of informal ones," he said.

"I think that was a bit of a wake-up call actually for what they're going into. I don't mind players having a glass of wine over dinner. Anything more than that, I think is ridiculous, really." (AP)

Goeswar LAC clinches district-level Tea Tribe & Adivasi Football Title

Winning team qualifies for zonal round to be held in Chirang district

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Dec 23: The district-level Chief Minister's Tea Tribe and Adivasi Football Tournament, 2025-26 concluded on Tuesday at the playground of Tamulpur Higher Secondary School, with the team from 44-Goeswar Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) emerging champions.

The final match was played between the winning teams of 43-Tamulpur LAC and 44-Goeswar LAC, following constituency-level matches held earlier on December 14.

In a one-sided contest, the Goeswar LAC team defeated the Tamulpur LAC team by 4-0 goals to secure the district title.

With this victory, the Goeswar team qualified for the zonal-level tournament to be held in Chirang district, from where the winning side will advance to the state-level competition.

The match was inaugurated by Ganesh Kachari, Executive Member of the Shuklai Serfeng Council Constituency, who encouraged the young players to

pursue sports seriously and drew inspiration from internationally renowned footballers.

In his welcome address, District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty highlighted the strong sporting potential of the district and assured continued efforts towards sports development.

The event was attended by Senior Superintendent of Police Taburam Pegu, Goeswar Council Constituency Member Maheswar Basumatary, Sports Officer Devanga Mahaliya, Vice-President of Tamulpur Sports Association Fridong Swargiary, social worker Diganta Kumar Bezbaruah, along with officials of the district administration, officers from various departments and sports enthusiasts.

The programme was anchored by Chinmoy Pathak. Information and Public Relations Officer Vijay Bezbaruah stated that the tournament aims to encourage sportsmanship and talent among youths from Tea Tribe and Adivasi communities across the district.

INDIAN WRESTLING IN 2025

Limited senior success but juniors hold promise for brighter future



NEW DELHI, Dec 23: The medal count was nowhere close to satisfactory at the senior level but junior performances held out hope for a brighter future as Indian wrestling searched for new stars in a challenging 2025.

On the mat, Antim Panghal emerged as India's most consistent senior performer. Competing in the women's 53kg category, the Haryana wrestler clinched a bronze medal at the World Championships, ensuring India's presence on the medals table of the premier event.

Antim's run, highlighted by a dominant performance in the bronze-medal bout, once again underlined her ability to deliver under pressure against elite opposition.

She also finished third podium at the Asian Championships, adding to her continental credentials, and capped the year with a gold at the senior national championships.

The performance at the domestic level assumed significance in the backdrop of her decision to compete in the higher weight category of 55kg.

Given how reliable she turned out to be through the year, it would not be an overstatement to label Antim as the country's standout performer in the sport.

However, India's overall performance at the senior world championships was not great with Antim's bronze being the lone medal.

Several wrestlers exited after narrow losses in early rounds, reflecting both the competitiveness of the field and Indian wrestlers' struggle to withstand the pressure of close bouts at the elite level.

A major highlight at the continental level was Manisha Bhanwala (62kg) winning gold at the Asian Championships.

The curious case of Aman Sehrawat
A major concern this year was how the season panned out for Aman Sehrawat

(57kg). Toast of the nation just last year after becoming the youngest Indian to medal at the Olympic Games, the 22-year-old endured a difficult season and ended up coping a ban for turning up overweight at the world championships which led to his disqualification.

This was after the Paris Games bronze-winner began the season rather strongly as India's leading male freestyle wrestler, reaching the podium at international ranking series events.

The ban on Aman was among the year's most shocking developments off the mat.

It exposed the fragile balance between athlete management and governance at a time when stability was crucial.

Aman later returned to domestic competition when his suspension was lifted by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) after he tendered an unconditional apology.

On the positive side, Sujeet Kalkal impressed with his tremendous defensive skills and has made the men's freestyle 65kg, which was previously associated solely with Bajrang Punia, his own.

He is gradually moving towards becoming a strong future prospect for India.

Bans on Neha and Reetika
Women wrestler Neha Sangwan was also banned for being overweight at U20 World Championships. The bans on her and Aman highlighted a shift towards tighter enforcement but also contributed to the disruption in the season.

Reetika Hooda (76kg) was among the wrestlers who landed in trouble after being banned for a doping violation.

The talented wrestler, regarded as one of India's key prospects in the higher weight categories, tested positive for a prohibited substance and was sidelined.

Her absence affected India's depth in a

division where options have traditionally been limited.

Success at junior level
India's age-group wrestlers ensured that 2025 remained a year of promise.

At the Under-23 World Championships, India delivered a strong performance, headlined by Sujeet's gold medal in men's freestyle.

The Under-20 World Championships proved even more rewarding, India finishing among the leading nations, winning multiple gold, silver, and bronze medals across categories.

Kajal, just 17, claimed gold in the women's 72 kg category, while Tapasya Gahlawat (57kg) also topped the podium. The women's U20 contingent displayed remarkable depth, composure, and tactical maturity.

Medals from Priya Malik (76kg), Saarika (53kg), Shruti (50kg), and Reena (55kg) in women's freestyle, along with podium finishes by Sumit Malik (125kg) and Suraj in Greco-Roman men's freestyle respectively, underlined India's growing competitiveness across styles.

Coaches viewed the U20 and U23 results as strong indicators of a bright future for the sport.

Vinesh promises return to mat
Another major talking point this year was Vinesh Phogat's decision to come out of retirement in pursuit of an elusive Olympic medal.

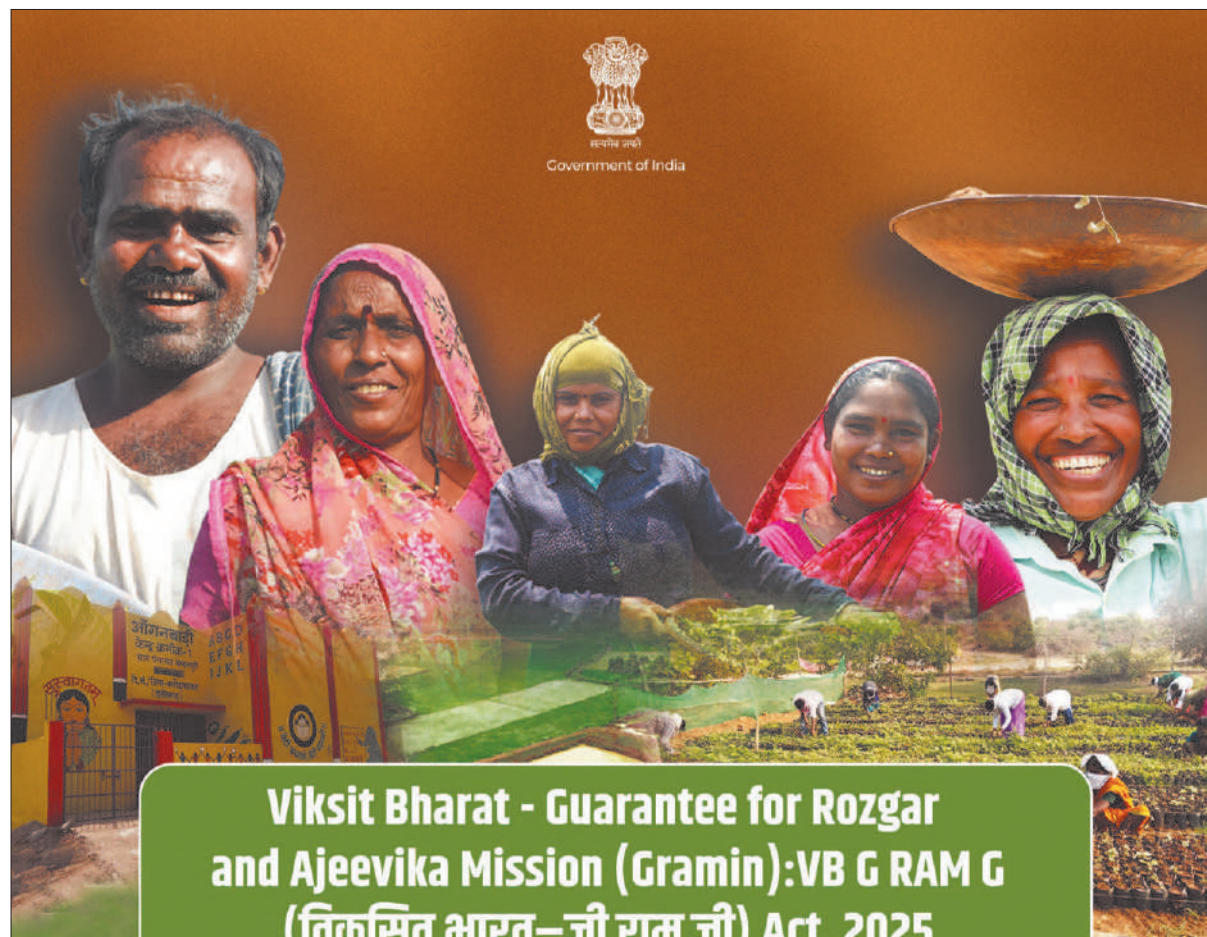
After having her heart and spirit broken in the Paris Games for being 100gm overweight before the 50kg finals, the feisty grappler from Haryana has picked up the pieces and promised to come back stronger.

One of the country's most successful wrestlers and now a Congress MLA in Haryana, Vinesh said she is giving it another shot for her son. But the road ahead is unlikely to be a smooth one for the 31-year-old despite her enormous talent, willpower, and drive.

The WFI also unveiled its new selection policy, underlining the significance of national camps and made it clear that Olympic quota winners will have to compete in one-bout selection trials to keep their place.

Return of PWL

After a prolonged absence, the franchise-based Pro-Wrestling League is set to be revived next month, marking the return of a vital platform for young grapplers transitioning to the senior level. (PTI)



Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin): VB G RAM G (विकसित भारत-जी राम जी) Act, 2025



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GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM



Continuing the Journey of Transparent & Merit-based Appointments

Appointment Letter Distribution Ceremony



for 215 Technical and Non-Technical Candidates from Tea Tribes and Adivasi Communities

Directorate	Post	Recruited Candidates
Medical Education & Research	Technical	88
	Non-Technical	28
Health Services	Technical	56
Health Services (Family Welfare)	Technical	43

In august presence of

Shri Ashok Singhal
Minister, Health & Family Welfare etc., Assam

Shri Prasanta Phukan
Minister, Medical Education & Research etc., Assam

Shri Rupesh Gowala
Minister, Labour Welfare, Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare, etc., Assam

Recruitment Timeline

Till 22 December 2025 **1,45,449**

24 December 2025 **215**

Total Recruitment
1,45,664

Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam



24 December 2025



03:00 PM



Srimanta Sankaradeva International Convention Centre, Guwahati

(NHM/D/2025-26/225)