

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- India airlifts movable bridge system, water units to Sri Lanka
- Asia flood death toll surpasses 1,500 as calls grow to fight deforestation
- Indian Navy synonymous with exceptional courage and determination: PM Modi
- SC asks states to provide more staff to EC for SIR duty to ease pressure on BLOs

Assam court sentences man to life imprisonment for killing mother

TEZPUR, Dec 4: A fast-track court in Assam's Sonitpur district on Thursday sentenced a man to life imprisonment for killing his mother and chopping the body into 16 pieces three years ago.

The court of additional district and sessions judge, A M Mohammad Mohiuddin, held Madhab Brahma guilty and pronounced the verdict. Additional Public Prosecutor N K Mishra said.

Brahma had killed his mother with a spade in a fit of rage in September 2022, and chopped the body into (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Man arrested with fake notes

MORIGAON, Dec 4: A man was arrested with counterfeit currency notes worth ₹ 1.5 lakh in Assam's Morigaon district, a police officer said on Thursday.

The recovery of the currency notes was made after the accused, while travelling from Guwahati to Diphu on a motorcycle, met with an accident in Jagiroad on Wednesday.

"The youth was taken to a nearby hospital and is undergoing treatment," the officer said.

Counterfeit notes of ₹ 500 denomination worth ₹ 1.5 lakh was recovered from him, police said.

The matter is under investigation, the officer added. (PTI)

Varsity forum spikes Himanta's pro-VC proposal

Shutdown by Tezpur varsity students continues
● CM masking failures of VC, says Gaurav

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: The shutdown by students of Tezpur University in Assam entered its sixth day on Thursday over their demand for the removal of the vice-chancellor, while staffers of the varsity rejected Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposal for the appointment of a pro VC.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has also accused Sarma of "masking the failures" of current VC Shambhu Nath Singh by suggesting the appointment of a pro vice chancellor.

The students of the varsity have been protesting since mid-September for alleged corruption and financial irregularities, and have started the shutdown of all academic activities on the campus from November 29 for an indefinite period.

A faculty member said the shutdown has been relaxed for departmental emergencies and pending work for a few hours in the morning for three days since Wednesday.

Sarma on Wednesday said he had spoken to Union Education



Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the shutdown of Tezpur University and urged him to appoint a pro VC immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present VC.

"The Tezpur University fraternity strongly rebuts the Assam chief minister's recent statement regarding the ongoing crisis on the campus. His suggestion to appoint a pro vice chancellor reflects a clear misunderstanding of the movement's long-standing and repeatedly communicated demand:

the urgent appointment of an acting vice chancellor." Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF) said in a statement late on Wednesday.

The ongoing agitation in the central varsity in Sonitpur district is being carried out under the aegis of the TUUF.

The forum also claimed that the university has been in "turmoil" for 76 days, and during the entire period, the chief minister "chose to remain silent".

"His sudden involvement - only after the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ST status issue: Tribal groups submit 'interim objections, suggestions' CCTOA seeks tripartite meeting with Shah, CM

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Tribal organisations of Assam opposing the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six new communities in the state on Thursday submitted "interim objections and suggestions" to the state government, affirming that they are against any move that will dilute or hamper the protection enjoyed by their groups.

The Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations of Assam (CCTOA), a conglomerate of more than 20 groups of various existing ST communities, also sought a tripartite meeting involving the state government and the Union home minister at a later stage to take forward the discussion.

A Group of Ministers (GoM) of the state government had submitted an interim report in the assem-



if the six communities are included in the reservation category, prompting the GoM to sit for talks with them here.

"We have raised our points so that the benefits of the existing STs are not harmed. We have demanded modifications in the interim report," CCTOA leader Aditya Khakhlyar told reporters after the meeting.

He said that an interim report with objections and suggestions has been submitted, and a final report based on consultations with various sections of people will be given within a month.

Khakhlyar further said the CCTOA has demanded talks with the chief minister in the next stage, followed by a tripartite meeting with the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta lauds success under 'Project Cheetah'

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday praised the efforts under 'Project Cheetah', which has resulted in 32 wild cats thriving now after being extinct from the country for seven decades.

He also lauded the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of International Cheetah Day.

"Three years of #ProjectCheetah, championed by Adarniya Shri @narendramodi ji, are showing remarkable results," Sarma said in a post on X.

He also said, "From being extinct in India for seven decades, cheetahs are now thriving with 32 individuals, including 21 born on Indian soil, in Kuno National Park and Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary. A reminder that vision, commitment, and science can restore lost ecological heritage."

Sarma also shared a post by the prime minister on the social media platform on India's success in re-activating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

State bans literature linked to banned fundamentalist groups

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: The Assam government has banned all literature, documents, materials and digital content associated with fundamentalist groups such as Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Ansarul Bahla Team (ABT) and other similar banned or affiliated outfits.

It has also put a similar ban on websites, social media pages, encrypted channels, online groups and digital platforms propagating extremist or 'jihad' content.

The ban has been imposed under Section 98 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, through a notification issued by the Political (A) department on orders of the governor on Wednesday.

The notification was based on a proposal from the assistant inspector general of police (law and order), along with observations from the judicial department.

It noted that JMB, ABT, Ansar-Al-Islam/pro-AQIS and other affiliated groups are proscribed by the central government, "being terrorist organisations engaged in activities prejudicial to the sovereignty, integrity and security of India".

According to the notification, intelligence inputs, cyber-patrolling reports and investigations by Assam Police and the Special Task Force (STF) indicated the "continued circulation, possession, dissemination and digital transmission of radical/jihad literature" linked to these groups.

Such literature and materials include content "glorifying violent jihad, promoting radicalisation, providing ideological indoctrination and facilitating recruitment, operations guidance and incitement against the sovereignty of India, thereby posing a grave threat to public order, internal security and communal harmony".

It pointed that publication, circulation, exhibition and possession of such materials was offensive under various legal provisions, and "perpetuates extremist ideology and renders vulnerable section of youth susceptible to radicalisation". In view of the above, the state government has prohibited publication, sale, possession, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Masses join BJP in West Karbi Anglong ahead of polls

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, Dec 4: In a significant political manoeuvre ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) organised a mass joining programme on Thursday at Amtuk Apam village, a remote and underdeveloped area under the Amrenge Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency in West Karbi Anglong.

The village, located about 44 km from Dongkamukam, is marked by dusty, barely motorable kutcha roads that make access difficult even for motorcycles.

Eight thinly populated hilltop villages, traditionally strongholds of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) and the Congress, witnessed a major shift as 250 voters switched allegiance to the BJP.

The event underscored the severe lack of basic infrastructure in the region, with villagers struggling due to the absence of proper connecting roads. The visit by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) leaders was aimed at reassuring residents of development ahead of the Assembly elections.

Attending as chief guest, Tuliram Ronghang,

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, addressed the gathering and pledged a series of essential development works to be taken up after next year's MLA election.

The commitments include construction of schools, establishment of Rongker sheds (traditional community spaces), building bridges over the Am-I River, construction of an open stage, setting up a medical centre and developing motorable roads.

CEM Ronghang urged villagers to remain patient for at least another five to six months, assuring them that "cent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Projects worth ₹ 5700 crore sanctioned for northeast under PM-DevINE: Scindia

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: As many as 44 projects worth about ₹ 5,700 crore have been sanctioned under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for the North East Region, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has said, adding that the ministry was set to utilise the scheme outlay.

Chairing a meeting of the Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region on Wednesday, the minister said the Modi government is committed to ensuring rapid, transparent, and outcome-oriented development in the region, with the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for the North East Region (PM-DevINE) serving as a key catalyst for infrastructure and socio-economic transformation.

Scindia, the Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region, termed the initiative the



"most important scheme of the ministry" and said it was conceptualised in the Union Budget 2022-2023, according to an official release.

He said the scheme has a total outlay of ₹ 6,600 crore for the period 2022-2023 to 2025-2026, and as of October 31, 2025, 44 projects worth about ₹ 5,700 crore have been sanctioned.

"Three out of the sanctioned projects worth about ₹ 176 crore have been completed, and 41 proj-

ects worth about ₹ 5,500 crore are currently under progress. Further, projects worth ₹ 111 crore have been approved in-principle, with more projects worth ₹ 625 crore in the pipeline," he said, adding that the ministry was on track to fully utilise the scheme outlay.

He highlighted that the PM-DevINE projects are monitored through a rigorous and multi-layered mechanism. Weekly reviews are conducted, and each project is tracked against expected versus actual timelines.

Scindia told members of the committee - MPs from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha - that the committee's meetings form an integral part of the continuous dialogue on investment and development progress in the northeastern states.

Responding to points raised by the members, the minister provided (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi welcomes Putin with hug on arrival



NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday night kick-started a nearly 27-hour visit to India to further shore up a nearly eight-decade bilateral partnership that remained in firm footing notwithstanding fractious geopolitical environment and tensions.

In reflection of the importance India attached to the visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi received Putin at New Delhi's Palam airport with a hug and accorded him a warm welcome to India after a gap of four years.

The two leaders left the airport in the same car, nearly three months after they travelled together on a vehicle in the Chinese city of Tianjin following the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

Modi is hosting a private dinner for Putin this evening, in reciprocal gesture to the hospitality extended to the Indian prime minister by the Russian leader during his visit to Moscow in July last year.

The conversation between the two leaders this evening is expected to set the tone for the 23rd India-Russia summit talks on Friday that is expected to produce a number of key outcomes.

Boosting defence ties, insulating India-Russia trade from external pressure and exploring cooperation in small modular reactors are set to be the focus of the summit meeting between the two leaders that is expected to be closely watched by Western capitals.

The Russian leader's visit to New Delhi has assumed greater significance as it is taking place against the backdrop of rapid downturn in India-US relations. Following the summit, the two sides are expected to seal several agreements including in areas of trade.

On Friday morning, Putin will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan before the summit. Modi will also host a working lunch for the Russian leader and his delegation at Hyderabad House, the venue for the summit.

Putin will also visit Rajghat in the morning, according to people familiar with the matter.

After the summit, Putin is set to launch the new India channel of Russian state-run broadcaster, following which he will attend a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BSF's Guwahati frontier IG stresses effective border management

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Kuldeep Singh, who has assumed charge as the inspector general (IG) of BSF's Guwahati frontier, emphasised effective boundary management to control cross-border crimes.

He also stressed cordial relations between the border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh.

Singh, who took over the new role on Wednesday, said effective border management is necessary to prevent crimes along the India-Bangladesh border. He also stressed the need to promote sense of security among the people residing in the bordering area.

A 1990 batch direct entry officer of the BSF cadre, Singh also emphasised maintaining cordial relationships between the border guarding forces of the two neighbouring countries. He has extensive (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Two species of vultures - Slender-billed and White-rumped, have been successfully bred in captivity'

Wildlife group BNHS to reintroduce two vulture species in state in Jan

MUMBAI, Dec 4: A leading Mumbai-based wildlife research organisation is working on a plan to release vultures in Assam as part of its conservation breeding programme across India targeted at the protected bird species.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) said so far, it has raised over 800 vultures in its conservation breeding centres across India.

The 142-year-old research organisation is giving final shape to its plan of releasing vultures in Assam, where they will be serving common cattle owners, farmers and people of the state, a BNHS release said on Thursday.

BNHS scientists intend to release Slender-billed and White-rumped vultures in the north-eastern state next month, said the release.

A team from the conservation group, supported by the Royal Society



for Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Assam Forest Department, is working consistently to prepare ground for the release of the birds. As part of the programme, multiple BNHS teams are conducting village-level meetings and educating villagers about vultures and their importance, it said.

Senior scientist and BNHS deputy director Sachin Ranade said, "Two species of vultures - Slender-billed and White-rumped, have been successfully bred in captivity. We are working with local communities to save the vultures in their natural habi-

tats. "Currently, we are working on the reintroduction of these two species. The release of aviaries is set now, and the vultures will be released in a scientific way termed as 'Soft Release Method'."

Problems such as using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like diclofenac, aceclofenac, ketoprofen and nimesulide, and pesticides were highlighted during BNHS's educational campaign on vulture conservation, he maintained.

Notably, vultures can die from eating the carcasses of cattle that were given certain anti-inflammatory drugs. These birds are scavengers and consume carcasses, thus preventing the spread of diseases and contamination of water sources.

Ranade explained how veterinarians have to play an important role in practising the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Northeast becoming logistics, cultural gateway to Southeast Asia: Sonowal

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: The Northeastern region is becoming a logistics and cultural gateway to Southeast Asia, through integrated check posts, border infrastructure and multimodal connectivity linking waterways, highways and rail, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Thursday.

Sonowal, union minister of ports, shipping and waterways, said under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Northeast has witnessed a historic reversal of decades of neglect -- from rail connectivity reaching state capitals to world-class highways, airports and waterways.

He said the region has emerged as a new engine driving India's growth.

"Under the Act East Policy, the Northeast is becoming a logistics and cultural gateway to Southeast Asia, through integrated check posts, border infrastructure and multimodal connectivity linking waterways, highways and rail," he said at a press conference here.

The minister said the story of the Northeast now is the story of a resurgent India and the transformation carries the signature of Prime Minister Modi - a leader who placed faith, focus and future in the hands of the people of the Northeast. "The Northeast suffered seven decades of under-representation and

under-investment. Under PM Modi, the region is recognised as the 'Ashlaksami' of India - not just a border region but a new engine of national

growth," he said.

Sonowal said connectivity has been the cornerstone of the Prime Minister's roadmap and all major gauge conversion work in the region has been completed, with Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram connected to the broad gauge network and goods and passenger trains reaching the region's interiors for the first time.

He said the Bogibeel rail-cum-road bridge, completed in 2018, and the commissioning of the Bhairabi-Sairang link in June this year have expanded access across Assam and Mizoram. Four capital connectivity rail projects - Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and Meghalaya - are underway, while the India-Bangladesh Agartala-Akhaura (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stock markets snap four-day losing streak, Sensex climbs 158 points as IT shares rally

MUMBAI, Dec 4: Snapping the four-day losing run, benchmark Sensex climbed 158 points and Nifty settled above 26,000 on Thursday following buying in tech and IT shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex edged higher by 158.51 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 85,265.32. During the day, it rose by 380.4 points or 0.44 per cent to 85,487.21.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 47.75 points or 0.18 per cent to 26,033.75. Sensex dropped around 613 points or 0.72 per cent while Nifty shed nearly 230 points or 0.8 per cent in four straight sessions to Wednesday.

Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Bharat Electronics and Trent were the major gainers among Sensex scrips.

However, Maruti, Eternal, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Titan were among the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,206.92 crore on Wednesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 4,730.41 crore, according to ex-



change data. Ravi Venkatesh, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

"Equity markets traded in a narrow range today as sentiment remained subdued amid persistent weakness in the Indian rupee. With the RBI's monetary policy decision due on Friday, investors largely opted to stay on the sidelines, leading to a lacklustre trading session and limited directional movement across the indices. The rupee slipped further on Thursday, marking a fresh lifetime low," Ponnudi

Services, consumer discretionary, financial services, Industrials, utilities, capital goods, consumer durables and power were the laggards. Domestic markets closed flat amid mixed global cues and caution ahead of the RBI policy. Early value-driven gains were restrained by a record-low rupee and persistent FII outflows. However, lowered expectations of an RBI rate cut supported a mild currency rebound, helping indices stabilise towards the close," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite Index settled lower, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended in positive territory.

Equity markets in Europe were trading higher. US markets ended higher on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.38 per cent to USD 62.91 per barrel. On Wednesday, the Sensex dipped 31.46 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 85,106.81. The Nifty settled 46.20 points or 0.18 per cent to 25,986. (PTI)

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Contd. from Page 1...

Assam court sentences

16 pieces, police said. "He attempted to conceal the crime, but the police successfully uncovered all evidence during investigation. Based on it, the fast-track court today awarded the convict life imprisonment," Mishra said. Mishra said the prosecution had sought death penalty. (PTI)

Varsity forum spikes

situation gained national attention - raises serious concern about whether he is acting out of genuine responsibility or political self-preservation," the TUUF questioned. The chief minister "ignored the crisis for weeks" despite continuous protests, appeals and institutional paralysis, the forum alleged, adding that "leadership demands timely engagement, not last-minute statements".

"Our demands remain unchanged - immediate suspension of the current vice chancellor, pending enquiry, appointment of an acting vice chancellor - not a pro-VC and publication of all inquiry reports already submitted to authorities," the TUUF added. Gogoi has also expressed his 'disappointment' with the chief minister's stand on the issues. "Real leadership would have meant that the chief minister would have stood with the faculty, staff and students of this prestigious university. Instead, the chief minister is masking the failures of the current vice chancellor by suggesting a pro vice chancellor," he said in a post on X on Thursday.

Citing old news reports, Gogoi claimed that there were "enquiries about financial irregularities from the office of Principal Accountant General" during Singh's term as VC of Patna University in Bihar.

"It would be best that the prestige of Tezpur University should be paramount, and a new Vice Chancellor be appointed. Stopping the University of Northeast for posting controversial VCs," the Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha added. All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and other activities have also stopped in the varsity. The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their support to the agitation. The VC abstained from the campus after the university had witnessed noisy scenes and an exchange of words between him and students on September 22, leading to a situation where Singh had to leave the spot. (PTI)

CCTOA seeks tripartite

state government and Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the later stage. He maintained that the GoM recommendation of forming a new ST (Valley) category for some of the six communities will not protect the rights of the existing groups, as at the central level, the STs have a single pool for reservations in jobs, educational institutions, and other rights. "We have ST (Plains) and ST (Hills) as two sections in the state now. But at the central level, both these come together as ST. If ST (V) is introduced, they will also be subsequently taken in the same ST pool at the national level," the CCTOA leader added. Khakhlary also stressed that a "very strict and reliable" identification and verification mechanism has to be prepared for notifying the new communities, if it is done, so that ineligible people do not get the benefits. "We are positive. The GoM has to ensure that the aboriginal people do not face any loss," he added. Another CCTOA leader Dipen Boro said the interim objections and suggestions have been drawn after extensively and minutely studying the GoM's interim report. "We have explained our reasons why we cannot accept the GoM report. We had a very serious discussion today. The rights and protection the existing groups have now cannot be touched at any cost, we are clear on it," Boro affirmed.

The GoM report has recommended a three-tier reservation classification of STs in the state so that the demand can be met without affecting the reservation of the existing tribal groups. If these communities are granted ST status, they will come under reservation for education and jobs. It has proposed the formation of a new category of 'ST (Valley)', and inclusion of Ahom, Chutia, Tea Tribes, and Koch-Rajbongshi (excluding those from undivided Goalpara) in it. For Moran, Matak and Koch-Rajbongshi (Goalpara), it said they can be included in 'ST (Plains)', and the existing communities in this category "do not have much opposition".

The report said that dialogue has to continue with all stakeholders for a "conclusive solution", and the final nod has to be given by Parliament through constitutional amendment. (PTI)

State bans literature

storage, etc., whether physical or digital of any radical or jihadi literature, materials, etc. associated with JMB, ABT and other similar groups, with immediate effect. Police, Special Branch, CID, district senior superintendents of police, cyber crime units and all law-enforcement agencies will ensure strict enforcement of the order and take necessary legal action against all violators, the notification added. (PTI)

Himanta lauds success

cheetahs in the wild. Altogether 20 cheetahs were introduced into Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh - eight from Namibia in September 2022 and 12 from South Africa in February 2023. As of December 2025, India sustains a thriving population of 32 cheetahs, of which 21 are India-born cubs. (PTI)

Masses join BJP in

per cent development will take place after the Assembly election." He also cautioned the newly joined members and villagers against the Opposition, stating that rival leaders are likely to intensify their efforts as the election approaches and could resort to "mispropaganda" to mislead the public. He appealed to residents not to pay attention to the Opposition's agenda or misinformation. The joining programme was also attended by KAAC Executive Member and MAC Rina Terangpi, MACs Pawan Kr Ray and Heading Rongphar, the Board Chairman of KAAC and other local leaders.

Projects worth ₹ 5700

specific details of projects under implementation in Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura. On a suggestion for tourism sector projects in Tripura, Scindia informed the members that tourist circuits with world-class facilities will be developed in each of the northeastern states, at selected locations identified in consultation with the state governments. To begin with, Sohra Circuit in Meghalaya and Matabari Circuit in Tripura are being taken up on a pilot basis, he said. The foundation stone for the Meghalaya-Sohra circuit has already been laid, while the Tripura-Matabari circuit is at an advanced stage of approval. (PTI)

Modi welcomes Putin

state banquet to be hosted in his honour by President Droupadi Murmu. The Russian leader is expected to leave India around 9 pm on Friday. After the summit, Putin is set to launch the new India channel of Russian state-run broadcaster, following which he will attend a state banquet to be hosted in his honour by President Droupadi Murmu. In the summit talks, New Delhi is expected to press for addressing the increasing trade deficit caused by India's procurement of large volumes of Russian crude oil. The Russian president's trip to India is taking place at a time when India-US relations are going through possibly the worst phase in the last two decades after Washington imposed a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for New Delhi's procurement of Russian crude oil. The impact of American sanctions on India's procurement of Russian crude oil is likely to be discussed at the summit. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday said New Delhi's purchase of crude oil from Russia may decline for "a brief period" in view of Western sanctions, but, at the same time, he said Moscow is taking steps to enhance the supplies. At the summit, Putin is expected to apprise Modi about the latest US efforts to bring an end to the Ukraine conflict. India has been consistently maintaining that dialogue and diplomacy is the only way forward to end the war. Following the Modi-Putin talks, the two sides are expected to ink a plethora of agreements, including one on facilitating the movement of Indian workers to Russia, and another on logistical support under a broader framework of defence cooperation.

It is learnt that under the trade basket, Indian exports to Russia are expected to significantly increase in areas of pharma, agriculture, food products and consumer goods. The move comes amid concerns in New Delhi over a ballooning trade deficit in favour of Russia. India's annual procurement of goods and services from Russia amounts to around USD 65 billion, while Russia's imports from India stand at around USD 5 billion.

Officials said India is also looking at boosting cooperation in the fertiliser sector. Russia supplies three to four million tonnes of fertilisers to India annually. The Indian and Russian sides are also likely to discuss New Delhi's proposed free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Ahead of the summit, the defence ministers of the two countries held wide-ranging talks on Thursday with a focus on India's plan to procure additional batches of S-400 missile systems and other critical military hardware from Russia. The S-400 missile systems proved to be very effective during Operation Sindoor. (PTI)

BSF's Guwahati frontier

field, staff and instructional experience, including key tenures with the NSG and the UN Mission in Kosovo. He has earlier served as an instructor at the BSF Academy and is an alumnus of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. (PTI)

Northeast becoming logistics

rail link was inaugurated jointly by the prime ministers of both nations in November 2023, he said. The Union minister said upgradation of more than 11,000 kms of national and strategic highways has been taken up in the last decade while the air connectivity has undergone "a revolution".

From nine airports in 2014, the Northeast now has 19 operational airports, he said, adding greenfield airports at Pakyong and Hollongi, along with the upgraded Tezu, Rupsi and Agartala terminals, were operationalised under the UDAN scheme. Sonowal said a network of heliports and water aerodromes has been added to extend links to remote districts. By giving credit to the prime minister for all these development works in the Northeast, he said Modi has emerged as "the grand architect of a new and resurgent Northeast", transforming a region once neglected for decades into a major driver of India's growth, connectivity and national pride. (PTI)

Wildlife group BNHS

right way of treating domestic cattle. "They and their assistants (paravets), who actually handle medicines for livestock, play a valuable role. We are requesting them to advocate and use only vulture-safe medicines like meloxicam, tofenamic acid in cattle treatment, and ensure the cattle and their carcasses do not have any harmful residues for vultures," insisted the senior scientist. In Assam, there have been frequent cases of poison bait and instances have come to light where local residents sprayed pesticides on cattle carcasses just to kill stray dogs, Ranade opined. "As vultures can't distinguish between safe and unsafe carcasses, they fall victim to such incidents of poisoning. It has taken a toll on many wild vultures and caused a delay in the release of the captive-bred vultures into the wild," he explained. Ranade said the BNHS plan in Assam will be an important project in conserving vultures. "The vultures to be released will be serving common cattle owners, farmers and the people of Assam. By feeding on cattle carcasses, they will control the pollution caused by rotten carcasses and the spread of various diseases. Rebuilding the natural food chain in the ecosystem is important for the survival of vultures to be released as well as wild vultures," the wildlife scientist elaborated.

Nowadays, Assam is the only stronghold of the Slender-billed vultures in India and saving this species will be an important step in conserving and raising their global population, Ranade asserted.

BNHS director Kishor Rithe maintained his organisation's campaign was very important as it will decide the success of vulture release programme. (PTI)

Guwahati emerges as Northeast India's commercial powerhouse with major infrastructure push: JLL

IT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Guwahati is undergoing a transformational expansion as Northeast India's leading commercial hub, driven by major infrastructure investments that are set to reshape the region's real estate landscape through 2028, according to JLL's latest report. "Beyond the Metros: Insights into India's Emerging Real Estate Stars".

The city's strategic role as the gateway to eight northeastern states, along with the presence of top educational institutions and a growing business ecosystem, is drawing unprecedented investor interest across office, retail and logistics segments.

Surekha Bihani, Senior Managing Director - East and Emerging Markets, India, JLL, said Guwahati currently represents one of the most compelling real estate investment destinations in the country, combining location advantages with transformational infrastructure growth and strong market fundamentals.

She said the convergence of 80% office stock growth, a steady decline in retail vacancy and limited industrial availability, supported by large-scale infrastructure investments, positions Guwahati as the gateway for the region's economic expansion, offering investors a significant opportunity at a critical inflection point.

The office market is on a strong upward trajectory, with stock expected to rise by 80% from 2 million sq ft in 2024 to 3.6 million sq ft by 2027.

Rental rates of ₹40-80 per sq ft remain competitive against Tier 1 markets and are expected to remain stable.

The Secondary Business District along NH-27 commands premium rents of ₹45-55 per sq ft with 13% vacancy, while the Peripheral Business District around Airport Road offers attractive entry rents of ₹40-45 per sq ft. Retail real estate is witnessing steady growth with mall stock increasing from 2.3 million sq ft in 2024 to 3.5 million sq ft by 2027, while vacancy has dropped from 4.5% due to strong absorption and rising retailer confidence.

The Central Business District along GS Road and Zoo Road continues to command premium rents of ₹200-250 per sq ft with only 5% vacancy, underscoring its established commercial dominance.

The logistics and industrial segment remains exceptionally tight, with vacancy as low as 0.5% in 2024 and expected to fall further by 2027.

The current 8 million sq ft of industrial stock is ex-

panding rapidly on the back of demand from FMCG, e-commerce and third-party logistics operators.

Competitive rental rates of ₹19-25 per sq ft make Guwahati an attractive distribution hub for the entire Northeast.

Several landmark infrastructure projects are accelerating this growth. The 93-km Guwahati Ring Road, slated for completion in 2026, will ease congestion and open new development zones in Azara, Baihata and Narengi.

The upcoming six-lane Guwahati-North Guwahati Bridge will reduce travel time across the Brahmaputra from an hour to 15 minutes, catalysing growth on the north bank.

The LGBI Airport expansion, raising capacity to 10 million passengers by April 2025, and the 5.44-km Dighalipukhuri Flyover, the longest in Assam, are further strengthening intra-city and regional connectivity.

Guwahati's economic base remains strong, anchored by the Guwahati Stock Exchange and the country's largest tea auction centre.

Institutions such as IIT Guwahati, the Guwahati College of Architecture and Planning, and AIIMS continue to supply high-quality technical and medical talent, supporting the city's emergence as a BPM and startup destination.

Co-working spaces are expanding along with demand from food tech, fintech and software enterprises.

The city also offers a favourable quality-of-life edge due to significantly lower living costs compared to Tier 1 metros, better air quality, political stability and expanding healthcare and education infrastructure.

Major urban mobility initiatives, including the proposed 61.4-km Guwahati Metro network with 54 stations, are expected to unlock further development potential.

Market indicators reflect strong institutional interest across segments.

The office sector is benefiting from expanding BPM operations and a growing startup ecosystem supported by STPI and multiple incubators.

Retail growth is accelerating around transit-oriented developments, particularly near the new ISBT, with rising demand for integrated mixed-use spaces.

Logistics expansion continues to ride on the city's role as the Northeast's primary distribution gateway, strengthened by upcoming projects like the Bharalu-mukh-Amingaon Bridge and inland waterway development under Sagarmala.

Suzlon to set up 3 AI-powered wind blade factories: Co-Founder Girish Tanti

PUDUCHERRY, Dec 4: Suzlon Group is planning to set up three AI-powered blade factories to fast-track execution of its orderbook and meet the rising demand of the domestic wind industry, company's Co-Founder Girish Tanti said.

While two blade facilities will be set up in Gujarat and Karnataka, the location for the third one is still being explored, Tanti told PTI on the sidelines of an event to mark 30 years of the company.

Suzlon already has 5 blade factories in Jaisalmer, Bhuj, Ratlam, Dhule and Anantapur. With the addition of the three units, Suzlon will have India's largest smart wind manufacturing capacity with a total of 18 factories. When asked about investments on these new factories, Tanti said Suzlon maintains a capex of ₹ 500-550 crore annually so it will be part of that only. It will be funded from the company's internal accruals.

He said these factories will be closer to wind project sites to improve logistics. However, a plan is being worked out for cost, exact locations and estimated time period which will be required for setting up these facilities.

Sharing details, he said these will be smart factories with AI-enabled solutions to boost productivity, quality and safety.

The move has been taken to accelerate orderbook execution and meet growing demand for indigenised wind equipment, Tanti said adding the government is also promoting use of efficient Made in India equipment. The new plants will create 3,000 direct and 12,000 indirect jobs with 80 per cent rural employment. (PTI)

Need to make India-Russia trade more balanced: Goyal

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said there are huge opportunities to expand bilateral trade between India and Russia and work towards making it more balanced. He said sectors that hold potential to boost exports from India to Russia include consumer goods, food products, automobiles, tractors, heavy commercial vehicles, electronics like smartphones, industrial components, and textiles.

Bilateral trade is reaching USD 70 billion "but we cannot rest, we need to grow, we need to balance that," Goyal said here India-Russia Business Forum meeting, organised by industry chamber FICCI. India's exports to Russia stood at USD 4.9 billion

in 2024-25, while imports were USD 63.8 billion in the last fiscal year, leaving a trade deficit of about USD 59 billion.

The two sides have fixed a target of USD 100 billion bilateral trade by 2030.

He also said India can offer huge in services sector also to Russia.

Speaking at the meet, Maxim Oreshkin, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of the Russian Federation, said India's share in Russia's imports is less than 2 per cent and it needs to be increased.

There is a need to increase this for a more balanced trade, Oreshkin said. (PTI)

US team likely to visit India next week for trade talks: Sources

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: A team of officials from the US is expected to visit India next week for talks on the proposed bilateral trade agreement, sources said on Thursday.

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

"The team is likely to come next week. Dates are being finalised, and discussions are on," said one of the sources.

This visit of the US officials would be the second after the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff and an additional 25 per cent penalty on Indian goods entering the American market for buying Russian crude oil.

Earlier, the team had visited on September 16.

On September 22, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal also led an official delegation to the US for trade talks.

He was accompanied by the then special secretary in the ministry, Rajesh Agrawal and other officials. Agrawal is now India's commerce secretary. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 52 of 2025, Date: 03-12-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No.: DENGHY-62-2025**, Name of work & Location: At Kamakhya - Narangi: Provision of boundary wall in the jurisdiction of Sr. DEM/C/Maligaon (Balance work). Tender Value: ₹12,03,29,562.42; Earnest Money: ₹7,51,700.00. E-tenders will be closed at 13:00 hrs. on 05-01-2026 and will be opened at 13:00 hrs. on 05-01-2026. For details please visit www.ireps.gov.in.
 Divisional Engineer/Guwahati, Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 "Serving Customers with a smile"

জাননী
 Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) অধিদপ্তৰে বৃহস্পতি 'Assam Aquaculture Promotion and Livelihood Improvement (ASAPALI)' প্রকল্পৰ অধীনত বম্বাইয়া আৰু অন্তৰ্জন-প্ৰতিষ্ঠানৰ পুখুৰী উন্নয়নৰ বাবে মৰিগাঁও জিলাৰ ইম্ৰুংক সংস্থা / অনুস্থানৰ পৰা জিলা মীন উন্নয়ন বিষয়া, মৰিগাঁও কাৰ্যালয়ৰ হাৰা আবেদন বিচৰা হৈছে। উন্নয়নৰ বাবে সম্বন্ধীয় পুখুৰীৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত পুখুৰীৰ আকাৰ .৫০-২.০০ হে: আৰু অন্তৰ্জন - প্ৰতিষ্ঠানৰ পুখুৰীৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত আকাৰ .৪০-২.০০ হে: যোৱাটো বাঞ্ছনীয়। প্রকল্প ব্যয় আৰু নিৰ্মাণিত লক্ষ্য তলত দিয়া হ'ল।

ক্রমিক নং	আঁচনিৰ নাম	নিৰ্মাণিত লক্ষ্য (হে:)	মুঠ ব্যয় (লাখ/হে:)	প্ৰকল্প ব্যয় (৮০% লাখ/হে:)	বিভাগিকালীৰ অংশ (২০%) (লাখ/হে:)	মন্তব্য
১	Assam Aquaculture Promotion and Livelihood Improvement (ASAPALI)	৩.০০	৬.২৫	৫.০০	১.২৫	মৰিগাঁও জিলাৰ অধীনত সম্বন্ধীয় উন্নয়নৰ বাবে উপযুক্ত বিতৰিকালীৰে আবেদন কৰিব লাগিব।

আবেদনকাৰীয়ে পুখুৰীৰ মালিকীয় লীজ লোৱা হলে সম্পূৰ্ণ বিধিগত কাৰ্যসূচ, বৰ্তমানৰ মীন পালনৰ প্ৰতি আৰু বিতৰিকালীৰ অংশ ব্যয়ৰ সম্বন্ধিত প্ৰসংহ ১৮-১২-২০২৫ হে: তাৰিখ বা আগতে মৰিগাঁও জিলা মীন উন্নয়ন বিষয়াৰ কাৰ্যালয়ত আবেদন কৰিব লাগিব। ক্ষেত্ৰভিত্তিক পৰ্যবেক্ষণ আৰু নিৰ্মাণিত লক্ষ্য অনুযায়ী পুখুৰীসমূহ নিৰ্বাচন কৰা হ'ব।
 স্বাঃ/-
 জিলা মীন উন্নয়ন বিষয়া
 মৰিগাঁও, অসম
DIPR /D/HLT/241/5-Dec-25

Planned power shutdown announced for Diphu-Manja Road utility work

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 4: The Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), Diphu Electrical Sub-Division-I has announced a planned power shutdown to facilitate utility shifting work for the ongoing Diphu-Manja Road expansion project. The project involves upgrading the existing 2-lane road into a 4-lane highway.

The shutdown will affect various 11 KV town feeders and is scheduled daily from 5:00 AM to 8:00 AM, starting December 4, 2025, until the completion of the work. The temporary disruption may impact power supply in town areas and adjoining localities.

The move follows a request from M/s NN Construction, the agency overseeing the road improvement project. APDCL has sought the cooperation of the public and expressed regret for any inconvenience caused, emphasising that the shutdown is necessary to ensure the safe and smooth execution of the utility shifting activities.

Imam of Naramari brutally attacked by gang

HT Correspondent

MORIGAO, Dec 4: In a shocking incident, Imam Sadikul Ali of 2 No Naramari, Telahi was brutally attacked by a gang of five miscreants while returning home from the mosque after evening prayers on Wednesday.

According to reports, the attackers, identified as Tafikul Islam, Anarul Islam, Manuruddin, Ikram Ali and Umar Ali, surrounded the Imam and assaulted him with iron sticks and sharp weapons, leaving him seriously injured before fleeing the scene.

The injured Imam has been admitted to Morigaon Tilak-Hemram-Gunabhiram Civil Hospital for treatment. Authorities have registered a case and a police investigation is underway to apprehend the accused and determine the motive behind the attack. Local residents expressed shock and condemned the act of violence, calling for strict action against the perpetrators.

Mass joining event sees 250 voters switch allegiance to ruling party

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, Dec 4: A mass joining programme was held on Thursday at Amtuk Apam village, a remote and underdeveloped area under the Amreng MAC constituency in West Karbi Anglong, approximately 44 km from Dongkamukam. The hilly region, largely accessible only via dusty kutcha roads unsuitable even for bikes, witnessed a significant political shift as around 250 voters switched their support to the ruling saffron party.

The area, comprising eight sparsely populated villages has historically seen support for APHLC and Congress. The programme was attended by KAAC leaders, including Dr Tuliram Ronghang, CEM of KAAC, who served as the chief guest. Dr Ronghang assured the villagers of comprehensive development projects after the upcoming Assembly elections, including schools, Rongker sheds, bridges over the Am-ih river, open stages, medical centres and motorable roads.



Terangpi, Pawan Kr Ray and Rongphar Board Chairman, among others. The programme underscored the ruling party's efforts to consolidate support in remote constituencies ahead of elections while promising targeted developmental initiatives.

11th Biennial Brahman Mahasabha conference and Navagraha Mahayajna begins

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, Dec 4: The 11th biennial conference of the Brahman Mahasabha, Assam, along with the Sri Sri Navagraha Mahayajna, will begin on 5 December at the Sri Sri Navagraha Temple in Mangaldai Chapai. The three-day programme, organised by the Brahman Mahasabha Darrang District Committee will include a series of religious, cultural and organisational events.

According to Reception Committee Secretary Keshav Kumar Sharma and publicity in-charge Ganesh Dutta, the inaugural day will commence at 8 AM with environmental purification (parivesh nikakaran) led by retired headmaster Dimbeshwar Bhagwati, followed by a tribute to late cultural icon Zubeen Garg. A tree plantation drive will be conducted by retired Army officer Mohan Chandra Sharma, retired headmaster Ananta Charan Sharma and retired education officer Manorama Sharma. The full session of Darrang District Brahman Mahasabha will begin at 10:30 AM. In the afternoon, retired assistant teacher Mathura Mohan Sharma will

inaugurate the Purohit Camp, after which Pratap Bardoloi, Chairman of the Mangaldai Municipal Development Authority will inaugurate the Delegates' Camp.

On 6 December, following the morning Usha Kirtan, former president of the East Mangaldai Branch, Maheshwar Dev Sharma will light the ceremonial lamp. Brahman Mahasabha Assam president Khagendra Nath Dev Sharma will hoist the state religious flag, while Girish Chandra Bordoloi, president of the Darrang District Committee will hoist the district flag. Retired principal Premadhar Sharma will conduct smriti tarpan. At 9:30 AM, Mayor Nirmali Devi Sharma will inaugurate the bringing of sacred water for the yajna.

The religious discourse and souvenir release session at 11 AM will be conducted by Dr Nareshwar Sharma and inaugurated by Prof Dr Runima Sharma of Bhattadev University. Prof Diganta Biswa Sharma will participate as the main discussant. The souvenir 'Bhargajyoti' will be released by Dr Pabitra Kumar Sharma, Principal of Khairabari College, with Dr Angiras of Mangaldai

BTC to appoint 984 LP and UP teachers soon, says EM Rabiram Narzary

Recruitment to begin with January 22 appointments and fresh advertisement for 901 posts

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 4: The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is set to initiate large-scale teacher recruitment for Lower Primary (LP) and Upper Primary (UP) schools across its districts. Education Executive Member and MLA Rabiram Narzary announced during the Winter Session of the BTCLA on Wednesday.

Narzary said the BTC Education Department has completed the necessary preparations and finalised strategies to begin the recruitment process soon. A total of 984 teaching posts will be filled in the LP and UP categories under the council.

He informed that a selection and scrutiny committee has already



been constituted to oversee the recruitment process. "On 22 January,

teacher appointments will be made for the Lower Primary and Upper Primary levels," Narzary stated, adding that recruitment for Graduate and Post-Graduate teacher posts will follow thereafter.

The EM further said that an advertisement would soon be issued for 901 additional posts. He added that a committee comprising educationists and intellectuals will be formed to ensure the procedures remain free, fair, transparent and efficient.

Narzary reaffirmed the BTC government's commitment to strengthening the education sector and filling long-pending vacancies to improve teaching standards across the region.

Two arrested in major narcotics seizure on NH-29 in KA



BOKAJAN, Dec 4: In a successful anti-narcotics operation, police apprehended two individuals and seized a significant quantity of suspected psychotropic substances and cannabis during a routine Naka checking duty on National Highway 29 (NH-29) at Dillai Tiniali, Karbi Anglong.

The interception occurred on Wednesday, December 3, around 3:00 PM, when officers stopped a

white Chevrolet Spark bearing registration number AS 04 F 7303, traveling from Hidipi towards Manja. Officers suspected the vehicle might be carrying narcotics and immediately informed the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Karbi Anglong and the Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), Bokajan.

After obtaining the necessary authorisation from the SDPO, police conducted a thorough search

of the vehicle. The operation led to the seizure of various narcotics and psychotropic substances, including 154 SPS capsules weighing 6.702 grams, 57 Syndex Plus capsules weighing 3.940 grams, 30 Nitravet-10 tablets weighing 2.695 grams and one transparent polythene packet containing suspected cannabis weighing 1.429 kilograms. All items were seized, packed and sealed in the presence of independent witnesses, following standard procedure.

The two arrested individuals have been identified as Lethkongam Lunkin (26), son of Kamdar Lunkin and Lunkin (56), son of Thangkhotom Lunkin, both residents of Lailoi, PS Dillai, District Karbi Anglong, Assam.

Authorities have confirmed that a case will be registered in connection with the seizure and arrests and further investigation is ongoing.

Grace Corner inaugurated at Rabindranath Tagore University to support the needy

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 4: Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU), Hojai, inaugurated a new welfare initiative titled "Grace Corner" at its Srimanta Sankardeva Campus on Wednesday, marking a significant step toward promoting social responsibility and compassionate engagement within the academic community.

The centre was formally opened by Vice-Chancellor Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, who emphasised that universities must nurture not only academic excellence but also values of empathy, responsibility and community service. He welcomed the initiative as a thoughtful effort to support individuals facing material challenges.

Registrar (i/c)-cum-Academic Registrar Dr Sandip Ratna addressed the gathering and outlined the purpose, mechanism and vision behind Grace Corner. He explained that the centre will operate as a dedicated space for collecting and distributing new and pre-owned but usable essentials such as clothes, footwear, books, utensils, stationery and daily-use items. He added that the initiative enhances the affective aspect of education by motivating students to engage in acts of sharing and empathy.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by faculty members, non-teaching staff, students and well-wishers of the university, marking a meaningful start to the welfare-oriented programme.

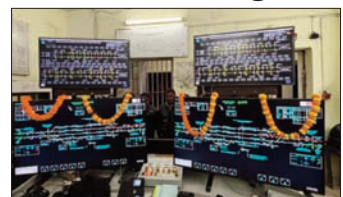
According to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), donations can be made at the designated collection point in the Old Campus canteen area on any working day. Items will be sorted and displayed for distribution once every fifteen days. Grace Corner will remain open from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM on the first and third Thursdays of every month. Separate racks will be arranged for male and female items and beneficiaries will be allowed to receive one item at a time unless special permission is granted.

The university authorities further announced that members of the RTU community and individuals from the wider society may contribute essential items, strengthening the culture of humanitarian service and collective support.

College also taking part. In the afternoon, the election session for delegates and office-bearers, chaired by Khagendra Nath Dev Sharma will be inaugurated by noted astrologer Dr Prabodh Sharma.

The concluding day on 7 December will begin with Usha Kirtan and environmental purification, followed by a grand cultural procession at 9 AM, to be flagged off by MLA Basanta Das. A public meeting and felicitation ceremony at 2 PM, chaired by Khagendra Nath Dev Sharma will be inaugurated by former minister Dr Jayanta Sharma. MP Dilip Saikia, retired Commissioner-Secretary Kanak Chandra Sharma, retired Chief Engineer Jyotish Kumar Sharma, senior journalist Dilip Chandan, Darrang-Udalguri District Brahman Sabha president Ananta Narayan Bhattacharya, former president Dipendra Sharma and Sanskrit scholar Gobinda Devacharya will attend as honoured guests. In the evening, the programme will conclude with the lowering of the religious flag and ceremonial lamp-lighting by Neelima Devi, president of BJP State Mahila Morcha.

NFR commissions advanced Electronic Interlocking system at Dumdangi



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has successfully commissioned a state-of-the-art Electronic Interlocking (EI) system at Dumdangi (DMZ) in North Dinajpur district, West Bengal, under Katihar Division. The modern Siemens MK-II system replaces the older Panel Interlocking, significantly improving safety, operational efficiency and reliability of train movements in the region.

The advanced system incorporates 45 routes, 33 track circuits, 9 main signals, 8 independent shunt signals, 2 dummy shunt signals, 16 points and multiple vital and non-vital FNMux units for digital monitoring. Level crossings NC-26, NC-29 and NC-31 have been upgraded with Electrically Lifted Barriers, replacing the older manually operated barriers to further enhance safety standards.

Train operations resumed seamlessly after commissioning. The first train to pass through the upgraded system was the 12345 Up Saraighat Express at 01:32 hrs, followed by the 15648 DN Mumbai LTT Express at 01:34 hrs on Wednesday. This milestone reflects NFR's ongoing commitment to modernisation, digitalisation and the provision of safe, reliable and efficient railway services for both passengers and freight.

Sivasagar Book Fair gets underway in Boarding field

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 4: The 10th Sivasagar Book Fair 2025 commenced on Monday evening at the Boarding field, offering a vibrant platform for book lovers, readers and sellers to celebrate literature. Noted bureaucrat-turned-litterateur and former president of Asom Sahitya Sabha, Kula Saikia, inaugurated the fair and lauded its role in fostering a culture of reading. He expressed hope that educational institutions across Assam would create similar environments within their campuses.

Jayanta Baruah, editor of Asomiya Pratidin and publisher of the Assamese-English dictionary Hemkosh, was honoured with the "K'hoj Sivasagar Gaurav Award 2025" during the inaugural function.

Baruah, along with organisers from the socio-cultural group Khoj, formally inaugurated the 11-day fair. The event was presided over by Samiran Phukan, General Secretary of AASU.

On the occasion of Asom Divas, the statue of King Sukapha was garlanded and Dr Raktim Ranjan Saikia of JB University delivered a lecture on "Mane Lekha Buranjit." The Zubeen Garg Memorial Cultural Programme was also inaugurated, featuring a song composed by Ghanashyam Dutta in memory of Zubeen Garg, released by cultural worker Partha Pratim Buragohain.

The fair continues to showcase Assam's rich literary and cultural heritage, attracting readers, writers and enthusiasts from across the region.

Celebration underscores Sabha's century-long contribution to Assamese language, literature and culture

Asam Sahitya Sabha marks centenary of Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan with Literary

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 4: The two-day centenary celebration of Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan concluded on Wednesday, paying tribute to the Asam Sahitya Sabha's unparalleled role in promoting Assamese language, literature and culture. Dr K Srinivas Rao, former Secretary of Sahitya Akademi, lauded the Sabha's initiatives as "rare and exemplary" during the open session presided over by Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami.

Former Sabha president Dr Kuladhar Saikia emphasised, "Language must be preserved for the nation to flourish," while Dr Dhruvajyoti Bora noted that the Sabha has evolved into an inclusive literary platform reflecting Assam's collective aspirations. The programme was attended by distinguished litterateurs, cultural leaders and thousands of delegates



from across the state.

MLA Hitendranath Goswami, president of the centenary celebration committee, delivered the welcome address and Sabha principal secretary Debajit Bora outlined the objectives of the event. Dr Surjya Kanta Hazarika highlighted the historical significance of Chan-

Events highlight inclusion, empowerment and recognition of achievements of persons with disabilities

International Day of Persons with Disabilities observed



HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Dec 4: The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was observed at Rajmai Bagan Primary School near Demow on Wednesday under the patronage of Samagra Shiksha Assam, Demow Education Block in association with the Block Guardian Committee. The programme featured a series of activities highlighting awareness, inclusion and community participation.

The event began with the flag hoisting by Pulindra Kalita, Headmaster of Rajmai Bagan Primary School. Santana Barua, Assistant Teacher, offered the smiti tarpan, while Sarju Begum lit an earthen lamp before the photograph of cultural icon Zubeen Garg. Buddeswar Borah, Secretary of the Guardian Committee, planted a sapling to mark the occasion.

Naranath Gohain, Block Elementary Education Officer, inaugurated the competitions and the health camp. An open session followed, presided over by Tulan Bezbarua and anchored by resource person Prasanta Dehingia. Resource person Dipu Kumar Gogoi spoke briefly about the objectives and importance of the programme.

Dr Rupam Borkakoty, Deputy Superintendent of Demow Model Hospital, delivered the keynote address. Chief guests—including Nilima Devi Child Development Project Officer (ICDS), Dipak Borah District Programme Officer of Samagra Shiksha Sivasagar, persons with disabilities Hemanta Borah and Ranjit Borah, also addressed the gathering, stressing inclusion, empowerment and continued support for differently abled individuals.

During the open session, ten specially abled meritorious students who cleared the HSLC Examination 2025 were felicitated for their achievements. The programme also saw participation from Block Accountant Dipti Borah, the RBSK team of Demow Block Primary Health Centre and several community members, marking a meaningful observance of the day.

Our Tezpur Correspondent

adds: The North Assam Divyang Association (NADA) in collaboration with the Sonitpur District Administration, observed the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at Bhupen Hazarika Kalabhumi on Wednesday. Known for its vocal advocacy for the rights

and welfare of persons with disabilities in the region, the organisation hosted a day-long programme celebrating ability, inclusion and awareness.

The event began with the unfurling of the organisational flag by Mrudul Borah, Chief Secretary of NADA. This was followed by a swahid tarpan led by president Reyaz Ansari and a plantation drive initiated by Working president Jitu Nath. The cultural programme was inaugurated by District Social Welfare Officer Rubi Kalita, who opened the event with a rendition of Zubeen Garg's song "Mayabini." Performers Dimpi Saikia, Trishna Devi, Talibul Hussain, Chitra Devi, Biki Borah, Binita Borah and Nayani Borah captivated the audience with their performances, showcasing the artistic talents of persons with disabilities.

The open session was chaired by noted Tezpur-based social worker Jagannath Bora. Among the speakers were local MLA Prithiraj Rabha, senior journalist Panjaj Baruah, media persons Prashanta Kumar Mahanta and Dip Kumar Kalita, Dipu Bhuyan from the District Legal Services Authority and Parash Nath Ray from the Tezpur Municipality Board. Speakers highlighted the significance of the day, with Panjaj Baruah expressing concern over the continued struggles faced by persons with disabilities in securing their rights and MLA Rabha stressing that their special abilities must be recognised and prioritised by society.

In a special felicitation ceremony, Para-Olympic players Abhijit Pegu, Saddam Hussain and Tarangita Das—who won gold, silver and bronze medals respectively while representing Sonitpur were honoured for their achievements. Media person Hemanta Kumar Nath announced that beginning next year, he will institute a special annual award in memory of his parents, Late Maheswar Nath and Late Rupeswari Devi. The award, carrying a cash prize of ₹ 10,000, will be presented to a person with disabilities excelling in sports, art, or culture.

In a separate function held at Rashtrabhasha School, three physically disabled students were felicitated with phulam gamosa and pens by Headmaster Bijay Kandulana in the presence of the school's teaching staff, marking a meaningful tribute to the day's spirit.

Sivasagar Book Fair gets underway in Boarding field

Baruah, along with organisers from the socio-cultural group Khoj, formally inaugurated the 11-day fair. The event was presided over by Samiran Phukan, General Secretary of AASU.

On the occasion of Asom Divas, the statue of King Sukapha was garlanded and Dr Raktim Ranjan Saikia of JB University delivered a lecture on "Mane Lekha Buranjit." The Zubeen Garg Memorial Cultural Programme was also inaugurated, featuring a song composed by Ghanashyam Dutta in memory of Zubeen Garg, released by cultural worker Partha Pratim Buragohain.

The fair continues to showcase Assam's rich literary and cultural heritage, attracting readers, writers and enthusiasts from across the region.

by Sabha office-bearers.

The celebrations featured a vibrant cultural evening showcasing Assam's diverse art forms, including Dhamail, Charak dance, Bishnupriya Manipuri dance, Ghoomar, Deodhani, Jhumur, Vyas Ojapali and other traditional performances, reflecting the state's rich cultural mosaic.

Earlier sessions included seminars on the Sabha's literary contributions and ceremonial flag hoisting attended by notable citizens from Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Charaideo and Golaghat. The festivities concluded with meetings of permanent members and a grand cultural rally emphasising the importance of Assam's literary heritage.

The centenary celebration reaffirmed the Sabha's enduring commitment to nurturing Assamese language, literature and cultural identity for future generations.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is strong enough. -Og Mandino

Aditya-L1: A technological feat

India's sun-watching spacecraft, Aditya-L1 is inching to face the moment it was built for. In 2026, the solar cycle will crest and the sun will flip its magnetic poles. And the familiar yellow disc will turn into a furnace of violent expulsions. For Aditya-L1, positioned patiently at its halo orbit, this will be the first opportunity to observe the corona during the first volatile phase of the star's 11-year rhythm. The timing is not just scientifically convenient. It is strategically important. After all, we are on the threshold of an age in which civilisations most fragile dependencies are the orbits above us. Nearly 11,000 satellites -navigation, climatic, communication, military and commercial-trace the thin shell around the earth. A powerful corona's mass ejection does not need to be a doomsday event. A single high velocity wave of charged particles can fry satellite electronics, disrupt GPS. It can also degrade communications, distort weather data and trigger blackouts in power grids built on antiquated assumptions about "terrestrial-only" risks. The beauty of auroras, which now spill unusually far south with every strong geomagnetic storm, is a reminder of that danger in disguise. That is Aditya-L1 matters beyond the scientific community. Its coronagraph, designed to look like an artificial moon, can block the sun's overwhelming surface light. It can observe the faint but decisive drama of the corona round the clock. Unlike other instruments, it studies eruptions in visible light.

It is a capability which helps it to gauge temperatures and heat energy at the very moment Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) is born. This is a domain where hours can determine whether a satellite lives or dies. In this backdrop, early warnings are not luxuries but necessities. India, like all modern economies, has skin in this game. The country's communication network, digital payments backbone, emergency services, aviation routes and energy grids all depend upon technologies vulnerable to space weather. Our navigations in space are expanding from navigation constellations to space-based broadband. In the march of technology, the need for reliable solar forecasting transforms from scientific curiosity to infrastructural defence.

Aditya-L1 represents an important shift in India's space posture. It signals confidence in scientific sophistication. It is also a recognition of the global power now includes the ability to anticipate celestial disruption. The mission is no longer quietly observing the sun. India in the 21st century stands on digital structure. This solar mission is helping to protect this structure. When the sun grows restless next year, the most significant line of defence may not lie on the earth at all. It would be 1.5 million kilometres closer to the storm.

Behind the steep fall of Indian rupee, there are many factors including fall in exports

By: Anjan Roy

The Indian currency has depreciated beyond the psychological level of ₹ 90 to a dollar in course of trading Wednesday. It closed at 90.22 at the close of trading. It now looks as though the Indian rupee is inevitably set for continuous depreciation. Some traders and financial markets operators are airing such views to the financial press. But in the worst of times, in 1992, when the rupee was first put to float, it showed surprising strength. It did depreciate sharply, but then it stayed calm for a long while.

In March 1993, when the rupee became fully market based it stood at 31.52 to a dollar. A decade later, it had depreciated to ₹ 48.39 but then it rebounded robustly to ₹ 40.28 in 2007-8, just before the global financial melt-down. After the global financial meltdown, rupee depreciated again to 47.44 in 2009 again to recover somewhat in a year.

The next phase of rupee depreciation had come after the taper tantrums since when the rupee has been going down. In contrast, the Chinese renminbi had remained rock solid against the US dollar for what now seems ages. Why is that so. The answer can be found in the sharp differences in the fundamentals of the two economies. China has developed a massive manufacturing industry and it grown immensely in the intervening years, which sets it apart from all others. Exchange rate fluctuation reflects several aspects of the functioning of an economy. The current fluctuations in the rupee exchange rate are the end result of uncertainties in the global markets and economy; more fundamentally, these could also reflect the divergences between the domestic economy and the global economy.

The current slide in the exchange rate of the Indian rupee against the US dollar points at these twin factors — while the global turmoil and uncertainty put pressure on the rupee, the inflation differential between India and its major trading partner also played a role. The adverse impact of these factors have further been compounded by the continuing low factor productivity.

The shortcomings of the real economy are now being morphed into a financial markets fall through the exchange market. Rupee's depreciation against the dollar is a reflection of the troubled global economic situation and its transmission into the Indian economy. The primary trigger this time came from the sharp hike in withdrawal of funds by the foreign institutional investors —FIIs. The FIIs have taken out close to \$1 billion in November alone. When the global economic situation becomes uncertain, such as at present, large investors re-work their investment positions. Generally, they show a marked preference for dollar denominated assets because the dollar remains the single most important currency and it is least prone to depreciate against other currencies. Foreign institutional investors are withdrawing their funds from the Indian stock and debt markets and at the same time taking their money out of India. As they convert their sales proceeds into the US dollar, the rupee comes under stress and depreciates.

This is the nexus seen every time there are disturbances on the global markets and prospects. The Indian rupee had depreciated considerably during the global financial melt-down in 2008-09. In course of that instability the rupee had lost from around ₹ 40 to a dollar to much lower levels around ₹ 50. Thereafter, the rupee had come under pressure in the years known as "taper tantrums" as the US Federal Reserve was working to reverse its monetary policy stance of large accommodation to prop up the US dollar and subsequently cutting down the large fund infusion. During the years of taper tantrums, the rupee had fallen from around ₹ 50 to over ₹ 60 to a dollar.

Now, once again, the Indian economy is facing uncertainty as the US slaps high tariffs on Indian goods exports to USA. These tariffs drive Indian exports out of the US markets by making these costlier vis-a-vis the exports from other countries. In fact, Indian exports to USA, one of the largest markets, have dropped. This means India earns less dollars and therefore there would be lower flow of dollars into the country compared with dollar outflow on account of withdrawal of funds from India by the foreign institutional investors or FIIs. (IPA Service)

Administrative transparency and public expectations

In a democratic society, the relationship between administration and citizens is not confined merely to legal obligations or constitutional rules; rather, it rests on a profound mutual trust and moral accountability. Ever since the concept of state governance took its modern form, the efficiency of the governance machinery and public satisfaction have remained central concerns. The true mirror of a nation or a society is its administrative system. If this mirror fails to reflect society's image clearly, or if it is covered with a veil of opacity, stability can never prevail in that society. When we speak of administrative transparency, we generally understand it as the clean face of government functioning, but its theoretical and practical meaning is not limited to that alone. It is a philosophy, a code of conduct, and above all, a question of citizens' dignity. In today's complex social and economic environment, the horizon of public expectations is continuously expanding. People no longer wish to remain content merely by receiving aid or grants from the government; they want to know the source of that aid, the process of its distribution, and the kind of justice embedded in it. Therefore, analysing the interrelationship between administrative transparency and the growing expectations of the public with a broad and reflective perspective has become a demand of the times.

Historically, the idea of administration has been intertwined with secrecy. In the past, ruling classes controlled the flow of information either for the sake of governance or to keep power concentrated in their hands. Yet, with the evolution of thought across the world over time, this notion has changed. In the present age, people no longer consider themselves merely the governed; they regard themselves as partners in the system of governance. With this mental transition, their expectations have also changed. They want every government decision, every policy, and every account of expenditure to be like an open book. Whenever the administration takes a decision, the reasoning and purpose behind it must be comprehensible to the public. Opacity breeds suspicion, and suspicion creates an atmosphere of distrust. When a wall of mistrust rises between the administration and the people, obstacles arise in every developmental work. Transparency serves as the primary tool to break down this wall. Like throwing light into a dark room, it not only reveals objective truth but also helps restore public faith in the administration.

When transparency is lacking in administrative processes, the first to suffer are the weaker sections of society. Those who possess power, wealth, or influence can obtain their due by any means. But for the ordinary farmer, labourer, or uneducated person who comes to a government office, transparency is not a luxury; it is a necessity. When he sees that the lists of government schemes or the rules are open and equal for everyone, a sense of security arises in his mind. But when such information is hidden or written in incomprehensible language, he feels helpless, and this helplessness opens the door to corruption. The emergence of middlemen or broker networks occurs solely because of unequal distribution of information. If the administration makes information easily accessible and simplified, the need for such intermediaries automatically disappears. Public expectations have now become so strong that people do not wish to remain dependent on anyone's favour to establish their rights. They desire an automatic system in which services are assured on the basis of eligibility.

In the present era, the scope of administration is no longer limited to maintaining law and order; it touches every aspect of citizens' lives. From education, health, infrastructure, drinking water, and electricity supply to social security, the government has a role everywhere. Ensuring transparency in this vast field of work is a complex challenge, yet it is indispensable. The public eye remains sharp on the use of government funds. People want answers from the administration about how long a bridge built with their tax money will last, whether free medicines will be available in hospitals, or what the standard of mid-day meals in schools is. When the detailed processes of these works, reports on material standards, and expenditure details are displayed on public notice boards or made available on websites, opportunities for corruption de-

crease. Financial transparency not only prevents wastage but also aids in the equitable distribution of resources. When the public keeps watch over the government treasury, the ruling side is compelled to become more cautious and responsible. This sense of accountability is the core mantra of democratic administration.

The new awakening of technology has given the concept of administrative transparency a fresh dimension. Documents that once took days to locate or information that got lost in files can now be accessed in moments. Yet, mere use of machines does not constitute transparency. Unless the mindset of administrative officers changes, neither computers nor the internet can achieve anything. True transparency becomes possible only when the administration voluntarily adopts a policy of disclosing information. The hallmark of an ideal administration is that the government itself makes information public even before citizens have to ask for it through RTI or similar applications. This can be called "self-initiated disclosure" or "digital presence". Citizens expect their government to be modern, dynamic, and to use technology in the best possible way to solve their problems. Yet caution is also needed here. The use of technology must not create a new divide, meaning that those who do not know how to use technology should not be deprived of services; the administration must remain conscious of this. Transparency means equal right to information for all.

Ensuring public participation in administrative decision-making processes is another vital aspect of transparency. Often, decisions taken by policymakers sitting in air-conditioned rooms fail to produce the desired results at the grassroots level. The reason is the gap between real problems and planning. If drafts of any scheme or law are made public and people's opinions sought before finalisation, the chances of that scheme becoming more effective increase. People want their voices to be heard before decisions that affect their lives are taken. This participatory democracy strengthens the governance system. When people feel that a law has been framed on the basis of their suggestions, they become more willing to abide by it. In contrast, imposed decisions always provoke adverse reactions. Trans-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

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parency strengthens the bond between government and people.

Of course, the path of transparency and public expectations is not always smooth. For a certain class within the administrative machinery, transparency appears as a threat. Those who have long fulfilled their self-interest by exploiting opacity do not easily accept change. Overcoming this bureaucratic inertia and mindset is a difficult task. On the other hand, there are limitations from the public side as well. Due to lack of awareness, many do not know what information they have the right to obtain or how to question the administration. Sometimes excessive expectations also create unnecessary pressure on the administration. Therefore, balance between the two sides is essential. The administration must clearly communicate its limitations, and the public must behave reasonably. Yet the fundamental point is goodwill. If the administration possesses goodwill, any challenge can be overcome while keeping transparency intact.

In the spheres of the justice system and police administration, the importance of transparency is immense. Maintaining peace and order in society requires public cooperation, and such cooperation can be built only on the foundation of trust. When transparency is adopted at every level, from registration of cases at police stations to the investigation process, fear of the police diminishes and respect increases. Similarly, transparency in court proceedings and delivery of judgments preserves the dignity of the judiciary. People expect that no matter how powerful a criminal may be, everyone is equal in the eyes of the law, and this equality must be reflected not only on paper but in reality as well. Secret deals or sluggish investigations increase criminal tendencies in society. Therefore, transparency in law-enforcement agencies is a fundamental condition for societal safety.

Administrative transparency also brightens a country's image at the international level. The more transparent the administration of a country or state, the more favourable the investment climate becomes. Entrepreneurs and investors prefer places where rules are clear and bureaucratic hurdles are few. This creates employment opportunities and accelerates economic development. In other words, transparency is not merely

an ethical concept; it is a key driving force of economic progress. To improve people's standard of living, a strong economic foundation is required, and in this, the role of transparency is no less than that of administrative efficiency. A corruption-free and transparent administration can carve a distinct identity for itself on the world stage.

At present, the role of the media and civil society has made the issue of transparency even more relevant. An alert media keeps the administration cautious by pointing out government mistakes. Along with this, new platforms such as social media have given people the opportunity to express their opinions. Today, no news or incident can be concealed for long. This power in the hands of the public has made the administration far more accountable than before. Yet it is also essential to have the ability to discern truth from falsehood. Society must remain vigilant so that misinformation or fake news does not derail the genuine movement for transparency. The administration too must cultivate the mindset to accept criticism gracefully and correct its mistakes.

In conclusion, it can be said that administrative transparency and public expectations are inseparably linked to each other. They are not a destination but an uninterupted journey. Society is ever-changing, and people's needs and aspirations keep evolving. The administration must transform itself in step with these changing times. Transparency means an open mind and open doors. Only when the administration empathises with the pain and aspirations of the people and works with an attitude of service rather than mere ruling can true democracy be established. Public expectations are not limited to material gains alone; people seek dignity, respect, and truth. Only a transparent administration can provide all three together. When honesty marks every step of the government, the public too will come forward to fulfil their duties. It is through this mutual trust and cooperation that we can realise the dream of a developed, clean, and prosperous society. For future generations, we must leave behind an administrative system where trust occupies the highest place instead of fear, and light instead of darkness. For this, our struggle and awareness must remain ever awake.

Leave the dead in Peace: The hateful politicisation of Zubeen's death

By: Satvabrat Borah

The death of Zubeen Garg on 29 October 2025 struck Assam like a thunderbolt that no one saw coming. A singer, composer, actor, and cultural icon who had spent three decades shaping the emotional and artistic identity of an entire state was suddenly gone at the age of fifty-three. Hospitals overflowed with fans keeping vigil, roads filled with silent processions, and social media became a river of shared memories, photographs, and songs. For days the state seemed to pause, as if trying to understand how a voice that had narrated its joys and sorrows for so long could fall silent forever. Yet within hours of the news breaking, something deeply disturbing began to unfold: politicians and their affiliated media outlets started transforming a moment of pure collective grief into a theatre of accusation, speculation, and partisan warfare. What should have been a time for mourning, reflection, and unity became, almost overnight, one of the most painful examples of how swiftly human sorrow can be weaponised for political gain in contemporary India.

Zubeen Garg was never just a celebrity in Assam. He was the soundtrack of an entire generation's coming of age. From the romantic ballads of the late 1990s that played at every college festival to the anthems of protest and identity that rang out during the Assam Movement and later agitations, his music was woven into the very fabric of Assamese life. He sang in multiple languages, crossed regional boundaries, and yet remained fiercely rooted in his homeland. He built music schools for underprivileged children, rushed to flood-affected areas with relief materials, stood on stages during anti-CAA protests, and used his platform to speak for the marginalised without ever joining a political party. That rare combination of artistic brilliance and uncalculable genuineness made him a figure who belonged to the people in a way politicians can only envy. When such a person dies unexpectedly, the natural response of any society should be to lower its voice, to offer the family privacy, and to allow the public to grieve together. Instead, within forty-eight hours microphones were raised, allegations were floated, and conspiracy theories were seeded with astonishing speed.

The pattern was depressingly familiar yet executed with unusual ferocity. Certain political leaders and their supporters began questioning the circumstances of his hospitalisation and treatment. Statements were issued suggesting medical negligence, administrative failure, or even darker possibilities. Hashtags appeared demanding investigations before the body had cooled. Television channels that normally compete for TRP ran tickers framing the tragedy as evidence of governmental incompetence. Opposition leaders who had never previously shown much interest in the singer's welfare suddenly discovered in his death a convenient stick with which to beat the ruling dispensation. Ruling party spokespersons, in turn, accused the opposition of insulting a grieving family and defaming doctors. What began as sorrow was rapidly converted into a fresh chapter of the endless political slugfest that has come to define public life in the state.

This rush to politicise grief revealed several uncomfortable truths about the current political culture. First, it demonstrated how little space is now left for genuine human emotion in public discourse. The moment tragedy strikes, the reflex is no longer empathy but calculation: how can this

event be framed, who can be blamed, whose narrative will trend faster? Second, it exposed the terrifying efficiency of the modern information ecosystem in amplifying division. A single ambiguous statement from a leader can become a viral post, then a newsroom shouting match, and finally a street protest within hours. Third, and most painfully, it showed how even death has been stripped of its sanctity. When a beloved artist dies, the family should be surrounded by compassion and the public by shared memories. Instead, Zubeen Garg's elderly parents, his wife, and his young son found themselves at the centre of a storm of allegations and counter-allegations none of them had invited.

The consequences of this politicisation run deeper than mere tastelessness. When grief is hijacked, the process of collective mourning is fractured. People who wanted to gather peacefully to sing his songs or light candles in his memory suddenly found themselves being pushed into opposing camps. Fans who had grown up together listening to the same albums were now arguing about which political party was more responsible for his death. The very unity that Zubeen's music had always fostered was being deliberately undermined. Young people who idolised him for his refusal to bow to political pressure watched in horror as his final journey became raw material for the same power games he had spent his life avoiding. The psychological toll of this betrayal is incalculable. A generation that already struggles with cynicism toward institutions has been handed yet another reason to believe that nothing, not even death, is sacred anymore.

There is also a profound moral injury inflicted on the family. No parent should have to hear conspiracy theories about their child's death while still arranging the funeral. No widow should have to see her husband's medical records debated on prime-time television. No child should grow up knowing that strangers used his father's passing as a political football. The family issued dignified statements asking for privacy and for the focus to remain on Zubeen's music and legacy. Those pleas were largely ignored by a political-media complex that had already scented blood. In their pursuit of eyeballs and votes, many forgot that behind the celebrity was a private family experiencing the rawest form of pain.

Perhaps the most dangerous long-term effect is the erosion of public trust in institutions. When politicians rush to allege medical negligence or governmental failure before any official inquiry has begun, they plant seeds of suspicion that are almost impossible to uproot. Doctors and hospitals that treated Zubeen in good faith suddenly found themselves under attack. Genuine questions about healthcare infrastructure, which deserve calm and reasoned discussion, were drowned in a flood of sensationalism. The space for honest investigation was contaminated from the outset. When truth itself becomes a casualty of political theatre, society pays a heavy price. It is worth remembering that Zubeen Garg himself had always kept politics at arm's length. He supported causes, not parties. He spoke for Assam's dignity, not for any ideology. He criticised governments when he felt they were wrong and praised them when he believed they were right. That independence was part of what made him beloved. To drag his corpse into the partisan battlefield is to violate the very spirit he embodied. It is an act of desecration dressed up as concern.

Assam has a long history of political turbulence, but there

have been moments when even bitter rivals set aside their differences in the face of shared tragedy. When Bhupen Hazarika died in 2011, leaders across the spectrum came together in genuine tribute. The state mourned as one. No one tried to score points over his body. That restraint reflected a mature understanding that some losses transcend politics. The contrast with the handling of Zubeen's death fourteen years later is stark and depressing. It suggests that the political culture has grown coarser, more predatory, and less capable of basic human decency.

What, then, is the way forward? First, there must be a collective refusal to participate in the weaponisation of grief. Citizens, media, and civil society have to draw a clear line: death and mourning are off-limits for political point-scoring. When leaders make inflammatory statements in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy, they must be called out not tomorrow but today. Silence in the face of such behaviour is complicity. Second, the media has to rediscover restraint. Sensational headlines and endless speculation in the first days after a death do not inform the public; they only inflame passions. Responsible journalism means waiting for facts rather than fuelling rumours. Third, political parties need to develop an internal code of conduct that explicitly forbids the exploitation of personal tragedies. The temptation will always exist, but institutional shame can be a powerful deterrent.

Finally, the people of Assam have to reclaim the narrative of Zubeen's legacy. His life should be remembered not for the noise that surrounded his death but for the music that defined it. Let the focus return to the songs that made millions feel less alone, to the charities he supported quietly, to the young artists he mentored, to the way he wore his Assamese identity with unapologetic pride. Let concerns be organised, scholarships created, music schools expanded, and documentaries made, all in his name and on his terms. That is the tribute he would have wanted: not anger, not division, but the continuation of the creative energy he poured into the world. Zubeen Garg belonged to the people of Assam in a way no politician ever can. His voice entered homes without permission and stayed there as a friend. When that voice fell silent, the decent thing would have been to lower our own voices in respect. Instead, too many chose to shout louder. The politicisation of his death was not just insensitive; it was a form of violence against a grieving society. Healing will take time, but it must begin with a simple resolution: never again. No family should endure what the Gargs have endured. No fan should feel that their love for an artist has been hijacked by cynics. No society should accept that even its deepest sorrows are fair game for political ambition.

Zubeen's songs will outlast the noise. Years from now, young couples will still play his romantic numbers at weddings, students will still sing his anthems of identity, and flood victims will still remember the man who showed up when no one else did. The politicians who tried to ride his coffin to power will be footnotes, if they are remembered at all. That is the ultimate justice. But until the culture changes, every such tragedy carries the risk of repetition. Assam, and India, must decide whether grief will remain sacred or become just another commodity in the marketplace of power. For the sake of every family that will ever lose a loved one, the answer has to be clear: some things must remain beyond politics. Zubeen Garg was one of them.

SIR 2.0: Cleansing or Culling the Rolls?

By: Satyabrata Borah

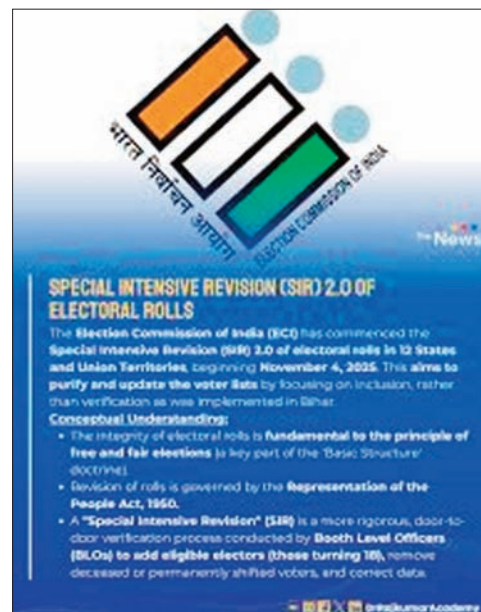
The Election Commission of India has embarked on an ambitious exercise called Special Intensive Revision 2.0 of electoral rolls in twelve States and Union Territories. On the surface the drive appears routine, a periodic cleansing of voter lists to remove dead, shifted or duplicate entries and to add those who have attained eligibility since the last revision. Yet beneath the administrative veneer lies a fundamental shift in philosophy that turns decades of settled electoral practice on its head. For the first time in independent India the Commission has placed the burden of proving citizenship and ordinary residence squarely on the individual voter rather than presuming eligibility of adult residents and requiring authorities to demonstrate ineligibility. This inversion of the burden of proof, coupled with an insistence on producing documents from a narrow historical window between 2002 and 2005, has triggered widespread apprehension that millions of genuine voters may be disenfranchised even before the next general election.

The origins of the present controversy can be traced to Bihar where a similar Special Intensive Revision was conducted in 2023 and 2024. The Commission directed Booth Level Officers to distribute Form 12D to every household. Citizens were asked to fill in details of family members and furnish documentary proof of residence that predated 2005 or establish linkage with ancestors whose names appeared on electoral rolls of that period. The stated objective was to eliminate fictitious and infiltrated voters, a concern repeatedly voiced in the context of border states. The Supreme Court is already seized of multiple petitions challenging the constitutional validity of that exercise. Petitioners argue that requiring citizens to prove their own legitimacy violates Article 14 and Article 21, that it discriminates against the poor, the illiterate and the mobile, and that it contravenes the principle of adult franchise which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. While those petitions remain pending the Commission has rolled out an almost identical template in twelve more States and Union Territories, suggesting either extraordinary confidence in the legality of its approach or an institutional reluctance to await judicial clarity.

The practical consequences of reversing the burden of proof are already visible. In Bihar the gender ratio of the electorate fell sharply after the revision, from 919 women per thousand men to 890 in some districts. Women, espe-

cially those married outside their natal villages, often lack documents in their own name and find it difficult to establish ancestral linkage. Migrant workers, students living in hostels, tenants in urban slums, and members of nomadic communities have been disproportionately affected. Many simply did not receive the enumeration forms. Booth Level Officers, overburdened and understaffed, frequently left bundles of forms with panchayat offices or local shopkeepers instead of visiting each household as mandated. In the absence of clear public communication thousands remain unaware that their existing voter identity cards are no longer sufficient proof of eligibility. When draft rolls are published next month a significant section of the population may discover that their names have vanished without any prior notice or opportunity for objection.

The Commission defends the methodology by arguing that electoral rolls must reflect only genuine citizens and that legacy data from



2002-2005 provides a reliable baseline. Yet this argument crumbles under scrutiny. Electoral rolls of that period were themselves prepared under a regime of presumptive eligibility. They contained errors, duplicates and names of persons long dead. To treat those rolls as sacrosanct while discarding the continuous revisions carried out subsequently is arbitrary. Moreover citizenship is not determined by the date on which a person's name first appeared on an

electoral roll. The Citizenship Act 1955 and the rules framed thereunder provide multiple pathways to establish citizenship: birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and incorporation of territory. Requiring citizens to produce documents that may have been lost, destroyed or never issued in the first place effectively creates an extralegal mode of disenfranchisement.

Indian jurisprudence has consistently leaned towards inclusion rather than exclusion in matters of franchise. As early as 1999 the Gauhati High Court in Dr Manmohan Singh versus the Election Commission held that the expression "ordinarily resident" in the Representation of the People Act must be interpreted liberally. A person who has come to a place with the intention of remaining there permanently or for a considerable length of time qualifies as an ordinary resident. The court emphasised that the law should not be construed in a manner that deprives citizens of their right to vote on technical grounds. The Supreme Court echoed this sentiment in Lal Babu Hussein versus Electoral Registration Officer (1995) when it ruled that the authorities bear the burden of proving that a person is not ordinarily resident. Once a voter's name has been on the roll and he or she has exercised franchise in the past the presumption is heavily in favour of continued eligibility.

This presumptive approach served India well for seven decades. It recognised the socio-economic reality that a large proportion of the population lives in informal settlements, changes residence frequently, and does not possess formal documentation. Voter identity cards issued after biometric enrolment under the Electoral Photo Identity Card scheme were accepted as conclusive proof of both identity and eligibility. By discarding that framework the Commission has introduced a degree of rigour that the registration machinery is simply not equipped to handle fairly. Booth Level Officers are part-time government school teachers or minor functionaries who receive minimal training for a task of immense constitutional importance. Expecting them to verify complex citizenship claims and ancestral linkages in remote villages within a compressed timeline is a recipe for error and abuse.

The timing of the exercise adds another layer of concern. Most of the twelve States and Union Territories undertaking SIR 2.0 are scheduled to face assembly elections within the next eighteen months. Any large-scale deletion of voters at this juncture will inevitably invite allegations of partisan manipulation, especially in States where the margin between victory and



defeat has historically been thin. Even if the Commission acts with impeccable neutrality the perception of targeting specific communities will be difficult to dispel. In Assam where a similar linkage-based exercise was attempted after the National Register of Citizens, millions were left struggling to establish inherited eligibility. The trauma of that experience still lingers. Replicating elements of that approach elsewhere risks reopening wounds that democratic institutions can ill afford.

The Commission insists that adequate safeguards exist: citizens whose names are deleted from draft rolls can file claims and objections, and appeals lie to the Electoral Registration Officer and beyond. But these remedies are meaningful only if people are aware of the deletion in the first place. In rural areas where newspapers rarely reach and internet penetration remains low the publication of draft rolls on a website is cold comfort. Physical display of lists at polling stations, a practice followed during summary revisions, has reportedly been dispensed with in several places. The thirty-day window for filing objections is illusory when the affected person discovers the omission only on election day. There is still time for course correction. The Commission could revert to the tried and tested method of house-to-house verification without demanding pre-2005 documents, treating existing EPIC holders as presump-

tively eligible unless specific evidence of ineligibility emerges. It could extend the timeline, intensify public awareness campaigns in regional languages, and involve civil society organisations in monitoring the process. Most importantly it could await the Supreme Court's verdict on the Bihar petitions before imposing the same template nationwide. Continuing down the present path risks converting a routine administrative exercise into a constitutional crisis.

The right to vote is not a concession granted by the state; it is the foundational act through which citizens constitute the state itself. Any process that erects barriers to its exercise must be subjected to the strictest scrutiny. The presumption that an adult citizen found residing in a constituency is entitled to vote unless proved otherwise has been the cornerstone of Indian democracy's remarkable inclusiveness. To discard that presumption in favour of a bureaucratic hurdle race is to forget the lessons of our own history. The poor, the marginalised and the mobile have kept faith with the Republic by turning out to vote in ever larger numbers. The Republic must now keep faith with them. The Special Intensive Revision in its current form represents a dangerous departure from that mutual trust. It deserves to be paused, rethought and, if necessary, struck down before irreversible damage is done to the world's largest democracy.

Sanchar Saathi App: The need for balance between privacy and security

By: Lalit Garg

A peculiar trend is unfolding in India's democratic politics—every initiative by the government is instinctively viewed with suspicion by the opposition. The ongoing controversy surrounding the Sanchar Saathi App is a prime example. The central government's intent to make this app mandatory on all new smartphones was fiercely criticised by the opposition, who labelled it a violation of privacy and personal freedom. It was raised as a major issue in the Winter Session of Parliament, amplifying fears of increased state intrusion into individual life. Accusing the government of constitutional overreach and covert surveillance, the opposition mounted a strong protest. Sensing the sensitivity of the matter and the political uproar, the government withdrew its decision of compulsory pre-installation, making it optional instead—those who want it may keep it; those who do not may uninstall it. However, this controversy raises a deeper question—are we, in the frenzy of political confrontation, ignoring the real challenges and necessities of the digital age?

The truth is that while today's digital era offers extraordinary opportunities, it also brings unprecedented threats. Cybercrime, espionage, identity theft, misinformation, data manipulation, terror networking—these have redefined the landscape of national security. Even the United Nations has acknowledged that the next world war, if it occurs, will be fought on the cyber front. In such times, can a government remain passive? Certainly not. Therefore, the Sanchar Saathi App is not merely a surveillance instrument; it has emerged as a strategic necessity for national security, citizen protection, and cybercrime control. The government's rationale—that rising digital crime demands protective mechanisms—is legitimate and unavoidable.

The opposition's resistance is also narrow because it is confined primarily to the privacy argument. While privacy is indeed a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution, it is not absolute—it is conditional and contextual. A democracy grants rights, but it also demands collective responsibility. When national integrity, economic security, strategic interests, and social stability are threatened



through digital platforms, government intervention becomes not only justified but imperative. The United States, China, Germany, and the United Kingdom—all possess cyber surveillance architectures. Have their democracies weakened because of it? No. They succeeded because they established a balance between monitoring and safeguarding rights. India, too, must find that equilibrium. It is valid to insist that any app must maintain minimal and justified surveillance without intruding unnecessarily into personal life. The government has also clarified that Sanchar Saathi App does not intend to peer into private lives but seeks to protect citizens from cyber fraud, hacking, scams, identity theft, and digital terrorism. Ironically, those criticising the app for being a "psychological control tool" or a "privacy violation mechanism" conveniently overlook that similar systems were conceptualised or implemented during their own regimes—whether in Aadhaar data frameworks, social media monitoring units, or national security protocol enhancements.

The real issue is—if criminals, terrorists, separatist groups, and cyber gangs are using sophisticated digital weapons, can ordinary citizens be left unprotected? Would democracy demand the government to look away while society becomes a laboratory for cybercrime? This threat is not unique to India—it is global. Nations without digital defence infrastructures end up with security systems as fragile as paper boats. Critics are justified

in asking whether the app guarantees data safety. The answer lies in what the government must ensure—transparent objectives, publicly available data policies, independent audits, privacy safeguards, and judicial oversight to prevent misuse. If these reforms are institutionalised, political resistance will naturally weaken. Unfortunately, the opposition's stance appears more opportunistic than reform-oriented. To be fair, citizen concerns are not baseless. India still lacks a robust, enforceable privacy protection framework, and accountability mechanisms for digital operations need strengthening. Hence, along with implementing Sanchar Saathi App, the country must toughen its data protection laws with punitive provisions and better judicial control. Viewed technically, the app's core intent is to enable detection, reporting, and tracking of crimes executed through mobile communication. It is more a crime prevention mechanism than a surveillance device. With cybercrime rising nearly 63 percent annually, and millions falling prey—from banking frauds to psychological exploitation on social media—can government silence be an acceptable option? Clearly not.

The harsh reality remains—nations are not sustained merely by rights; they endure through responsibility and protective structures. As citizens, we want secure data, safe transactions, and national security. Yet, the moment measures are introduced, we react negatively. This reflects a deeper political culture where we forget a universal principle: "Freedom survives only when coupled with responsibility."

Hence, the Sanchar Saathi App needs a balanced approach. The government must keep its architecture transparent, accountable, and law-governed; while the opposition must acknowledge that digital India's security challenges cannot be solved through slogans, but through technical safeguards. Democracy needs criticism—but constructive criticism that demands improvement rather than rejection. If the political class steers this debate in a reformative direction, the Communication Sathi App will not remain controversial; it may evolve into an effective citizen-centric digital safety instrument.

Undoubtedly, in today's digital world, personal data is invaluable—and must be protected at any cost. At the same time, we must examine whether other apps are stealthily penetrating our data far more dangerously. The government must protect citizens from such vulnerabilities. Instead of merely mandating usage, many believe that what India urgently needs is a national digital awareness movement and user training programmes so that citizens themselves become informed defenders against cybercrime. Ultimately, both security and privacy are indispensable. The challenge is not to pit one against the other, but to harmonise them. If policy, transparency, and accountability uphold this balance, the Sanchar Saathi App may well become a bridge to India's secure digital future. What India needs is not politics of resistance, but politics of understanding and solution—this is the true context and relevance of this debate.

What are the implications of renaming?

What are the implications of renaming?

By: Prof Mahesh Chand Gupta

It is often said: What's in a name? But Indian culture offers a direct answer—everything is in the name. The tradition of "yathā nām tathā gun" (as the name, so the qualities) is as old as our civilization. When we utter the name "Ram," a feeling of peace, compassion, and dignity arises within us. The name "Krishna" evokes love and sweetness. According to our beliefs, a name is sound, energy, identity, and direction. That is why in our society, a name is not just an identifier; it is a carrier of personality and leadership.

At a time when many nations across the world are struggling with moral decline, internal conflicts, authoritarianism, and power-centric governance, the Modi government has revived a deep cultural consciousness by renaming the Prime Minister's Office as Seva Tirth, Raj Bhavans as Lok Bhavan, and the Central Secretariat as Kartavya Bhavan. This is not merely an exercise of changing signboards or installing new plaques. Behind it lies the intent of transforming the very soul of governance through symbolic, philosophical, and ideological shifts.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly said that he is the "Pradhan Sevak" and that his work is not to display power but to practise service. In alignment with this spirit, the Prime Minister's Office will now be known as Seva Tirth. In our culture, the word tirth carries profound significance—it conveys purity, penance, devotion, and public welfare. A tirth is a place where people go seeking peace, solutions, and hope. By calling the PMO a tirth, the government has sent a message that this is not a place of power play but a place of service.

Similarly, renaming Raj Bhavans as Lok Bhavan is a revolutionary step. The word raj has long evoked feelings of distance, authority, and power in the public mind. In contrast, lok conveys belonging, participation, and partnership. The decision to name the Central Secretariat Kartavya Bhavan arises from the intention to instill a sense of duty and service within the bureaucracy. For decades, it has been seen as a symbol of authority, file-movement, decision-making power, and bureaucratic strength. But now, every official will constantly be reminded that governance is rooted not in rights, but in duties.

Until two days ago, the phrase "Prime Minister's Office" evoked an image of a grand, authoritative building. But the moment one hears Seva Tirth, a sense of purity, humility, and connection with the public emerges. That is the real implication of this renaming.

We all remember the famous Raj Kapoor song: "Mera joota hai Japani, sar pe laal topi Roosi, phir bhi dil hai Hindustani."

There could be no better example of how deeply names shape identity. "Japani" connects to the soul of Japan, "Roosi" to Russia, and "Hindustani" remains the heartbeat of the Indian spirit. Names evoke emotions; emotions shape culture; and culture defines national character.

India is no longer a monarchy; in a democracy, the people are supreme. For a government working with this conviction, renaming the PMO and Raj Bhavans is essential, as it strengthens emotional connect with the people. Seva Tirth, Lok Bhavan, and Kartavya Bhavan are words that resonate with the heart of every Indian

The Modi government has not merely changed names; it has conveyed a clear message—power is returning to the people. Raj Bhavans will no longer remain those old colonial symbols that the public could only gaze at from afar. I believe it is quite possible that in the future, public access to the PMO and Raj Bhavans may become even easier, because the government's commitment is: governance of the people, for the people, and among the people. The Modi government does not want any distance between itself and the public.

For the first time in independent India, a government is using words like kartavya-path, amritkaal, and seva as the foundation of its functioning. In this context, Kartavya Bhavan is not merely a name; it is a force shaping a new national mindset—one that will make bureaucracy more responsible, sensitive, and ethical. This renaming is an important chapter in India's cultural renaissance. We

know that Modi's government has earlier replaced many colonial or foreign invaders' names with those rooted in Indian identity—renaming Rajpath to Kartavya Path and Mughal Garden to Amrit Udyan being major examples.

Opposition parties are questioning the intent behind these changes. But the government has no hidden agenda. Its purpose is clear—to restore the lost dignity of Indian culture. Some may dismiss these name changes as symbolic, but this is actually a restoration of India's soul, thought, and values. This is the identity of a new India—an India proud of its culture, confident in its language, and deeply rooted in its vocabulary. Most importantly, this new India incorporates Indian philosophical thought into its administrative framework.

India is no longer a monarchy; in a democracy, the people are supreme. For a government working with this conviction, renaming the PMO and Raj Bhavans was essential, as it strengthens emotional connect with the people. Seva Tirth, Lok Bhavan, and Kartavya Bhavan are words that resonate with the heart of every Indian. They bridge the gap between government and people. As we celebrate the Amrit Kaal of independence, it is only natural to shed colonial mindsets. With these name changes, the Modi government has hammered the final nail into the coffin of colonial mentality. Words like "raj," "secretariat," and "office" belong to the vocabulary of colonial governance—and the government has now freed itself from that legacy.

By establishing service-based administration, the government has taken an admirable step. With these new names, it has given a powerful and inspiring vocabulary to the younger generation. When our children hear Seva Tirth or read Kartavya Bhavan, their thoughts will not turn toward power but toward service and duty. These ideas will shape India's future and help realize the dream of a developed India.

This renaming truly marks the rise of a new national consciousness, one we should all be proud of. With these changes, India has entered a new era—where governance will symbolize service, power will come closer to the common people, and administration will no longer reflect rights, but the spirit of duty. (The author is a well-known thinker and educationist who taught at Delhi University for 44 years.)

India airlifts movable bridge system, water units to Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 4: India has airlifted a movable modular bridge system and hundreds of water-purification units to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka as part of its ongoing humanitarian support to reconnect isolated communities and restore essential services in the island nation, the Indian mission here said on Thursday.

Sri Lanka has been grappling with widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse triggered by Cyclone Ditwah, leaving several districts isolated and severely straining the country's disaster-response capacity.

At least 479 people have been killed and 350 are missing as of Wednesday evening due to catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.

A C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force flew in the Bailey Bridge system

along with 500 water purification units on Wednesday, following a request from Colombo, the Indian High Commission said in a statement.

"The massive structure can be installed within a few hours to replace damaged bridges, significantly strengthening relief access and mobility for emergency services in landslide- and flood-hit areas," it said.

The flight also carried 22 personnel, including expert engineers to install the bridge and a medical team to assist the field hospital deployed earlier, the mission said.

In a social media post, the mission said disaster-management cooperation between the two neighbours also continued in the digital sphere.

In a virtual meeting held on Wednesday, Bhaskar Katamneni, Secretary of Real Time Governance, Andhra Pradesh, shared a "digital toolkit"



showcasing the state government's best practices in disaster preparedness and response with Hans Wijayasuriya, Chief Advisor to the Sri Lankan President on Digital Economy, and the GovTech team.

India has been extending humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka under Operation Sagar Bandhu,

with extensive air, sea and ground operations delivering urgent relief to those affected.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayake in a social media post on Wednesday expressed appreciation for Prime Minister Narendra Modi for India's steadfast support to the island nation.

Sri Lankan officials said the scale of the humanitarian crisis continues to deepen.

As of Wednesday night, more than 1.6 million people from over 455,000 families had been marooned, according to National Disaster Relief Services Centre (NDRSC) Assistant Secretary Jayathissa Munasinghe.

The government is operating 1,347 relief centres sheltering over 188,000 people.

Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) Director General Bandula Herath said

about 75 per cent of mobile coverage had been restored.

While none of the island's 9,332 communication towers were damaged, 16,926 distribution points remain affected due to lack of electricity and fuel to power generators, he said.

Authorities said accidental deaths among relief workers have risen to eight.

A 41-year-old electricity board employee died after being electrocuted during restoration work. Earlier, a Sri Lankan Air Force pilot was killed during an airdrop mission, while five Navy personnel and a Road Development Authority worker also died during rescue operations.

Officials estimate a total economic loss of between USD 6 billion and 7 billion, which is roughly 3-5 per cent of the island nation's GDP, due to the cyclone. (PTI)

Asia flood death toll surpasses 1,500 as calls grow to fight deforestation

PADANG (INDONESIA), Dec 4: Deaths from last week's catastrophic floods and landslides in parts of Asia surged past 1,500 Thursday as rescue teams raced to reach survivors isolated by the disaster with hundreds of people still unaccounted for across the region.

The tragedy of so much death and destruction was compounded by warnings that decades of deforestation caused by unchecked development, mining and palm oil plantations may have worsened the devastation. Calls grew for the government to act.

"We need the government to investigate and fix forest management," said Ranga Adiputra, a 31-year-old teacher whose home in West Sumatra was swept away. The hills above his village on the outskirts of Padang city had been scarred by illegal logging.

"We don't want this costly disaster to happen again," he said. Authorities said 837 people were confirmed dead in Indonesia, 479 in Sri Lanka and 185 in Thailand, as well as three in Malaysia.

Many villages in Indonesia and



Sri Lanka remained buried under mud and debris, with 861 people still unaccounted for in both countries.

Thousands reportedly faced severe shortages of food and clean water in cut off areas. The floods and landslides washed away roads and bridges and knocked out telecommunications, leaving many communities inaccessible.

Indonesian television showed images of huge amounts of felled timber carried downstream in North Sumatra, West Sumatra and Aceh

provinces. The leading Indonesian environmental group WALHI said that decades of deforestation — driven by mining, palm oil plantations, and illegal logging — stripped away natural defences that once absorbed rainfall and stabilised soil.

"Another environmental group, Global Forest Watch, has said the flood-inundated Indonesian provinces of Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra have since 2000 lost 19,600 sq km (7,569 square miles) of forest, an area larger than the state of New Jersey.

"Unless restoration begins now, more lives will be lost," Purba warned.

Massive piles of neatly cut timber lay scattered among the debris across Parkit Beach, a sight that stunned emergency crews deployed to the area.

"From their shape, it was clear these were not just trees torn out naturally by the flood, but timber that had been deliberately cut," said a member of a clean-up crew, Neviana, who goes by a single name.

Another resident of Padang, Ria Wati, 38, observed the same. (AP)

The group recorded more than 240,000 hectares (nearly 600,000 acres) of primary forest were lost in 2024 alone, leaving Sumatra's small river basins dangerously exposed.

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25 pc increase in terror incidents in 2025 in Pakistan, think tank report says

KARACHI, Dec 4: Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said here.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92 per cent of all incidents of violence recorded through January to November 2025, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

"Till November, an overall surge of 25 per cent was observed in violence, which resulted in 3,187 deaths in comparison to 2,546 casualties in 2024, a rise of around 20 per cent," the report, published on Wednesday, by CRSS, a non-profit, independent think tank, said.

In 2024, 2,546 deaths and 1981 injuries were reported. The figures include civilians, security personnel, and militants killed in anti-terror operations.

The fatalities reported were from 1,188 recorded incidents of violence, including terror attacks and counter terrorism operations, mainly concentrated in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces.

After clashes and tense relations with Afghanistan, violence has been at its peak in recent months in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, observed the report by CRSS, founded by civil society activists to monitor the security landscape in the country.

The Pakistan government accuses the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out terror attacks after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst hit region with around 68 per cent (2,165) of the total deaths, and over



62 per cent (732) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for over 28 per cent of the total fatalities (896) and over 30 per cent of the incidents reported (366).

The remaining regions of Pakistan — Sindh, Punjab, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) — collectively experienced 90 incidents, with 126 lives lost, constituting just 4 per cent of all fatalities, the report said.

The CRSS said on average there were approximately 15 casualties per day throughout the reporting period.

It also said that counter terrorism operations by security forces were impactful in the first 11 months of 2025, resulting in 1,795 militant fatalities — approximately 30 per cent more than the 1,392 lives lost in terrorist attacks.

However, in Balochistan, terrorist attacks by mainly banned insurgent groups were responsible for 517 fatalities among security forces personnel and civilians, outnumbering the militants killed in security operations by 36 per cent. (PTI)

Bangladesh tribunal issues arrest warrant against deposed PM Hasina's son

DHAKA, Dec 4: A special tribunal in Bangladesh on Thursday issued an arrest warrant against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's expatriate son Sajib Wajed Joy, a month after sentencing his mother to death on charges of committing crimes against humanity.

"The tribunal issued the arrest warrant in a case filed against him for (as well) committing crimes against humanity during the July Uprising," an ICT-BD prosecutor told reporters, adding an identical warrant was issued against then junior minister for ICT affairs Junaid Ahmed Palak, who, however, is already in jail.

Bangladesh's International Crime Tribunal (ICT-BD) handed down the death penalty to the ex-premier and her then home minister, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, for her attempts to tame a student-led violent street protest dubbed the July Uprising through brutal means after their trial in absentia.

Joy, 54, an information communication expert who served as the ex-premier's ICT affairs adviser, currently lives in the US. (PTI)

Critically ill former Bangladesh PM Zia to be taken to London: Reports

DHAKA, Dec 4: Family of former Bangladesh prime minister Khalada Zia, who remains in a critical condition here, is preparing to transfer her to London, where her son and BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman lives, media reports said Thursday.

Zia, the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, was admitted to a private hospital on November 23 when she developed a chest infection that affected both her heart and lungs.

Four days later, the three-time prime minister was shifted to the coronary care unit (CCU) after several of her health complications worsened.

BBC Bangla Service and Ittefaq newspaper said Zia's son and BNP's self-exiled acting chairperson Tarique Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman, a doctor herself, is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to oversee the transfer of her ailing mother-in-law.

"After arriving in Bangladesh, Zubaida Rahman will take her to London (after) assessing Zia's physical condition," at the Dhaka hospital, the BBC Bangla reported saying, several BNP leaders confirmed the decision without mentioning their names.

Qatar, meanwhile, said it is ready to provide an air ambulance for Zia for taking her to London even as two military and air force helicopters on Thursday staged landing tests at the rooftop of Dhaka's Evercare Hospital, where she is admitted.

"If madam's (Zia) health is suitable for travel, we plan to take her to London tomorrow morning. It all depends on her health," Zia's adviser Enamul Haque Chowdhury told The Daily Star newspaper.

A four-member Chinese medical team, comprising doctors Chi Jiang Fang, Yan Xin, Zhong Yuhui, and



Meng Huang Wu, arrived at the Evercare Hospital late on Wednesday night and met with the medical board to review treatment options for the BNP chairperson, the state-run BSS news agency reported.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir met the specialists upon their arrival and discussed Zia's treatment with them, according to news portal bd-news24.com.

The Chinese doctors joined a four-member UK specialist group led by Dr Richard Buell that had arrived earlier in the day to help chart an advanced treatment plan. The team's arrival marked the second batch of Chinese doctors, who had arrived earlier this week. A five-member advance team from China had arrived in Dhaka on December 1 to provide preliminary assistance.

Interim government chief Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday visited the hospital to enquire about Zia's health, a day after the army, navy and air force chiefs visited her. (PTI)

Identification of Thai agricultural worker's remains leaves 1 final hostage in Gaza

BANGKOK/JERUSALEM, Dec 4: Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai agricultural worker, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The return of Sudthaisak Rinthalak's remains leaves just one last hostage to be returned under the agreement.

Rinthalak was an agricultural worker who had been employed at Kibbutz Be'eri, one of the hardest-hit communities in the attack. Israeli officials said the 42-year-old Thai was killed on Oct 7, 2023 during the Hamas-led attack in Israel that triggered the Israel-Hamas war and that his body was taken by the militant group Islamic Jihad.

He was officially declared dead on May 16, 2024. Rinthalak's remains were returned Wednesday, a day after militants handed over remains that didn't match either of the last two hostages.

Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikordej Balankura said Sudthaisak's family has been notified and thanked the Israeli government for their assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai hostages taken at the start of the war. Of them, 28 were returned alive and three dead. (AP)

Europeans accuse Putin of feigning interest in peace after talks with US envoys

KYIV, Dec 4: Ukraine and its European allies have accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of feigning interest in peace efforts after five hours of talks with US envoys at the Kremlin produced no breakthrough.

The Russian leader "should end the bluster and the bloodshed and be ready to come to the table and to support a just and lasting peace", UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said on Wednesday. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha urged Putin to "stop wasting the world's time".

The remarks reflected the high tensions and gaping gulf between Russia on one side and Ukraine and its European allies on the other over how to end a war that Moscow started when it invaded its neighbour nearly four years ago.

A day earlier, Putin accused the Europeans of sabotaging the US-led peace efforts — and warned that, if provoked, Russia would be ready for war with Europe.

Since the 2022 invasion, European governments, along with the US, have spent billions of dollars to support Kyiv financially and militarily. Under President Donald Trump, however, the US has tempered its support — and instead made a push to end the war.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said Tuesday's talks at the Kremlin between Putin and US envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were "positive", but he wouldn't release any details.

Witkoff and Kushner are set to meet with Ukraine's lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov, on Thursday in Miami for further talks, according to a senior Trump administration official who was not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Trump said Witkoff and Kushner came away from their marathon session with Putin confident that he wants to find an end to the war. "Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," Trump said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said "the world clearly feels that the possibility of ending the war exists".

In comments from his evening address posted on Telegram, Zelenskyy said the effort depends on "constructive diplomacy plus pressure on the aggressor. Both components work towards peace".

Where the peace talks go from here depends largely on whether the Trump administration decides to increase the pressure on Russia or on Ukraine to make concessions.

A US peace proposal that became public last month was criticized for being tilted heavily toward Moscow because it granted some of the



Kremlin's core demands that Kyiv has rejected as nonstarters.

Many European leaders worry that if Putin gets what he wants in Ukraine, he will have free rein to threaten their countries, which already have faced incursions from Russian drones and fighter jets, and an alleged widespread sabotage campaign.

The Russian and American sides agreed Tuesday not to disclose the substance of their Kremlin talks, but at least one major hurdle to a settlement remains — the fate of four Ukrainian regions Russia partially occupies and claims as its own.

After the talks, Ushakov told reporters that "so far, a compromise hasn't been found" on the issue of territory, without which the Kremlin sees "no resolution to the crisis".

Ukraine has ruled out giving up territory that Russia has captured. Asked whether peace was closer or further away after the talks, Ushakov said: "Not further, that's for sure."

"But there's still a lot of work to be done, both in Washington and in Moscow," he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday it was "not correct" to say that Putin had rejected the US peace plan. He declined to elaborate on the talks.

"We're deliberately not going to add anything," he said. "It's understood that the quieter these negotiations are conducted, the more productive they will be."

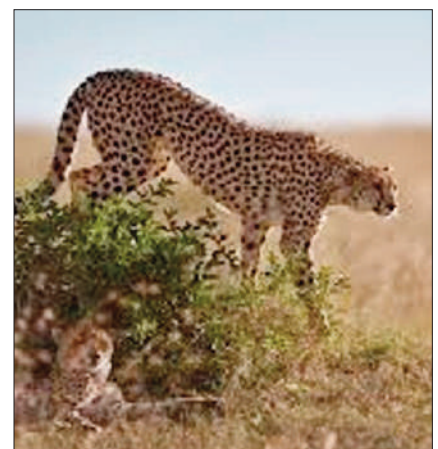
Foreign ministers from European NATO countries, meeting Wednesday in Brussels, showed little patience with Moscow.

"What we see is that Putin has not changed any course. He's pushing more aggressively on the battlefield," Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said. "It's pretty obvious that he doesn't want to have any kind of peace."

Finnish Foreign Minister Elinna Valtonen struck the same note. "So far we haven't seen any concessions from the side of the aggressor, which is Russia, and I think the best confidence-building measure would be to start with a full ceasefire," she said.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said Ukraine's partners will keep supplying military aid to ensure pressure is maintained on Moscow. (AP)

How sperm bank for cheetahs might one day save fastest land animal



CAPE TOWN, Dec 4: For 35 years, American zoologist Laurie Marker has been collecting and storing specimens in a cheetah sperm bank in Namibia, hoping conservationists never have to use them.

But she worries that the world's fastest land animal might be on the brink of extinction one day and need artificial reproduction to save it.

Marker says the sperm bank at the Cheetah Conservation Fund she founded in the southern African nation is a "frozen zoo" of cheetahs she's been building since 1990. It would be utilised in a worst-case scenario for the big cats, whose numbers have dropped alarm-

ingly in the wild over the last 50 years.

"You don't do anything with it unless until it's needed," Marker, one of the foremost experts on cheetahs, told The Associated Press from her research centre near the Namibian city of Otjiwarongo. "And we never want to get to that point."

Conservationists mark World Cheetah Day on Thursday with less than 7,000 of them left in the wild, similar numbers to the critically endangered black rhino. There are only around 33 populations of cheetahs spread out in pockets mainly across Africa, with most of those populations having less than 100 animals, Marker said.

Like so many species, the sleek cats that can run at speeds of 70 miles per hour (112 km per hour) are in danger from habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict and the illegal animal trade.

Their shrinking, isolated groups mean their gene pool is shrinking also as small populations continuously breed among themselves, with repercussions for their reproduction rates.

Globally, cheetah numbers in the wild have dropped by 80% in the last half-century and they've been pushed out of 90% of their historical range.

Scientists believe that cheetahs already narrowly escaped extinction at the end of the last ice age around 10,000-12,000 years ago, which first reduced their gene pool.

Marker said the lack of genetic diversity, along with the fact that cheetahs have 70-80% abnormal sperm, mean they might need help in the future.

"And so, a sperm bank makes perfect sense, right?" Marker said.

Storing sperm is not unique to cheetahs in the wildlife world. It's a tactic that conservationists have developed for other species, including elephants, rhinos, antelopes, other big cats, birds and others.

The value of animal reproductive research, Marker said, is seen in the desperate battle to save the northern white rhino from extinction.

There are just two northern white rhinos left, both females, making the species functionally extinct with no chance of reproducing naturally. Their only hope lies in artificial reproduction using northern white rhino sperm that was collected and frozen years ago.

Because both remaining northern white rhinos — a mother and daughter — can't carry pregnancies, scientists have tried to implant northern white rhino embryos in southern white rhino surrogates.

The surrogates haven't managed to carry any of the pregnancies to term, but the conservation team has committed to keep trying to save northern white rhinos against all odds.

Other efforts around artificial reproduction have been successful, including a project that bred black-footed ferrets using artificial re-

production after they'd been reduced to a single wild population in Wyoming in the United States.

Marker doesn't chase down cheetahs to collect their sperm but takes samples opportunistically.

In Namibia, cheetahs are mostly in danger from farmers who view them as threats to their livestock, meaning Marker's team are called out for cats that have been injured or captured and will collect samples while treating and releasing them.

Sperm samples can also be taken from dead cheetahs. "Every cheetah is actually a unique mix of a very small number of genes. We will try to bank every animal we possibly can," Marker said.

The samples from approximately 400 cheetahs and counting are now stored at ultralow temperatures in liquid nitrogen at the Cheetah Conservation Fund laboratory. Marker's research does not involve any artificial insemination as breeding wild animals in captivity is not allowed in Namibia.

Should cheetahs be threatened with extinction again, the first backup would be the roughly 1,800 cats living in zoos and other captive environments. But, Marker said, cheetahs don't breed well in captivity and the sperm bank might be, like the northern white rhinos, the last resort.

Without it, "we're not going to have much of a chance," Marker said. (AP)

Development under BJP reached remotest corners of Arunachal: Khandu

Panchayat and Municipal polls to be held simultaneously on 15 December

ITANAGAR, Dec 4: Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday asserted that development under the BJP government has reached "remotest corners" of the state, bringing improved connectivity and accelerated infrastructure growth.

Attending a panchayat election campaign at Jangda village in Tawang district, Khandu said he could "sense the people's expectations and trust" in the government's ongoing development initiatives.

"At Jangda village today for the Panchayat election campaign, I felt the trust and aspirations of our people," he said in a post on X.

"Their belief in a brighter tomorrow inspires me to work even harder for every family and every village," Khandu said.

The 12th general elections to panchayati raj institutions and the third municipal polls for Itanagar and Pasighat will be simultaneously held on December 15. Counting of votes is



scheduled for December 20.

A total of 63 candidates, 58 from the BJP

and one from the National People's Party (NPP) for zilla parishad seats, along with four BJP candidates from the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) have been elected uncontested following withdrawal of nominations on November 29.

Altogether, 5,037 Gram Panchayat Members (GPMs) from the ruling BJP have also been declared elected unopposed.

According to election officials, 440 candidates remain in the fray for 186 zilla parishad seats, 39 candidates for 16 IMC wards and 21 candidates for eight Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) wards.

A total of 8,31,648 voters, 7,59,210 for panchayat bodies and 72,438 for municipal bodies are eligible to vote across 2,171 panchayat polling stations, 67 IMC and 12 PMC polling stations, they said.

Polling in the Dumba Singhpho GP constituency has been countermanded due to the death of a validly nominated candidate. (PTI)

Governor extends Podi Barbi greetings

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 4: Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), Governor of Arunachal Pradesh has extended his warm greetings to the people of the State, with special regards to the Adi community, on the occasion of 'Podi Barbi'. He expressed hope that the festival would strengthen unity and further enrich the State's vibrant cultural heritage.

In his message, the Governor highlighted the importance of festivals, rituals and celebrations in shaping the social and cultural identity of every tribe. He noted that these traditions reflect community joy, harmony and a shared sense of belonging, often rooted in agricultural practices. Podi Barbi, he said, symbolises prayers for divine blessings, abundant harvests and the well-being of all.

Concluding his message, the Governor offered prayers to 'Almighty Donyi Polo' for peace, prosperity and happiness throughout Arunachal Pradesh.

Chief Secretary reviews development projects in Dibang Valley



HT Correspondent

ANINI, Dec 4: Chief Secretary Manish Kumar Gupta undertook a comprehensive review of key developmental initiatives in Dibang Valley on Wednesday, accompanied by Gopala Krishnan, IAS, Chairman of the Staff Selection Board (GoI), Pawan Kumar Sain, IAS, Chief Electoral Officer and Goli Angu, Joint Director of Industries. They were joined by Deputy Commissioner Bekir Nyorak, Superintendent of Police Ringu Ngupok and Heads of Departments from the district.

During the visit, the Chief Secretary inspected ongoing works across various sectors, giving special attention to flagship projects under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP). He stressed timely completion, strict quality control and stronger inter-departmental coordination to ensure that developmental activities translate into tangible benefits for the people.

A day before the field visit, a detailed district review meeting was held, where Deputy Commissioner Nyorak presented a comprehensive PowerPoint briefing highlighting progress and challenges across multiple departments. The Chief Secretary issued key directives aimed at strengthening implementation, improving monitoring systems and enhancing administrative convergence to accelerate developmental outcomes.

As part of the programme, the Chief Secretary travelled to Bruni, the last motorable point of Dibang Valley, where he interacted with personnel of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). He appreciated their commitment to duty and discussed concerns related to connectivity, infrastructure gaps and ground-level coordination in the remote border region.

While reviewing VVP and other major projects, the Chief Secretary emphasised that all completed assets must be formally handed over to the respective beneficiary departments. He stated that proper handover ensures effective utilisation, maintenance and long-term public benefit, strengthening overall service delivery in the district.

Operation Dawn 2.0: Two arrested in Pasighat for possessing suspected Ganja

Naka alert leads to chain investigation;

ADS team seizes 69.95 grams of suspected contraband

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Dec 4: In a major breakthrough under Operation Dawn 2.0, East Siang Police arrested a contraband carrier and a female drug peddler, seizing a total of 69.95 grams of suspected ganja following swift action by Naka personnel and the Anti-Drug Squad (ADS).

The operation began on 30 November when a Naka was set up at the 2-Mile Check Gate to enforce the Model Code of Conduct ahead of the upcoming Panchayat and Municipal elections. During checking, the Naka team—comprising ASI R Lowang, HC Roni Kri and Ct G Nangkar—intercepted Karson Pait of Dhemaji, Assam and recovered 14.61 grams of suspected ganja from his handbag. A case, PSGT/PS/C/No 104/2025 under Section 20(b) of the NDPS Act was registered.

During interrogation, the accused revealed that he had procured the substance from Majgaon, Silapathar from a woman identified as Bhanu Chetria alias Gita Chetria of Lakhimpur District. Acting on this lead, an ADS team led by SI Johny Tasung



and SI Kuncha Tangha, under the supervision of IC ADS DySP Ayup Boko, conducted a raid at Silapathar on 2 December 2025. The team arrested Chetria and recovered an additional 55.34 grams of suspected ganja. All seizures were made in accordance with the NDPS Act in the presence of independent witnesses. Items seized include: 14.61 grams of suspected ganja, 55.34 grams of suspected ganja, one smart phone and one packet of rolling paper.

Both accused were brought to Pasighat Police Station along with the seized items and the female accused was placed at WPS Pasighat. Further investigation is in progress.

Superintendent of Police, East Siang, Pankaj Lamba, IPS, praised the coordinated efforts of the Naka personnel and ADS team, reiterating the police department's firm zero-tolerance stance on drug-related offences. He urged citizens to stay vigilant and report suspicious activities, stressing that community cooperation remains essential to building a drug-free East Siang.

Active NSCN (K-Niki Sumi) cadre apprehended in Tirap

Assam Rifles and Arunachal Police seize armed insurgent, weapons and incriminating items



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 4: In a major counter-insurgency operation, the Khonsa Battalion of Assam Rifles in coordination with the Arunachal Pradesh Police, apprehended an active cadre of the NSCN (K-Niki Sumi) faction in General Area Hukanjuri, Tirap district.

The arrested insurgent has been identified as SS Captain Jenlong Supong, a fully armed and active

member of the NSCN (K-Niki Sumi) faction. The operation was launched following credible intelligence from ECIB & 3 CIB, corroborated by 19 WEU, confirming the presence of an armed insurgent in the area.

Acting swiftly, a joint column of troops from 44 Assam Rifles and police personnel executed a precise intervention, resulting in the seizure of one pistol, one magazine, six live rounds, a mobile phone and a PAN card from the cadre.

The apprehended individual has been handed over to Khonsa Police Station for further investigation and legal action.

The operation underscores the continued commitment of Assam Rifles and state agencies to maintain peace, strengthen security and curb insurgent activities in the region. Security forces have recently intensified operations in Tirap district in response to a surge in extortion activities.

The Niki Sumi faction of NSCN has been particularly active in the Tirap, Longding and Changlang (TLC) region of Arunachal Pradesh, reportedly running extensive extortion networks targeting local residents and businesses.

India to promote inclusive, resilient and sustainable democracy under 2026 Chairship

HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Dec 4: Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar on Thursday assumed the Chairship of the Council of Member States of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) for the year 2026. The occasion was also attended by India's Ambassador to Sweden, Anurag Bhushan.

The Chairship is being seen as a significant milestone, reflecting global recognition of the Election Commission of India as one of the world's most credible and innovative Election Management Bodies (EMBs). India, a founding member of International IDEA has consistently contributed to the organisation's governance, democratic discourse and institutional initiatives.

Upon his arrival in Stockholm, CEC Gyanesh Kumar was received by Ambassador Anurag Bhushan and held discussions with International IDEA Secretary-General Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora.

In his acceptance speech in Stockholm, CEC Kumar highlighted the scale of India's democratic exercise, noting that the country has over 900 million electors across 28 states and 8 Union Territories. Reflecting on the 2024 General Elections, he said India witnessed a massive democratic exercise with over 20,000 candidates from 743 political parties, including six national and 67 state



parties, participating.

He added that over 20 million election personnel, including more than 1 million Booth Level Officers and 5 million polling staff were engaged in conducting the elections. Observing India's electoral history since independence in 1947, he said the country has successfully conducted 18 general elections to Parliament and over 400 elections to State Legislatures. CEC Kumar emphasised India's intention to share its experiences from the world's largest, most diverse and inclusive modern democracy, alongside the democratic values and principles deeply rooted in the country's civilisational heritage.

Affirming the roadmap for India's Chairship, he stated that it

would be decisive, ambitious and action-oriented. The Council's work will focus on India's theme for 2026 – "Democracy for an inclusive, peaceful, resilient and sustainable world" and will prioritise two key pillars: Reimagining Democracy for the Future and Independent & Professional Election Management Bodies for Sustainable Democracy.

Concluding his speech, CEC Kumar reiterated India's commitment to ensuring that every vote counts, every voice matters, and that democracy worldwide become more inclusive, peaceful, resilient and sustainable.

Mauritius and Mexico will serve as Vice Chairs of the International IDEA Council alongside India for the year 2026.

REC Executive Director reviews RDSS progress in Arunachal Pradesh



HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Dec 4: Prince Dhawan, IAS, Executive Director (PMD-RDSS), REC Limited, conducted a high-level review of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) implementation in Arunachal Pradesh during a meeting held at the Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall in Tawang. The review formed part of his three-day visit to the state from 2-4 December to assess ground-level progress and fast-track critical power distribution reforms.

Welcoming the Executive Director, RK Sharma, Secretary (Power), Government of Arunachal Pradesh, acknowledged existing challenges and urged implementing agencies to work in close coordination to meet targets. He stressed the need to prioritise completion of smart metering across all 42

identified towns of the state.

Deputy Commissioner of Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS, expressed confidence that the visit would help resolve bottlenecks and further enhance execution. She assured full support from the district administration, noting that such engagements play a vital role in improving public service delivery.

A detailed presentation highlighted district-wise progress under Loss Reduction, Smart Metering and System Strengthening components. While several achievements were noted, the review also flagged areas requiring urgent intervention.

During the meeting, Executive Director Prince Dhawan issued key directives aimed at expediting statewide progress. He called for acceleration of smart metering across all divisions, improved coordination among field teams and

departments, quicker resolution of operational challenges and effective use of review platforms for informed decision-making. Drawing from his previous tenure in Arunachal Pradesh, he said he was familiar with the state's unique challenges and assured that REC would continue extending technical and administrative support. He also emphasised enhanced inter-departmental coordination, intensified field activities with strict adherence to quality and safety norms and regular virtual reviews with districts for continuous monitoring.

Reiterating the significance of RDSS, Dhawan stated that strengthening the power distribution network is crucial for reducing losses, improving system reliability and ensuring better consumer services across the state.

The meeting witnessed participation from senior officials of the Department of Power, including Chief Engineers Er G Lingi (CEZ & State Nodal Officer, RDSS) and Er D Tajapodia (WEZ), Executive Engineers from multiple divisions and representatives from PMAs, PGCIL, TKCs, AMISP, TPQMA and other implementing partners. Officials from several districts also attended virtually, facilitating a comprehensive statewide review.

REC Limited reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and urged all agencies to adopt a mission-mode approach to ensure timely and quality-driven execution of all RDSS components for a stronger, more reliable power distribution system in the state.

Guv urges discipline, leadership and empowerment as cadets prepare for Viksit Bharat 2047

KT Parnaik visits Sainik School Rewa, inspires cadets

ITANAGAR, Dec 4: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), visited Sainik School Rewa in Madhya Pradesh on 4th December 2025, marking an emotional return to his alma mater and the institution where he was part of the first batch in 1962. Standing before the iconic Yuvraj Bhawan, he recalled the school's rich history, its inspiring founders and the timeless values that have shaped generations of cadets. He described the school as a sacred ground where discipline, character and leadership are nurtured in young minds.

Addressing the cadets, the Governor praised the distinguished legacy of Sainik Schools nationwide, noting that they have produced more than 70% of officers serving in the Armed Forces with Sainik School Rewa standing tall among the finest. He urged cadets to embrace discipline, hard work, teamwork and the spirit of healthy competition.

Encouraging cadets to develop leadership traits, he emphasised the impor-



ance of confidence and taking on challenges early in life. He highlighted that true leadership lies in communication, empathy, collaboration and the ability

to influence others with integrity—skills essential for serving the nation and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

In a special message to girl cadets, the Governor commended their achievements in breaking barriers and becoming symbols of empowerment and national pride.

He urged them to embody the strength of Durga, the wisdom of Saraswati and the grace of Lakshmi, highlighting that Sainik School Rewa, followed by the National Defence Academy, would mould them into capable leaders, thinkers and problem-solvers. "The nation believes in you and depends on you," he said, calling them torchbearers of a more equal and progressive India.

The Governor also addressed the teachers, acknowledging their pivotal role in shaping future leaders. He urged them to guide, mentor and inspire cadets through personal example and active participation in academic, physical and character-building activities, noting that their influence will remain immortal in the memories of every cadet.

Emphasising the need for emotional intelligence, adaptability and a growth mindset in a rapidly changing world, the Governor encouraged the school to continue preparing students for future challenges. He expressed hope that Sainik School Rewa will sustain its legacy as a cradle of nation-builders.

IndiGo cancels over 300 flights at Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, other airports

MUMBAI, Dec 4: The country's largest airline IndiGo on Thursday cancelled more than 300 domestic and international flights at Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and other airports, as operational disruptions continued for the third day, impacting the travel plans of hundreds of passengers.

A significant number of IndiGo flights were also delayed at various airports, as crew woes and adjustments to schedules weighed on the operations of the airline, which is known for its punctuality.

A day after its On Time Performance (OTP) or punctuality plunged to 19.7 per cent, the airline continued to grapple with flight disruptions, and sources said over 300 flights have been cancelled till afternoon. At least 95 flights were cancelled at the Delhi airport, 85 at the Mumbai airport, 70

at Hyderabad and 50 at Bangalore. Besides, there were cancellations at other airports, the sources told PTI.

Based on data from six key airports -- Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad -- IndiGo's OTP nosedived to 19.7 per cent on Wednesday, down from 35 per cent on December 2.

The sources said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is meeting the airline officials to discuss the situation.

In late afternoon trade, IndiGo shares dropped over 3 per cent to Rs 5,417.90 apiece on the BSE.

On Wednesday, DGCA said it was investigating IndiGo flight disruptions and has asked the airline to submit the reasons for the current situation, as well as its plans to reduce flight cancellations and delays.



The sources said the airline has been facing an acute crew shortage since the implementation of the second phase of the FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limitations) norms.

While IndiGo has not issued any statement on Thursday, the airline, which operates around

2,300 domestic and international flights daily, on Wednesday said a "multitude of unforeseen operational challenges" have significantly disrupted its operations across the network for the past two days, and apologised to the passengers for the inconvenience.

The airline is adjusting its schedules in a calibrated manner to normalise the situation. The Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) has alleged that IndiGo, despite getting a two-year preparatory window before the full implementation of new flight duty and rest period norms for cockpit crew, "inexplicably" adopted a "hiring freeze".

Further, the pilots' grouping has urged DGCA not to approve airlines' seasonal flight schedules unless they have adequate staff to operate their services "safely and reliably" in accordance with

the new FDTL norms.

Airline Pilots' Association of India (ALPA) has said the operational disruptions at IndiGo due to crew issues point to a failure of proactive resource planning by dominant airlines, and claimed that there could also be an effort to pressurise regulator DGCA to dilute the new flight duty time limitation norms.

For the disruptions, IndiGo, in a statement on Wednesday, flagged various challenges including "minor technology glitches, schedule changes linked to the winter season, adverse weather conditions, increased congestion in the aviation system and the implementation of updated crew rostering rules (FDTL) had a negative compounding impact on our operations in a way that was not feasible to be anticipated". (PTI)

SC asks states to provide more staff to EC for SIR duty to ease pressure on BLOs



NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Taking note of a plea alleging extreme work pressure faced by the booth level officers (BLOs) engaged in the time-bound special revision of the electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed the states on Thursday to consider deputing additional employees for reducing their working hours.

The court was hearing an application filed by actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), seeking a direction to the Election Commission (EC) not to take coercive actions under the Representation of the People (RP) Act against the BLOs for not performing the duty in a time-bound manner and pointing out that many of them have committed suicide due to the work pressure.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared in the matter for the TVK, that some instructions are needed to be issued as many BLOs, who are either teachers or anganwadi workers, have died due to the extreme pressure exerted on them by EC officials.

Sankaranarayanan said moreover, the EC officials are also getting FIRs lodged against the BLOs if they fail to perform their duties.

The CJ said the states may consider deploying additional staff, so that the work pressure is eased.

"In case they are facing hardships, including being overburdened with their routine duties as well as the additional duties assigned by the Election Commission, the state government can obviate such hardships," the bench noted.

The states may consider the "desirability of deputing additional staff at the disposal of the EC, so that the working hours can be proportionately reduced",

an order issued by the court said.

The bench said if any employee has any "specific reason" for seeking exemption from the SIR duty, the competent officer of the state can consider such requests on a case-to-case basis and replace such an employee with another.

"However, it shall not be construed or understood as if they can withdraw the employees who have been assigned the duty if their substitutes are not provided," it added.

The court further said the states where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls is underway, "shall be obligated to deploy the requisite workforce at the disposal of the EC, though the strength of such employees can be increased as explained above".

The bench disposed of the plea, saying the other prayers like seeking ex-gratia compensation for the BLOs who died during SIR duties can be revived later, either by the aggrieved persons or the petitioner, by filing another application at a later stage.

During the hearing, Sankaranarayanan said FIRs under section 32 of the RP Act have been filed by the poll panel against BLOs.

Section 32 of the Act deals with a breach of official duty by electoral officers, making it punishable with imprisonment and fines for neglecting their duties related to the electoral rolls.

The senior lawyer said BLOs are not equipped to perform the SIR duties in such a short span of time and moreover, there are internet-related issues. He said the teachers and anganwadi workers have to go for SIR duties early morning or late at night, before or after their regular work.

He said a youngster, who had to go on leave for his wedding, was denied leave and suspended.

"He committed suicide... When you are doing this, at least show the human side. Criminal action is harsh, it should not be initiated," the lawyer said.

The bench said the state governments cannot run away from their obligation.

"If there is a difficulty being experienced, then on a case-to-case basis, the state government can exempt employees and provide an alternative," the CJ said.

"Why should the Election Commission register FIRs?" Sankaranarayanan asked.

"It is not for the first time, earlier also they have been registering it," the CJ said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the pressure on the BLOs is a "harsh reality". (PTI)

Govt tells visiting dignitaries not to meet LoP, it's insecurity: Rahul

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the Leader of the Opposition due to its "insecurity".

Gandhi's remarks came hours ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's two-day visit to India. The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha said it is a tradition that visiting foreign dignitaries meet the LoP but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs were not following this norm.

"Normally the tradition is that those who come from abroad have a meeting with the LoP. This used to happen during (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee ji's time, Manmohan Singh ji's time, it has been a tradition but what happens these days is that when foreign dignitaries come and when I go abroad, the government suggests to them to not meet the LoP," Gandhi told reporters in Parliament House complex.

"This is their policy, they do this every time. They do it when I go abroad and when people come here. We get the message that they have been told that the government has said 'not to meet you'," the former Congress president said.

Highlighting the importance of such meetings, he said the LoP gives another perspective.

"We also represent India, only the government does not represent India. The government does not want that opposition leaders to meet foreign leaders. This is a tradition (visiting foreign dignitaries meeting LoP), a norm, but Modi ji does not follow this norm, foreign ministry does not follow this norm," Gandhi said without naming Putin. Asked why the government was doing so, he said, "It is their insecurity". Echoing her brother's views, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said it is a protocol that visiting dignitaries meet the LoP.

"All the policies of this govern-

ment are based on one principle -- they want to capture everything, do not let other voices be heard, don't want to hear other people and are breaking protocols. Every democracy has a protocol which should be followed," she told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

"The government is very insecure that this is a reflection of it. When dignitaries come, they meet the LoP, this is protocol so what is the need to break that protocol. This can only be insecurity and nothing else," she said.

Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal said the LoP meeting foreign dignitaries visiting India is a time-tested democratic tradition, so that India's international engagement is deeper and more meaningful. "But those who only wish to speak their own Man ki Baat clearly have no regard for these traditions that serve as important pillars of our foreign policy engagement," Venugopal said on X. (PTI)

Indian Navy synonymous with exceptional courage and determination: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended Navy Day greetings to the force personnel on Thursday and said the Indian Navy is synonymous with "exceptional courage and determination".

In a post on X, he also said in the recent years, the Navy has focussed on self-reliance and modernisation, and this has "enhanced our security apparatus".

Navy Day on December 4 serves as a reminder of the naval force's "vital role" during the 1971 India-Pakistan War. The missile boats of the Indian Navy had launched a daring attack on the Karachi harbour as part of Operation Trident.

"Navy Day greetings to all personnel of the Indian Navy. Our Navy is synonymous with exceptional courage and determination. They safeguard our shores and uphold our maritime interests. In the recent years, our Navy has focussed on self-reliance and modernisation. This has enhanced our security apparatus," Modi said in his post.

He also recalled a recent occasion when he spent time with naval personnel on board INS Vikrant, India's indigenous aircraft carrier.

"I can never forget this year's Diwali, which I spent with Naval personnel on board INS Vikrant.



Wishing the Indian Navy the very best for their endeavours ahead," the prime minister said.

INS Vikrant, frontline frigate INS Udaygiri, destroyer INS Kolkata and several other state-of-the-art naval platforms were part of an operational demonstration by the Navy off the coast of Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday evening. It was witnessed by President Droupadi Murmu.

Murmu, the supreme commander of the armed forces, attended the event on the Shangumugham beach as part of the Navy-Day celebrations, as the Navy showcased its maritime prowess and multi-domain combat

capabilities.

In a post on X on Thursday, she extended greetings to the Indian Navy personnel, veterans and their families on Navy Day.

"Warm greetings to Indian Navy personnel, veterans and their families on Navy Day! The nation salutes the brave men and women who safeguard our maritime borders and national interests with courage, vigilance and unwavering commitment. From securing trade routes and strengthening the blue economy to leading humanitarian missions, the Indian Navy embodies discipline, compassion and responsibility," the president said.

Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K

Tripathi also offered his greetings and reaffirmed the force's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of India's maritime interests.

"On occasion of #NavyDay2025 we renew our pledge to serve the Navy and the Nation with Duty, Honour and Courage, and continue to stand firm as a #CombatReady, #Credible, #Cohesive and #FutureReady #Aatmanirbhar Force committed to protecting and promoting India's National Maritime Interests -- Anytime, Anywhere, Anyhow" -- Adm Dinesh K Tripathi #CNS & all personnel of #IndianNavy," he said.

In his address at the operational demonstration held a day ago, the admiral had said Navy Day is celebrated on December 4 each year to commemorate the "daring and decisive attacks of the Indian Navy on and off the Karachi harbour during the 1971 India-Pakistan war".

"The day also offers us an opportunity to pay homage to our brave warriors, whose courage and supreme sacrifice continue to inspire us in service of the Navy and the nation," he had said.

Navy Day is also about India's rich maritime heritage -- a heritage that continues to "shape our thinking and guide our course" -- Admiral Tripathi had said. (PTI)

SC asks all high courts to submit details of pending acid attack cases

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Terming tardy trials in acid attack cases as a "mockery of the system", the Supreme Court on Thursday directed all the High Courts to submit details of such pending cases across the country within four weeks.

Mooting the idea of setting up special courts for expeditious disposal of acid attack cases, the top court also asked the Centre to consider amending the law through legislation or even an ordinance so that the survivors are formally included within the definition of persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to avail welfare schemes.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also issued notices to the Centre and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on a PIL filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik that the victims be categorised as persons with disabilities to ensure access to welfare schemes. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the issue would be taken up with "due seriousness" by the government.

The bench termed as "national shame" the prolonged delay of 16 years in Malik's own case, which has been pending since 2009 before a Rohini court here. Malik, who also argued personally, said that she was attacked in 2009, yet the trial has still not concluded. "Mere saath 2009 mein attack hua tha, abhi tak trial chal raha hai" (I was attacked in 2009; the trial is still going on)," she said.

Till 2013, nothing happened in the case and the trial, which is now taking place in Rohini in Delhi, is now at the stage of final

hearing, she said.

Expressing surprise over the delay of over 16 years, the CJ said, "The offence is of 2009 and the trial is not completed! If the National Capital cannot respond to these challenges, then who will deal with them? It is a shame on the system! This is a national shame."

The CJ asked Malik to file an application in the PIL itself explaining why the matter has not been concluded, assuring her that the court may even take suo motu cognisance. The CJ said the trial in her case must be held on a day-to-day basis.

"Issue notice. Learned Solicitor General who was present in the court has graciously accepted notice. He has also expressed concern about the causes raised in the instant petition. We also direct the registrar generals of all high courts to furnish the details of pending trials in the cases of acid attack victims in their respective jurisdiction," the bench ordered.

The CJ said that the aspect of pendency of cases and covering acid attack victims within the definition of persons with disabilities will be taken up after four weeks.

The bench, however, said that it will take up next week the issue of the delay in the trial in Malik's case at a Rohini court here. During the hearing, Malik highlighted the plight of victims who are forced to ingest acid, often surviving with artificial feeding tubes and severe disabilities.

The CJ expressed shock and said he had heard about the incidents of acid-throwing but had never come across cases where victims were forced to consume acid. (PTI)

Health, National Security Cess not on essential goods; revenues to be shared with states: FM

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the proposed Health and National Security Cess will be levied only on demerit goods, like pan masala, and not on essential commodities, and revenue from the levy will be shared with states for spending on health schemes.

The purpose of the Health Security se National Security Cess Bill, 2025, is to create a "dedicated and predictable resource stream" for two domains of national importance -- health and national security, Sitharaman said while moving the Bill in the Lok Sabha.

"This is a cess, and it is placed not on any essential commodity. The purpose of this Bill is to levy a cess on demerit goods, which are associated with significant health risks. We wish to impose such a cost, so that it is a deterrent, so people tend not to use it," the minister said.

Sitharaman said pan masala will be taxed at the maximum 40 per cent rate under Goods and Services Tax (GST) based on its consumption, and there will be no impact of this cess on GST revenues.

The proposed Health and National Security Cess, which will be over and above the GST, will be levied on the production capacity of machines in pan masala manufacturing factories. "The cess liability will be different for every factory, depending on their production capacity," Sitharaman said. Since GST is levied at the consumption stage, and excise duty cannot be levied on pan masala, this cess is being sought to be levied on the production capacity of pan masala units, which is a demerit good.

"Part of the revenue from this cess will be shared with states through health awareness or other health-related schemes/activities," Sitharaman pointed out. Sitharaman said that since excise duty cannot be levied on pan masala, the government is bringing a separate cess bill to ensure that production of pan masala is taxed, along with GST, which is levied on consumption. Currently, pan masala, tobacco and related products attract 28 per cent GST plus a compensation cess at a varied rate. With the end of the compensation cess levy, the GST rate will go up to 40 per cent. (PTI)

New barrier-free highway toll collection system to be in place within a year: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said the current system of toll collection will come to an end within a year, replaced by an electronic system that will ensure a seamless experience for motorists on highways.

The new system has been rolled out in 10 places and will be extended across the country within a year, the Union minister of road transport and highways said in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour.

"This toll system will end. There will be no one to stop you in the name of toll. Within a year, an electronic toll collection will be implemented across the country," he said.

Gadkari also informed the House that currently, 4,500 highway projects worth ₹ 10 lakh crore are ongoing across the country.

According to an official statement released recently, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has



developed the National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) programme -- a unified, interoperable platform for electronic toll payments -- to streamline toll collection across India's highways.

At the core of NETC is FASTag, a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)-based device affixed to a vehicle's windscreen. It allows automatic toll payments from the user's linked account without stopping at the plaza.

Gadkari, in a written reply to a question, informed the Lok Sabha that the government has also decided to introduce innovative methods for user fee

collection with the objective of reducing congestion, eliminating delays at fee plazas and improving overall user experience on national highways.

"In the effort to enhance toll operations and enable seamless movement of vehicles, the government has decided to implement the Multi-Lane Free Flow Electronic Toll Collection system, which facilitates barrier-less tolling using integrated technologies including Automatic Number Plate Recognition with AI analytics and RFID-based electronic toll collection (FASTag)," he said.

According to the minister, a request for proposal to implement FASTag+ANPR/AI barrier-free user fee collection system on the selected fee plazas has been invited/finalised as per Annexure-IV, with the possibility of implementing it on other fee plazas in a phased manner, depending upon the outcomes and efficacy of the implementation on these projects. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM DIRECTOR CUM ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU.

No.ACEH/CS/SOPD/72/2025-26/03

Dated.02/12/2025.

PRESS NOTICE

The Additional Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B), Hills Assam, Diphu on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids from registered Contractors Class-1 (A) (Roads) for the work "Construction of Road from Jorlep Teron to Hapjan Sikari Bey village under Annual Action plan, KAAC for the year 2025-26 under E.E., PWD, Diphu Roads Division, Diphu. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 05/12/2025 to 18/12/2025. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

Sd/-

Director cum Additional Chief Engineer
PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No.ACEH/CS/SOPD/72/2025-26/03-(A)

Dated.02/12/2025

Scindia in Nagaland on 3-day visit Future of Tripura is safe in hands of NCC cadets: Tripura CM



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Dec 4: Union Minister for Communications and Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia arrived in Dimapur on Thursday on a three-day visit to Nagaland.

In a brief interaction with media persons upon arrival at Dimapur airport, Scindia spoke highly of the state's rich diversity, equality, and cultural heritage. He said Nagaland symbolises immense potential in various sectors.

Highlighting the Centre's commitment to the development of the Northeastern region, he reiterated that the Prime Minister's Act-East, Act-Fast, Act-First policy has yielded significant progress. He pointed out that 10% of the gross budgetary support, amounting to more than ₹ 1 lakh crore annually, has been dedicated to accelerating development across the eight Northeastern states.

Scindia added that the DoNER ministry has

consistently celebrated the culture, identity, and diversity of all communities across the Northeast, including the 17 tribes of Nagaland, with deep respect.

Scindia's visit to Nagaland includes a schedule focusing on development initiatives and cultural engagements. On December 5, he is expected to attend the foundation stone laying ceremony for multiple DoNER-funded projects aimed at boosting connectivity, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities in the state.

Later in the day, he is expected to participate in the traditional stone-pulling ceremony at Toupheima village, while in the evening, he will grace the Hornbill Festival at Kisama as a special guest. On December 6, Scindia will visit the Heirloom Naga Centre at Sovima, where he will interact with artisans and review initiatives that promote traditional crafts, sustainable village industries, and livelihood programmes led by local communities.

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Dec 4: Tripura Chief Minister Prof Dr Manik Saha on Thursday said that the National Cadet Corps (NCC) in Tripura has always been at the forefront not just in parade but also in the service of society.

Dr Saha said this after inaugurating the Tripura NCC Fest 2025 at the Tripura Institute of Technology, Narsingarh, Agartala. He said that in the year 1970, when he was in Class 11, he was in the NCC.

"Whatever I have learnt from there, I am not going to forget, it was my foundation. I also received an award. I was also not aware that such things would happen. The way NCC cadets

are getting benefits now, earlier we did not receive such things. The new cadets must work with full dedication. Earlier there was no such thing called patriotism in society but now after Prime Minister Narendra Modi we can see this in society," said Dr Saha. He said that the NCC youths are not soldiers but in the coming days they will go to the Army, Navy or Air Force, and for them NCC will be a foundation.

"Indiscipline always works like a magnet; it attracts people, but NCC will help people to remain disciplined. Today we are not just celebrating a festival but we are celebrating the spirit of unity, disci-



pline and the spirit of service that defines the National Cadet Corps. Seeing you in khaki and the bright faces of youths assembled here, I am reassured that the future of Tripura is in safe and capable hands. NCC is not merely an organisation but a move-

ment," said Dr Saha. Dr Saha informed that NCC was established in July 1948 and its footprint in Tripura has grown steadily. "It is the largest uniformed youth organisation in the world. Tripura NCC Fest 2025 stands as a landmark celebration of youth, discipline and national service in the state of Tripura. It bridges the gap between uniformed services and civil society, allowing the public to witness the grooming of their youths. Living in a border state we understand the vigilance and resilience. Our NCC cadets in Tripura have always been at the forefront not just in parade but also in the service of society," he added.

Skill department, LPAI signs MoU

To enhance skills of women living in bordering areas

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Dec 4: An important Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Directorate of Skill Development of Tripura and the Land Port Authority of India to strengthen the skill development opportunities for women residing in border areas.

The signing ceremony took place at the office of the Director of Skill Development. The primary objective of this MoU is to utilize the various facilities of the Akhaura Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Agartala to enhance the skills of women living in nearby border regions. As a result of this agreement, from the last week of December, several facilities at the land port including the 30-seater conference hall, smart classroom, meeting rooms, and other infrastructures will be made available for training programs aimed at women.

Speaking on the occasion, Pradip K., Director of the Skill Development Department, said that using the training infrastructure at the land port, the department will conduct various IT-based training programs, as well as courses in Accounting Assistance, GST, Tally, and more. Debashis Nandi, Manager of the Tripura Integrated Check Post, added that similar initiatives will be introduced in the future at the Sabroom and Srimantapur Integrated Check Posts in the state.

Arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 4: A large cache of arms and ammunition were recovered in Manipur's Imphal valley, police said on Thursday.

A .303, a double-barrel gun, a single-barrel gun and a 9 mm pistol were recovered from Loitang Sandum Hill in Imphal West district on Wednesday, they said.

Among the other items recovered were 118 rounds of cartridges, a hand grenade, eight detonators, eight magazines of different types and four hand-held sets, they said.

From the foothills of Ngariyan Hill near Keirao Wangkhem in Imphal East district, a 12-bore single-barrel gun, a 9mm SMG carbine with magazine, two hand grenades and an IED weighing nearly 2 kg were recovered, they added. (PTI)

Meghalaya CM Flags Need for Long-Term Education Reforms

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 4: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma on Thursday underscored the urgent need for long-term structural reforms in the state's education sector, as he released the Platinum Jubilee Souvenir of St. Xavier's Higher Secondary School, Tura, during a special programme held on the campus. The event marked 75 years of the institution's service, drawing dignitaries, alumni, students, and parents.

Focusing his address on youth and education, Sangma said Meghalaya stands at a critical demographic juncture, with half of its 38 lakh population under the age of 20. Calling this "both a tremendous opportunity and a significant challenge," he warned that without proper guidance and values-based education, the state's young population could become "a destructive force."

Sangma emphasised that the government's priority has been to channel youthful energy through better opportunities, mentorship, and strong value systems. Turning to the education sector, the Chief Minister admitted that despite an annual expenditure of more than ₹3,500 crore, quality remains a persistent concern. Meghalaya

has nearly 55,000 teachers and close to 15,000 schools, he noted, pointing out the inefficiencies created by multiple small schools in remote villages—often with just a handful of students.

"Reforming this structure is complex and cannot be done overnight," Sangma said. "It will require a phased approach spread over the next 15 to 20 years, but it is necessary for meaningful improvement." He added that cultural preservation must run parallel to reform, stressing that students should ideally learn both Khasi and Garo up to Class 4 or 5 to safeguard Meghalaya's linguistic heritage.

Sangma also praised St. Xavier's for producing some of the state's finest students over its 75-year journey. As a gesture of support, he announced a new school bus under the Chief Minister's Special Development Fund and musical instruments for the school band.

Earlier, Bishop Andrew R. Marak lauded the Missionaries of Christ Jesus for their decades of service, while Sister Marline Pinto traced the school's evolution since 1948—from its thatched beginnings to its modern initiatives including special education and NIOS programmes.

Govt committed to empowering farmers: Agriculture Minister

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Dec 4: Tripura Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath on Thursday emphasised the state and central governments' unwavering commitment to improving the lives of farmers, asserting that farmers are finally receiving the respect they deserve.

The Minister said this while addressing a Workshop and Input Distribution Programme on Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights (PPV & FR Act) at KVK Dhalai, Salema.

The Minister informed the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPV&FRA), 2001 is an important Indian law that protects new plant varieties while also recognizing the traditional rights of farmers. The main objective of this Act is to encourage the development of improved varieties, protect the rights of farmers, and preserve agricultural diversity.

He said that the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA Authority) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare of India. He stated that the main purpose of the Act is that crop varieties will be registered in the name of the farmer, and the farmer will have all rights over that crop variety. It aims to provide protection for seeds of innovative and improved crops, recognize the role of farmers in conserving traditional seed varieties, ensure farmers' access to quality seeds, encourage research and exploration, and establish a system for the registration and legal protection of crop seeds. He said that earlier, no farmer was seen getting a place on the stage.

"After Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, farmers are getting due respect. Even if I wish, it is not possible to get certificates—there are so many farmers who know better than scientists. PM Modi said scientists must go from lab to land, help farmers first, and then conduct research. Farmers are now receiving due respect. Farmers are annadata. PM Modi has said farmers are the real god. We must serve the farmers," said the Agriculture Minister.

ED undertakes first-ever raids in Meghalaya registered PMLA case

NEW DELHI, Dec 4: The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted searches at multiple locations in Meghalaya as part of a money laundering probe into alleged misappropriation of funds at the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), officials said.

These are the maiden raids undertaken by the federal probe agency's sub zonal office located in Shillong after registering a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in the state. The agency has conducted similar action in the state as part of cases registered in other states.

At least five premises in Tura under the West Garo Hills district were raided, the officials said. The probe relates to the alleged non-execution of developmental works and the misappropriation of funds allocated for the development of the Asanang constituency under the GHADC.

According to officials, out of a total allocation of Rs 28.66 crore, members of the committee, in collusion with certain contractors, "diverted" and "misused" the funds in contravention of established rules and procedures.

In particular, instances have been noticed where 60 per cent of the sanctioned funds were "irregularly" released to contractors Kubon Sangma and Nikseng Sangma, contrary to the applicable rules and provisions as advance, they said.

Acting under the directions of one Ismail Marak, multiple cheques were issued in their names and subsequently, Kubon Sangma withdrew the entire amount and handed it over to Marak, while Nikseng Sangma transferred his share directly to the bank account as directed, the ED officials said. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF SURVEYS, (HILL CELL), DIPHU.

No. Surveys, (HC). 02/2013-14/ Dated Diphu the Dec'2025.

Corrigendum Re-Advertisement

In pursuance of the KAAC Vide letter No. KAAC/Esstt-381/P(B)/Prior Approval post/Survey/2021-2014 Dated 25th Nov. 2021, applications are hereby invited in standard forms with testimonials and KAAC revenue receipt of Rs. 10/- only (Rupees Ten) only from the eligible candidates for filling up the posts under office of the Asstt. Director of Surveys, (Hill Cell), Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

Sl. No.	Name of Post	No. of Vacancy	Educational Qualification	Scale of Pay
1.	Traverser Grade-III	5 (Five) nos.	H.S.L.C passed or equivalent examination having 2 (two) years Surveyor trade pass certificate from a Govt. recognized ITI. Diploma in Civil Engineering. Minimum 3(Three) months certificate course on CAD software is essential. Knowledge of ETS, DGPS, CAD software will be given preference.	PB-2 Rs. 14000/- to 60500/- + G.P. 7400/-
2.	Computer Grade-II	2 (Two) nos.	H.S.L.C passed or equivalent examination having 2 (two) years Surveyor trade pass certificate from a Govt. recognized ITI or diploma in Civil Engineering. Minimum 3 (Three) months certificate course on CAD software is essential. Knowledge of ETS, DGPS, CAD software will be given preference.	PB-2 Rs. 14000/- to 60500/- + G.P. 5600/-
3.	Peon	01 (One) nos.	Class-VIII	PB-1 Rs. 12000/- to 52000/- + G.P. 3900/-

Note:- The posts shown above are tentative and the actual vacancy shall be determined at the time of giving appointment as there is every likelihood to increase the posts due to Superannuation, Promotion etc.

Age: Minimum 18 years and maximum 38 years for General Category and Minimum 18 years and Maximum 43 years for ST/SC as per standing Assam Govt. requirement norms.

General Instructions:-

- 1) Attested copies of education qualification Certificates, Caste Certificates, Date of Birth, recent passport size 2 Nos., Employment Registration Certificate (Latest) Should be enclosed with the applications. The application alongwith all relevant documents should reach this office on before 06/12/2025 during office hours from 10 AM to 5 PM.
- 2) Candidates fulfilling the requirement criteria may apply giving all particulars in standard forms prescribed in Assam Gazette Part-IX.
- 3) Candidates who applied for the posts of Traverser Grade-III, Computer Grade-II will have to appear for a written test. Subject to clearing the written test the oral interview will be called.
- 4) Candidates who applied for the post of Grade-IV (Peon) will have to appear oral interview (VIVA voce test) only.
- 5) The Syllabus of written Examination for the post of Grade-III Traverser and Grade-II Computer are as follows:- (1) General English, (2) General Aptitude, (3) General Knowledge having 50 Marks and Computer Skill Test having 25 marks.
- 6) No Postal Correspondence will be accepted from the Candidates in any form.
- 7) The Viva-Voice test date will be intimated to the Candidates in due course of time for the 4th Grade post (Peon) on being fixed by the Selection Committee.
- 8) No TA/DA shall be entertainable to the Candidates.
- 9) N.B:- Canvassing directly or indirectly will disqualify a candidate.

Sd/-
Asstt. Director of Surveys,
Hill Cell, Diphu, K/A
Dated Diphu the 3rd Dec' 2025.
No. Surveys, (HC). 02/2013-14/234-A

Anoushka Shankar's sitar damaged on A-I flight, airline says it is investigating



A "devastated and truly disturbed" Anoushka Shankar has said her sitar was damaged on an Air India flight, telling the airline in a social media post that "even an Indian instrument isn't safe with them" and this is the first time in 15 or 17 years that this has happened.

The high-profile musician posted a video on Instagram on Wednesday showing a deep crack through the lower rounded end of the stringed instrument.

"First I was just looking at the top of my sitar and felt like it was really out of tune. And after I turned it and picked it up to play and that's when I realised. This was my first time flying Air India after a long time. You're the country this music belongs to and this is the first time anything like this has happened to my instrument in 15 or 17 years. How have you done this? I have special cases. You guys charge a handling fee and yet you've done this," she said in the video.

She also expressed her dismay that an Indian instrument could be mishandled by an Indian airline.

"I'm devastated and deeply troubled by @airindia's handling of my sitar. How can such damage occur without negligence?"

It's especially disheartening since I recently chose to fly Air India after a long time, yet it seems even an Indian instrument isn't safe with them -- after countless flights on other airlines without a single peg going out of tune," Shankar wrote.

Though she did not mention any details of her flight and where she landed, an Air India spokesperson said in a statement on Thursday that the airlines had initiated an investigation, including a review of CCTV footage at Delhi airport.

"We are concerned to learn of a valued guest's experience with their musical instrument on a recent flight with us. We understand its cultural and personal significance, and deeply regret the distress this incident may have caused," the spokesperson said.

"However, we are currently unable to ascertain the cause of the damage and are engaging with the guest to address the issue, while

investigating further to understand where the damage may have occurred as multiple stakeholders and agents are involved in the handling of such items," the statement added.

Shankar, a globally renowned sitarist and daughter of the legendary Pandit Ravi Shankar, has a series of concerts in India over January and February. The shows begin on January 30 in Hyderabad.

Several fellow artists echoed her shock at her instrument being damaged.

While stand-up comedian Zakir Khan and singer Vishal Dadlani described the incident as "heart-breaking", actor Lisa Ray called it "truly distressing".

Singer Papon too expressed his dismay, commenting below the post, "Genuine care feels so rare these days... it's as if the very act of caring has faded from our lives! This is so heartbreaking @airindia."

Shankar, 44, had faced travel troubles last year as well.

While in Berlin for the final show of her European tour, she

lost her luggage, which contained all her clothes and her 'mizrab' -- custom-fitted finger picks essential for playing her instrument.

Her call for help was answered by netizens who reached out to contacts in Berlin and suggested stores selling Indian clothing, enabling her to successfully perform at her sold-out concert at the Berlin Philharmonic.

There have been several instances of musicians finding that their precious instruments have been damaged in transit.

In 2010, for instance, sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan's instrument was allegedly damaged by Air India in 2010. Four years later, his sarod went missing on a London-Delhi British Airways flight. It was later restored to him.

The sarod of another musician, Ustad Aashish Khan, suffered a snapped tail on an IndiGo flight in 2012 despite being clearly marked fragile and paid for as excess baggage.

In 2019, sitarist Pandit Shubhendra Rao's sitar was damaged on an Air India flight from New Delhi to New York. (PTI)

Ashes of Dharmendra immersed in Ganga in Haridwar



The family of veteran actor Dharmendra immersed his ashes in the Ganga at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar on Wednesday, the family's priest said.

Known affectionately as the "He-Man" of Indian cinema, the legendary actor passed away on November 24 at the age of 89.

The rituals were kept completely away from the media and public, the family priest Sandeep Parashar Shrotriya told PTI.

The immersion took place at Har Ki Pauri after the pre-ritual ceremonies were performed at a private hotel.

Shrotriya said Dharmendra's grandson and Sunny Deol's son Karan Deol reached Har Ki Pauri with family members on a two-wheeler and performed the rituals.

According to the priest, Sunny wanted to conduct the rituals himself but due to concerns over crowding, his son Karan performed them

instead.

Sunny and his brother Bobby Deol reached Haridwar on Tuesday, and the immersion was initially planned for the same day, but it was postponed as one of the relatives could not arrive in time.

The Deol family has maintained silence since Dharmendra's demise on November 24. Last week, the family organised a prayer meet, titled 'Celebration of Life', in Mumbai which was attended by many prominent celebrities.

Born as Dharam Singh Deol in Punjab in 1935, Dharmendra featured in more than 300 films in a career spanning six-decades.

The screen icon was widely celebrated for his versatility across action, romance and comedy and some of his classics include "Sholay", "Chupke Chupke", "Satyakam", "Anupama", "Seeta Aur Geeta" and many others. (PTI)

Yami Gautam calls out paid film promotions in Bollywood, Hrithik Roshan supports her

Actor Yami Gautam has slammed the practice of creating paid hype to promote movies in Bollywood ahead of the release of husband Aditya Dhar's "Dhurandhar", saying the trend is going to affect the future of the industry in a big way.

The 37-year-old actor shared a note on her X handle on Thursday to criticise the negative publicity around the film, which releases in theatres on Friday. "There is something I've been wanting to express since really long. I feel today is that day & I must. This so-called trend of giving money, in the disguise of marketing a film, to ensure good 'hype' for a film is created, or else 'they' will continuously write negative things (even before the film is released), until you pay 'them' money feels nothing but kind of extortion.

"Just because this arrangement is accessible to anyone, whether to 'hype' a film or spread negativity against another

actor/a film is a plague that is going to affect the future of our industry in a big way," she wrote in the post.

Gautam said this trend is going to affect everyone and once the truth of such practice is exposed, it is not going to be a "pretty picture for many".

Known for films such as "Uri: The Surgical Strike", "Bala" and "Vicky Donor", Gautam compared the situation to the South cinema industry and said such "trends" don't take place there as

artists stay united but something similar needs to be done in Hindi cinema as well.

"I say this as a wife of an extremely honest man who has given everything to this film with his undying hard-work, vision & grit along with his team to create something that I know India shall be proud of. I say this as a deeply concerned member of the fraternity who, like many other industry professionals, wishes to see Indian cinema blossom with its best potential & not the other way around.

"Let's not kill the joy of filmmaking & presenting it to the world & letting the audience decide what they feel. We need to protect our industry environment," she said. Hrithik Roshan, her "Kaabil" co-star supported the actor on X, saying with such practice, the true voice of journalists is lost and also the chance for them to "inform all the creative forces behind a movie what they felt, thought, what they applaud and criticise".

"Only true opinions have the potential where feedback helps us evolve. Their own right to freedom gets unknowingly usurped and so does our chance of growth. Without freedom of expression, without the truth helping us evolve, what job satisfaction can they or any of us hope for."

"Dhurandhar" features Ranveer Singh alongside Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun and Rakesh Bedi. (PTI)



SCARLETT JOHANSSON IN FINAL TALKS TO JOIN 'THE BATMAN' SEQUEL

Four years after leaving the Marvel Cinematic Universe behind, Scarlett Johansson is headed to DC's Gotham City.

Sources say the actress is in final negotiations to join The Batman Part II, the long-gestating sequel to Matt Reeves' 2021 hit. If the deal comes together, it'd be a jolt for the project which aims to go before cameras next year. She will first film The Exorcist, to which she signed on last week, before moving on to Batman.

Johansson is one of the more bankable stars in the world, with her work in Black

Widow/Natasha Romanoff in the MCU just part of her hits, which also include July's Jurassic World: Rebirth. She also recently released her directorial debut, the low-key drama Eleanor the Great, starring June Squibb.

It's been a winding road to The Batman sequel, which Warner Bros. first announced in April 2022 at CinemaCon. In early 2023, DC Studios bosses James Gunn and Peter Safran said the film would open in October 2025, but a year later that was pushed back a year to Oct. 2, 2026, and then pushed again to Oct. 1, 2027.

Robert Pattinson will return to star as Batman/Bruce Wayne, with filmmaker Reeves helming and co-writing the script with Mattson Tomlin. The Batman, released in March 2022, was a solid performer at the box office, grossing \$770.3 million. It also birthed a Max spinoff centering on Colin Farrell's Penguin. The cast included Zoë Kravitz as Catwoman, Jeffery Wright as Jim Gordon, Paul Dano as The Riddler, Andy Serkis as Alfred and Barry Keoghan as an Arkham Asylum inmate believed to be a version of The Joker. (PTI)

Janhvi Kapoor slams voyeuristic media culture, says her mother's death became a 'meme'

Actor Janhvi Kapoor has criticised the "voyeuristic nature" of media culture where even death gets dehumanised, something that she experienced after the death of her mother and more recently with veteran actor Dharmendra.

Speaking at the We The Women 2025 event on Sunday, Janhvi said media, especially social media, has "single handedly contributed to the complete derailment of human morality".

"The voyeuristic nature of journalism, of media culture, of social media today, has single handedly contributed to the complete derailment of human morality, and I'm seeing it more and more every day.

"It was horrible when I lost my mom. I don't know if you all can imagine what it's like to lose someone that close to you and see it become a meme. I don't even know how to compute or explain it, but it's just gotten worse," the actor told senior journalist Barkha Dutt.

Janhvi said she avoids talking about her mother, renowned actor Sridevi's death publicly, as she fears that people will think she's using it to grab head-

lines. Sridevi died on February 24 in 2018 at the age of 54.

"I think the feeling and the phase that I went through during that time is something I'll never be able to verbalise. And I think that it was such an individual experience that even if I told you all everything about it... I don't know if any of you all would ever be able to relate to it, and I'm always conscious about sounding like I'm saying things to get you all to feel bad for me.

"And so I always refrain a little bit because I know everyone is opportunistic in nature, and everyone just wants a headline. And I would hate if I ever sounded like I was using such a painful part of my life and my relationship with my mother for a headline, so I think that always holds me back," she added.

She also referred to the false media reports about veteran actor Dharmendra's death on November 11. The "Sholay" star died on November 24 at the age of 89.

"We saw what happened with Dharamji and it's happened repeatedly before that. I'm sure it will only get worse," Janhvi said, adding that celebri-

ties are equally responsible for the problem.

"I think we are part of the problem. I think every time we give videos, headlines or narratives... like views, comments, likes, every time we look for something like that, we are incentivising this culture," she said.

Janhvi said "human morality is in shambles" and it is nothing but "depressing".

"I think earlier we had a consciousness in us that stopped us from seeing certain things, saying certain things, indulging in certain practices, but that's out of the window, and it's disgusting.

"This is the modern-day crisis that we've lost our morality as a result of how voyeuristic everything has become. Someone dies somewhere, some horrible attack somewhere, you kind of want to see the things that you shouldn't see, and it gives you that strange feeling of... I guess it's that same horrible feeling of satisfaction that sometimes you get when you gossip, but it's been encouraged so much through social media," she said. (PTI)



Unfortunate that people who haven't achieved much deciding 'Ro-Ko' future: Harbhajan

SHARJAH, Dec 4: Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh finds it a bit unfortunate that the future of legends like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli is being decided by "people who have not achieved much" but he nonetheless expects the duo to carry on till the 2027 ODI World Cup.

The 38-year-old Rohit and the 37-year-old Kohli only play the ODI format now and there has been intense speculation on whether they would be able to continue till the World Cup in South Africa given the shrinking ODI calendar across the cricket-playing world.

Head coach Gautam Gambhir and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar have been non-committal on the possibility but the two players have dropped ample hints to suggest that they intend to fight for their place.

"It is beyond our understanding, I may not be able to answer because I have been a player myself and what I have seen has happened to me as well. It has happened to many of my teammates but it is very unfortunate. We don't talk about it or have a discussion about it," Harbhajan, part of the expert commentary panel at the ongoing DP World ILT20 Season 4, said in an interaction here.

"I am so happy when I see a



player like Virat Kohli who is still going strong. It is a bit unfortunate that those people are deciding about their future who have not achieved much," India's fourth-highest Test wicket-taker with 417 scalps added when asked whether the two are being handled well.

There is still over a year left before the first ball is bowled at the World Cup but Harbhajan has backed Rohit and Kohli to be in imperious form during the showpiece and set benchmarks for the next generation.

Kohli has struck back-to-back hundreds at home in the ongoing South Africa series, while a leaner Rohit has reeled off two fifties and

a 121 not out in his last four innings.

"They have always scored runs and have always been great players for India, they have done extremely well as batters and are leaders of the team. I'm so happy for them, they are going very, very strong."

"Not just going strong but setting the example for the younger generation to follow and what it takes to be a champion. So, well done Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma for setting the right example," the 45-year-old added.

Play on good tracks at home India's recent home Test strug-

gles have left observers of the game shocked.

Since Gambhir's appointment, India have lost five of their last seven home Tests, including the recent 0-2 defeat to South Africa -- their first home series debacle against the Proteas in 25 years.

Harbhajan said India's biggest concern is the quality of pitches at home.

"They have to start playing on good tracks. We don't give much chance to our batsmen to make runs. If we tour abroad our batsmen have a chance to make runs because the pitch is good for batting. The bowlers have to work hard."

"That is why I think it is high time that the pitches that have been made in the last 10-12 years are very bowler-friendly especially spinner-friendly. Spinners bowl with the new ball. I think somewhere we need to change that trend."

"I feel it is not the right kind of thing to do. Our team is so solid and we have played well in England. We will win even if we play for five days. Why are you looking to play two and half days of Test cricket?" he asked.

On the Guwahati Test, that lasted full five days, he added: "We saw in Guwahati that the pitch was very good but there we didn't play

well on that pitch because we are not used to playing for five days in Test cricket."

Harbhajan said modern cricketers lack patience because of excessive T20 exposure and tracks like the one used in the opening Test in Kolkata against South Africa will compound problems.

"...barring two or three of them, the others don't really have that much patience anymore. If we will continue to play on such tracks...it is no more interesting for anyone."

Harbhajan further said India can't produce a strike spinner on under-prepared rank-turners. "We have done a lot of bowling, we understand a little bit of cricket which we have learnt in 20 years. I feel it's high time we start playing on good tracks in India, simple as that."

Turning to ILT20, Harbhajan said the league and the UAE Cricket Board deserve credit for expanding the game's footprint across the region.

"This year is even better because some of the players are from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The UAE Cricket Board has done a great job. Not only UAE players but players from other neighbouring countries also come here to play."

"They get a chance to play with big players. It's a great opportunity for them," he concluded. (PTI)

Kohli's second successive ton looked inevitable, he carried on confidence from Ranchi



RAIPUR, Dec 4: Virat Kohli's second successive ton during the second ODI against South Africa here seemed "inevitable" as the stalwart got off the mark with a six, carrying the confidence of his first-game heroics, feels former India captain Sunil Gavaskar.

Kohli struck 102 off 93 balls here on Wednesday, his 53rd ton in the 50-over format and 84th international hundred of his career, although India lost the match by four wickets. He had scored 135 off 120 deliveries in India's 17-run win in the first match in Ranchi on November 30.

"To be honest, at no point did it look like he wasn't going to get a hundred. From the first ball he faced, it felt as if he was carrying on from Ranchi," JioStar expert Gavaskar said.

"He got off the mark with a hook for six, a shot he doesn't often play in the air, which showed the confidence from his previous hundred. After that, unless something unfortunate happened, the hundred always seemed inevitable."

Kohli and Rituraj Gaikwad (105 off 83 balls) rewrote the record for India's highest third-wicket stand in ODIs, putting on a superb 195-run partnership.

"The partnership with Rituraj was excellent. Rituraj's first ball was a tough bouncer from Jansen, coming right after he had dismissed Jaiswal. He managed to put it away for four, and you could immediately see Kohli go down the pitch to comfort him."

"Rituraj would've been nervous after getting out to a brilliant catch earlier, and whatever Kohli told him clearly lifted him; the next ball he played very confidently off the front foot," said the legendary batter.

Gavaskar lauded Kohli for guiding Gaikwad after a nervous start.

"Sometimes, it's not just about your own runs; it's about how you help your partner. Their running between the wickets, the communication, it was wonderful to see a senior player guiding a younger one at such an important stage," Gavaskar said.

The Indians lost their 20th consecutive toss as South Africa put the hosts to bat, considering the dew factor. The Proteas ended up chasing 358 with four balls to spare to level the three-match series 1-1.

"It (toss) was crucial. Just look at how wet the outfield was. Apart from perhaps the first half-dozen overs, the ball was always going to get wet. That affects not just the bowlers but the fielders too, you can't get a proper grip. The ball feels like a bar of soap. So yes, the toss made a big difference," Gavaskar said.

Aiden Markram led South Africa's reply with a commanding maiden century against India, maximising a flat deck under lights.

"I rate that innings very, very highly. Whenever you're chasing 350-plus, there is always pressure. You want to give the team a good start, not a quiet one, and keep the asking rate under control. The rate was just over seven when they began," said Gavaskar.

"With his experience of playing in India, in the IPL and otherwise, he understands the conditions well. He took that responsibility on himself."

"In the previous match he captained because Bavuma wasn't fit; in Raipur, he did the stabilising job alongside the skipper. That's exactly what South Africa needed at that stage." (PTI)

Opening or batting at No 4, process remains same after a few hits: Gaikwad

RAIPUR, Dec 4: A specialist opener in white-ball cricket, Rituraj Gaikwad failed to click in his maiden outing at the coveted No. 4 spot but came good in his second match with a hundred here and he said he did not find it too difficult to adjust to his new role.

India have been served well by Shreyas Iyer in ODIs at No. 4 but with the Mumbai batter unavailable due to injury, the team management entrusted Gaikwad with the job to build the innings and he did it with aplomb, hitting his maiden century in the second ODI against South Africa on Wednesday.

"I feel it's a privilege to have that kind of confidence from the management towards an opener who can bat at No 4 as well. I took it that way," Gaikwad told the media after India lost the high-scoring contest by four wickets.

"It was just matter of how I can play my first 10-15 balls and after that, the process remains the same," he added.

The right-handed batter scored a quickfire 83-ball 105 in a 195-run third wicket stand with Virat Kohli (102) to help take India to 358 for 5.

For Gaikwad, it was imperative to channelise his experience of long hauls in 50-over cricket as he looked the perfect foil to Kohli during their 195-run stand, at times matching the batting great in strokes that he played and with immaculate running between wickets.

"In one-day format, even when I was opening, I have always tried to make sure I am able to bat till the 45th over and capitalise after that," he said.

"Somehow, I knew how to play in between (overs) 11 to 40, how to rotate strike (and) what are the boundary options. I was pretty much confident about how I can go through."

Injury lay-off during major tournaments like the IPL earlier this year, where he was replaced by MS

Dhoni as Chennai Super Kings captain, and time away from the national side also gave the 28-year-old Gaikwad a lot of perspective about dealing with challenging situations off the field.

"It is better if you don't think too much about all these things because (if) you are not in the present and whatever matches are in front of you, you don't have that much focus and that much preparation. Obviously, in the last Vijay Hazare Trophy, I wasn't able to make that many runs," he said.

"Some things were going on in my mind, but after that, this year I thought that whichever match it is, whether it is a club game or any red-ball (or) white-ball format I play, I will make sure to stay consistent."

"If I get an opportunity, (it's) well and good, even if I don't get an opportunity, it is still fine. I realise that it is my duty to keep scoring runs as much as possible and if things happen (again it's) well and good, if not, still well and good," he added. Gaikwad admitted his 83-ball 105, studded with 12 fours and two sixes, was so far the best knock of his career.

"I would say yes, because obviously batting at No. 4 was also a challenge for me," he admitted. Getting match-time with superstar Virat Kohli was something he may not have envisaged but Gaikwad kept his focus on the job of making runs, which he says is paramount.

"His (Kohli's) batting is unbelievable and the amount of time he has and (also) how he is able to convert it in the match as well," he said.

"(But) I was trying to be in my zone and not really think about how he is batting or how he is able to score runs."

He said his conversation with Kohli was about continuing the partnership, finding the gaps and rotating strikes. (PTI)

Bhuvneshwar, Rizvi shine in UP's win over Chandigarh

KOLKATA, Dec 4: His days as one of India's leading seamers may be well past him but Bhuvneshwar Kumar continues to deliver handsomely in domestic cricket, evidence of which was his impressive outing in Uttar Pradesh's 40-run win over Chandigarh in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here Thursday.

The 35-year-old seasoned bowler returned excellent figures of 3/23 in four overs to help his side restrict Chandigarh to 172 for eight after UP posted a competitive 212 for seven in their allotted 20 overs at the Eden Gardens.

Sameer Rizvi top-scored for UP with a blistering 70-run knock that came off just 42 balls and contained six fours and three sixes.

Opener Madhav Kaushik struck a brisk 67 off 41 balls, and found

the fence seven times seven times while clearing it twice in the Group B game.

Rizvi and Kaushik were involved in a third wicket partnership of 86 runs, which laid the foundation for UP's total in excess of 200.

Siddarth Yadav looked in great touch until he was run out by Nehal Pajni for a quick-fire 12-ball 28 with three fours and two sixes.

After the dismissal of Rizvi and Kaushik, India's T20I specialist Rinku Singh blazed away to a 10-ball 24 to help prop up the UP innings after Chandigarh opted to bowl first.

Rajasthan Royals seamer Sandeep Sharma was the most successful bowler for Chandigarh, finishing with fine figures of 4/26,

including taking the wickets of Kaushik and Rinku.

In reply, Chandigarh were off to a disastrous start as they lost two wickets with just 19 runs on the board, Bhuvneshwar removing Pajni for a nought.

However, opener Manan Vohra kept Chandigarh in hunt with his explosive batting that fetched him 61 runs from only 35 balls, and which contained six boundaries and three sixes.

But Kartik Tyagi removed him at a crucial juncture to leave Chandigarh at 100 for three in the 11th over.

Wicketkeeper Nikhil Thakur (32 off 28 balls) and Amrit Lubana (30 off 23 balls) carried on the fight, but their team fell short by plenty of runs in the end. (PTI)

Chess: Erigaisi defeats Anand to clinch Jerusalem Masters

JERUSALEM, Dec 4: Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi defeated five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand in an all-Indian final to clinch the Jerusalem Masters title here. After the duo drew the opening rapid games, Erigaisi struck in the first Blitz tie-break match by winning with the white pieces to take a decisive lead in the fixture.

The 22-year-old also held a winning position in the second blitz encounter before settling for a draw, which was enough for him to win the fixture 2.5-1.5 and title, according to a report by 'chessbase.com'.

"It wasn't easy. There were a lot of challenges. My quality wasn't the best. I'm just glad I managed to make it through," Arjun told the organisers in an interview after winning the title.

"Today, both the matches (versus Peter Svidler and then Anand) were very tense. In the first game against Anand sir we both missed our chances. But in blitz, I think I played quite well," he added.

On losing control of Game 1 in the final despite having a white pieces advantage, Erigaisi said that he was worried after "messing up" but managed to recover.

"During the game, I was very worried. I knew I was winning and I knew I missed it. So, I was definitely worried. But okay, all I had to do was to fight back and that is what I was trying to do."

With the win, Erigaisi pocketed USD 55,000 while Anand walked away with USD 35,000.

Arjun had defeated Russian Grandmaster Peter Svidler in his last four stage fixture while Anand outplayed reigning World Blitz champion Ian Nepomniachtchi in the semi-final.

Svidler defeated compatriot compatriot Nepomniachtchi 2.5-1.5 in the third-place playoff.

The Jerusalem Masters is a closed invitational 12-player round-robin tournament in which the top four advance to the playoffs. (PTI)

Bayern Munich aims to continue unbeaten domestic run against Stuttgart in the Bundesliga

DUESSELDORF (GERMANY), Dec 4: Bayern Munich remains unbeaten in 15 league and cup games against German opposition this season as Vincent Kompany's team prepares to face Stuttgart in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

Key matchups

Stuttgart could hope to take advantage of Bayern's tough schedule after Bayern struggled to match Union Berlin's physical intensity at times in its 3-2 win over Union in the German Cup on Wednesday. Bayern prevailed in part thanks to two own goals by Union players and was under pressure late in the game. Already eight points adrift of Bayern in second, Leipzig needs to avoid dropping further back when Ole Werner's team hosts Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday. Frankfurt is under pressure in seventh and risks failing to qualify for the Champions League knockout stages, too. Hoffenheim is riding high in fifth and faces third-placed Borussia Dortmund on Sunday knowing that a win would see it overtake Dortmund in the standings.

Players to watch

Harry Kane's header against Union in the cup on Wednesday took the England captain to 25

goals from 21 games for Bayern this season. Five more goals for England take his tally to 30 for club and country. Ibrahim Maza has three goals and two assists in his last five games in all competitions at Bayer Leverkusen in an attacking midfield role once filled by Florian Wirtz. Scoring the winning goal against Dortmund in the cup on Tuesday was another step forward. Leverkusen visits Augsburg on Saturday.

Who's out? Bayern midfielder Aleksandar Pavlovic is doubtful after he limped off against Union in the cup on Wednesday. Frankfurt's top scorer Jonathan Burkardt will reportedly be out until the new year with a muscle injury. His eight goals in 10 Bundesliga games mean that's a heavy blow.

Off the field Mainz and Augsburg both go into the weekend's games with interim coaches. Last-placed Mainz parted company with Bo Henriksen, who led the team to sixth last season but has overseen a dismal run this campaign, punctuated by poor discipline. Benjamin Hoffman is in temporary charge ahead of Friday's game against Borussia Moenchengladbach. (AP)

Runs only matter if you win games, says Aiden Markram

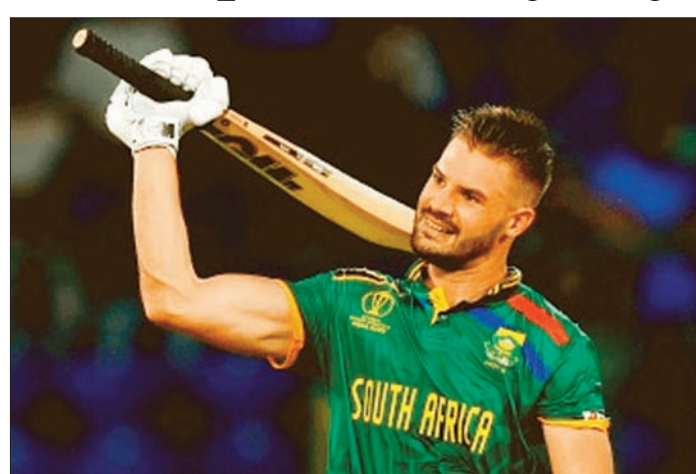
'Felt responsible for first ODI loss'

RAIPUR, Dec 4: Architect of South Africa's series-levelling win in the second ODI against India here, Aiden Markram says scoring runs matters only when the team wins and he felt responsible for the visitors' defeat in the first ODI by a small margin.

Markram, whose 110 on Wednesday set the stage for South Africa's four-wicket win in a chase of 359, fell cheaply in the first ODI at Ranchi where India clinched the high-scoring game by 17 runs.

"Runs only matter if you win games, to be fair, or at least for me. If we'd lost today, I'd be as miserable as I would have been in the previous game. Getting the result is something that makes me really happy," Markram told the media here after the match on Wednesday.

"Being three (wickets) down early in the first game, a lot of that is the difference in the results I feel. From a personal point of view I felt quite responsible for that," he



added referring to the opening game.

On Wednesday though, Markram's ton was followed by a rapid 34-ball 54 from Dewald Brevis and a measured 68 by Matthew Breetzke, which helped the Proteas overhaul the target with four balls to spare.

"It felt like we were living the first game out again today," he said as South Africa stuttered but crossed the line.

Markram said there wasn't much discussion in the mid-innings break as batters needed to step up and play their role.

"There wasn't much to be hon-

est. You kind of know how to chase 350 (or) 360, you have to take the game on a bit and manage that with setting the game up and being smart in between as well," he said.

"It wasn't a collective discussion, it was each guy backing their game and the options that they feel confident in doing and trusting that and hopefully it comes off," Markram added.

The series-levelling win gives South Africa a chance to trump India in their backyard in the third ODI at Visakhapatnam on Saturday, which would add a lot to the growing list of achievements for this group ahead of the two white-ball World Cups in following years.

"All of it feels like it's very far away still, but belief and confidence are probably the two things that you can take as a group," Markram said.

"To chase quite a big number (of target) gives the group belief and confidence that the next time

you're in that position, (we can say) 'we've done it before and we can do it again'."

Markram was lavish in his praise for young batters Brevis and Breetzke, whose 92-run stand for the fourth wicket took the game away from India.

"Brevis hits the ball (for) miles. He takes the game (head) on. He's not afraid to put bowlers under pressure and as cricket lovers, I suppose it's great to watch. It's really entertaining," he said.

"Matthew Breetzke has had an incredible start to his ODI career. He managed the situation really well today. I think, he's only played 10, 11 (or) 12 games. But the way he batted today was like this guy's got at least 50 caps under his belt."

"(It's) a big plus for us to have the side of Matthew Breetzke that can really take the game on and then the side of Matthew Breetzke that can also manage the chase quite nicely," Markram said. (PTI)

Norris says he won't ask Piastri to move over if needed in F1 title decider



ABU DHABI, Dec 4: Lando Norris says he won't ask his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri to give up a place to favor him in the three-way Formula 1 title fight with Max Verstappen at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Norris has a 12-point lead over Verstappen going into Sunday's race, with Piastri four points further back.

If Verstappen is far ahead of both McLarens, it's possible Piastri could be in a situation where he can't take the title himself but can aid Norris' title bid. If Verstappen wins on Sunday, a top-three finish would be enough for Norris.

"Honestly, I mean I would love it but I don't think I would ask it because it's up to Oscar if he

would allow it. I don't think it's necessarily down to me," Norris said, sitting alongside Piastri and Verstappen at a pre-race news conference on Thursday.

Norris added he believed he would help out Piastri if the roles were reversed but said they hadn't discussed any such situations within the team.

"Personally, I think I would, just because I feel like I'm always like that and that's just how I am, but this, it's not really up to me," Norris said. "I'm not going to ask it. I don't want to ask it because I don't think it's necessarily a fair question."

Piastri left the issue open. "It's not something we've discussed," he said. "I don't really have an answer until I know what's expected of me."

Norris had the chance to wrap up the title at last week's Qatar Grand Prix but a pit strategy blunder by McLaren handed Verstappen the win to boost his title defense chances. Piastri was second and Norris fourth in Qatar. (AP)

Latham and Conway (37) put on 84 for New Zealand's first wicket Ravindra's 171, Latham's 145 give New Zealand a 481-run lead over West Indies in the 1st test

CHRISTCHURCH, Dec 4: Rachin Ravindra at his best can make it look like he is batting on a different pitch. He was at his best Thursday as his 176 helped New Zealand take complete control of the first test against the West Indies on the third day.

Ravindra put on 279 for New Zealand's third wicket, batting for most of the last two sessions with his captain Tom Latham who made 145. Both were out in sight of stumps at which New Zealand was 417-4, a lead of 481 after leading by 64 on the first innings.

Of those 417 runs, 200 came from 50 boundaries, 27 of which were hit by Ravindra. Will Young was 20 and Michael Bracewell 6 at stumps and a declaration is likely either overnight or early on the fourth day.

Latham did the hard work for much of the New Zealand second innings, batting through the last hour on the second day in fading light, then through lunch, tea and into the last session on the third day to reach his first century in 40 innings over three years. His uncharacteristically jubilant celebration showed just how much it meant to break that drought.

Latham reached a dogged and exemplary century from 179 deliveries with nine fours. Ravindra reached his fourth test century, his second in consecutive tests, from 108 balls with 16 fours and the first six of the New Zealand second innings.

"Rachin played fantastically well," Latham said. "It was a great day for batting and a great position we're in now."



"He's pretty high-octane for a guy whose got every shot in the book. I think the way that he played was fantastic."

Ravindra opened up parts of the field that no other batter had been able to reach. He played the pull shot, especially, with exquisite timing and power for a high percentage of his boundaries.

Latham's innings was a feat of endurance and character. In the first innings, he scratched out 24 runs from 85 balls — admittedly in conditions that favored the West

Indies seamers — but looked like a batter searching for form.

The short period in which he batted with Devon Conway before stumps on Wednesday seemed to revitalize him. The opening pair rushed to 32 in seven overs in conditions that became so dark the pacers could no longer bowl.

Latham and Conway (37) put on 84 for New Zealand's first wicket and New Zealand was 100-2 when Kane Williamson (9) departed to the last ball before lunch.

Ravindra joined Latham after the break and his immediate ability to raise the scoring rate influenced Latham who added his second 50 runs from 61 balls.

Latham reached his 14th test century on his home ground, surrounded by family. It was like coming home in the sense of finding again the balance that saw him score 252 against Bangladesh on Hagley Oval in 2022.

Ravindra made only 3 in the first innings, was bowled by a good ball but on Thursday found the form that saw him score an unbeaten 165 against Zimbabwe in his previous test.

His innings wasn't chanceless. Has dropped on 8 and 13, the first a hard chance to midwicket, the second a simple chance to first slip but from them on he was commanding. He finally was out, bowled by a yorker from Ojay Shields three overs before the end of the day.

The partnership with Latham was important because New Zealand's batting lineup was depleted. Tom Blundell who came in at No. 6 in the first innings has a hamstring strain and will not take any further part in the match. Latham, as well as captain New Zealand and opening the batting, now must also keep wicket.

New Zealand is the only test-playing nation yet to complete a match in the new World Test Championship cycle. New Zealand's only other test series in 2025 was against Zimbabwe in August, a 2-0 series win. (AP)

Starc's three wickets jolts England on Day 1 of the 2nd Ashes test



BRISBANE, Dec 4: Mitchell Starc struck for a third time on Day 1 of the second Ashes test, swinging momentum again for Australia just as England was settling into an almost conventional rhythm in cricket's longest format.

After removing Ben Duckett and Ollie Pope to have England reeling at 5-2 in the third over Thursday, Starc returned to dismiss Harry Brook in his first over of the middle session. With his 415th career wicket, the 35-year-old Australian surpassed Pakistan great Wasim Akram (414 from 104 tests) as the most successful left-arm fast bowler in test cricket.

It was a jolt England could have done without, Brook caught at slip slashing outside off stump and falling for 31 from 33 balls to end a 54-run fourth-wicket partnership with Joe Root just as the sun was going down.

Root shared a 117-run stand with Zac Crawley (76) to lift England to 122-3 and then partnered Brook in another innings-reviving stand.

He was unbeaten on 68 and skipper Ben Stokes was 14 with England at 196-4 at the end of the second session, ushering England to its highest total of the series so far following two batting failures in the eight-wicket loss in the first test at Perth.

Starc took 10 wickets in Perth under standard test conditions. He's the most prolific bowler ever in day-night test cricket, taking 81 wickets with the pink ball in 14 matches leading into

this one. With the lights on and the ball starting to shape around, anything could happen before stumps.

Early going Stokes won the toss and opted to bat for the second time in the series, and may have regretted it initially when Duckett was out on the sixth ball — the 26th time Starc has taken a wicket in the first over a test innings — and Pope was out in the third over.

On the plus side Crawley, who was out for ducks in both innings in Perth, survived Starc's two-wicket opening burst and posted a half-century in the first session as England went to the first interval at 98-2.

He got off the mark with a boundary and, apart from two half-chances when he drove unpishly at Starc and Boland before he'd reached 50, he was composed.

Recalled paceman Michael Neser broke the 117-run third-wicket stand when Crawley attempted an extravagant pull shot and got an under edge through to the keeper. He was out for 76 off 93 balls.

No Lyon The most contentious selection of the series so far was Australia's choice to recall Neser in a five-man pace attack at the expense of spinner Nathan Lyon, who missed out for only the second time on home soil since his debut in 2011.

The selection committee later described it as a "once off" because of the conditions. (AP)

Kalikesh begins first full term as NRAI president Pawan Singh becomes new secretary general



MOHALI, Dec 4: Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo began his first full four-year term as president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he was elected unopposed during its general body meeting here on Thursday.

Pawan Singh, a well-known administrator and technical expert of the precision sport, was elected as the new secretary general as results of the sports body's elections were officially declared.

The elections were conducted by Justice (Retd) Nirmaljit Kaur, who was the returning officer.

The elections also put in place a new executive committee and a new governing body.

Sharing his first reactions, Singh Deo said, "Indian shooting has currently seen its most successful phase in history over the last couple of years, both in terms of success and popularity and that increases our responsibilities manifold."

"I wholeheartedly thank the entire general body for restoring faith in me and my team and we promise to leave no stone unturned to accelerate this growth momentum even further and to maximise the potential that our extremely talented shooting athletes possess."

"With the flag paramount in our

thoughts, let us all work together to make India number one in the world in our beloved sport." Odisha's Singh Deo has been in charge of the federation since former president Raninder Singh completed his three terms in the post.

Pawan Singh said, "All the functions in the NRAI are already online, from registration to results, and now the next step is to use technology efficiently. We want to leverage AI and performance data to identify talented shooters across the country."

"My focus will be on using technology to find and nurture promising athletes from every corner of India. We also want to train coaches and shooters for coaching so that they have an alternate career when they retire and can earn from the sport they have invested their life in."

In the two electoral contests which took place, Amit Sanghi from Telangana was elected as the senior vice president, while Kanwar Sultan Singh and Sushma Singh were elected vice-presidents in the 15-member executive committee.

The four sportspersons in the executive committee are Olympic bronze medalist Gagan Narang, Kunti Malik, Zorawar Singh Sandhu and Elavenil Valarivan. (PTI)

Fan frenzy for Hardik Pandya forces venue shift in SMAT

HYDERABAD, Dec 4: Fan frenzy over star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya forced the organisers to shift the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match between his team Baroda and Gujarat to a more secure Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium from a nondescript Gymkhana ground here on Thursday.

The game, which Baroda won by eight wickets, was moved due to an unexpected crowd interest and security concerns in Hardik's presence.

It was the second competitive game for the India all-rounder since returning from a two-month long injury break. He will be seen in India colours in the upcoming five-match T20 series against South Africa beginning in Cuttack on December 9.

Officials confirmed that the decision was taken after unusually large gatherings of fans were recorded near team hotel, practice nets, and ticket counters, far exceeding the normal

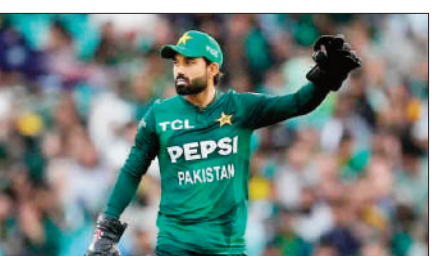


turnout for a domestic fixture.

"Fan turnout, enquiries, and crowd movement exceeded our projections by a huge margin. To ensure safety and smooth match operations, we decided to shift the match to Rajiv Gandhi Stadium," a senior organising official said.

After smashing an unbeaten 77 against Punjab, Hardik made 10 and took a wicket against Gujarat. (PTI)

Rizwan hoping to do well in Big Bash in his bid to make comeback in Pakistan T20 squad



LAHORE, Dec 4: Pakistan's seasoned wicketkeeper-batter Muhammad Rizwan is hoping to use the Big Bash platform in Australia to claw his way back into the national T20 squad for next year's World Cup.

Rizwan, a former captain of the ODI and T20I squads, has not been picked to play in the shortest format by the national selectors since December 2024, but he sees the Big Bash League (BBL) as a big opportunity to regain his spot back.

"I am confident of performing well in the Big Bash and in Australia if you are successful everyone takes notice of you," Rizwan told the media.

"I have always enjoyed playing the most in Australia because the competition level is very high and the Australians play their cricket in a

very different manner. The level is so high that if a player does well in Australia he knows he can perform anywhere else," he added.

Rizwan is set to leave for Australia with Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Haris Rauf and Hasan Ali to play in the Big Bash this week for Melbourne Renegades.

Pakistani selectors tried out young wicketkeeper-batter Muhammad Haris this year but then dropped him for poor form and recalled Usman Khan who got some good scores against Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe in the recent tri-series. But Usman is not considered as good a wicketkeeper as Rizwan.

The 33-year-old Rizwan, who has an impressive average of 47 from 106 T20Is with one century and 30 half centuries, was dropped because of his low strike rate of 125 despite forming a reliable opening pair with Babar Azam.

Babar, also sidelined from the format because of his inability to improve his strike rate, is now back in the team but at the number three spot.

Rizwan, who was removed as ODI captain in October to be replaced by Shaheen Shah Afridi, said like every other player he was also keen to get a chance to play for the country in the World Cup. (PTI)

Selectors set to include new faces in Pakistan squad for T20Is in Sri Lanka

LAHORE, Dec 4: The Pakistan Cricket Board's selectors are not ruling out the possibility of including some new faces in the T20 squad that will be playing three matches in Sri Lanka from January 7 to 11.

This is because the PCB had issued NOC to six main players to appear in the Big Bash League in Australia which runs from December 14 to end of January before it announced the three-match series in Dambulla this week.

This is the first time so many Pakistani players are taking part in the BBL including Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Muhammad Rizwan (their debut seasons in the event), Hasan Ali, Haris Rauf and Shadab Khan.

With the exception of Rizwan, who has not been picked in the national T20 squad since December 2024, all the others are either playing or are set to play in the format for Pakistan team.

Cricket Australia had made it clear before permitting its teams to sign on the Pakistan players that they would be available for the entire season.

"The understanding between CA and PCB was that Pakistan didn't have any international commitments in December and until the last week of January the players could play in the entire Big Bash event. But the situation has changed now," a reliable source said.

He said now either the PCB would have to hold another round of talks with CA or go with the selectors who are happy to give the bench strength the chance to play the series in Sri Lanka.

Many cricket boards in the past have complained about Pakistani players who sign on to play in their leagues being called back abruptly by the PCB for some training camp or national duty. (PTI)

"I am focusing on my cricket and I am not looking for any platform."

All-rounder whose performance the selectors from a shoul comeback to

Narine becomes first cricketer to take 600 T20 wickets

ABU DHABI, Dec 4: Known for his variations for the longest time, mystery spinner Sunil Narine etched his name in history after becoming the first bowler to claim 600 wickets in competitive T20 cricket.

He achieved the milestone during the World T20 game for his franchise Abu Dhabi Knight Riders against Sharjah Warriors on Wednesday.

Following the match, Abu Dhabi Knight Riders presented Narine with a special edition jersey featuring the number 600 to commemorate his unprecedented feat.

The 37-year-old cricketer from Trinidad reached the landmark by claiming the wicket of Tom Abell. This achievement is a testament to Narine's status as one of the greatest T20 bowlers to take the pitch.

Over the years, he has represented the likes of Kolkata Knight Riders, as well as the Abu Dhabi Knight Riders, Trinbago Knight Riders and Los Angeles Knight Riders with distinction. (PTI)

Arshdeep Singh -- statement spells against SA shows need to give pacer consistent ODI outings



VISAKHAPATNAM, Dec 4: By his own admission, Arshdeep Singh's favourite pastime is to watch YouTube compilations of Wasim Akram and Zaheer Khan to learn about the nuances of yorker and reverse swing.

Arshdeep has put those learnings to use quite frequently in T20Is, and it's not for

nothing that he became the first Indian bowler to take more than 100 wickets in that format.

But his spells against South Africa in the recent Ranchi and Raipur ODIs have underlined the need to give the left-arm pacer a consistent run in the 50-over version, something he has been deprived thus far.

In isolation, his figures of 2 for 64 and 2 for 54 in those matches look modest. But they offer a different picture when placed alongside Proteas' totals of 332 and 362 for six.

In both the games, Arshdeep had to bowl during SA's chase under lights with a heavy dew setting in wintry conditions.

But he never let the batters dominate him in either of the matches, registering the best economy among the pacers — 6.4 at Ranchi and 5.4 at Raipur.

At Raipur, Harshit Rana gave away seven runs an over and Prasad Krishna was carted around for 10.20.

It may be argued that Arshdeep largely bowled when the ball was relatively drier in the first Power Play and when the ball was changed after the 44th over in the second ODI.

But even then to contain or dismiss batters like Quinton de Kock and Marco Jansen on a firm pitch, a bowler needs optimum tactical awareness and the ability to bowl to the set field.

"That is one area where he has improved a lot in recent times. He knows the

conditions well, he then adjusts the lengths well and he has now learned the importance of mixing up his deliveries to avoid being predictable.

"It is very important in white ball cricket in which batsmen keep looking for runs. He has really matured now as a bowler and is mentally tough," tells Jaswant Rai, his childhood coach.

Rai's words ring true if one glances back at Arshdeep's third spell in the first ODI which India won by 17 runs.

The 26-year-old returned to bowl in the last power play, conceding just 16 runs in that three-over spell, and also dismissed Nandre Burger to make a critical difference in a close match.

In fact, the 47th over, in which he ousted Burger, was a wicket maiden, as he used the left-hander's angles and a well-concealed short-pitched balls to perfection.

No dew in Vizag

Arshdeep will be eager to bowl in the series-deciding third ODI here on Sunday because the high humidity in this coastal city -- often as high as 70 per cent in the night -- might cut down the effect of dew

in the eventuality of India bowling second.

It will certainly make his and colleagues' job that much easier here, but his overall statistics in the last two years beginning from 2023 December also testify to his improvement and consistency.

Arshdeep has grabbed 16 wickets in 10 matches in this period and his combined economy is five, only behind left-arm spinner Axar Patel's 4.43.

Despite all that, Arshdeep, who made his ODI debut in November 2022, has played only 13 matches, whereas Harshit Rana, who debuted in February 2025, has already appeared in 10 ODIs.

Prasidh Krishna, whose economy in the last five ODI stands at 9.33, 9, 7.42, 6.54 and 10.20, has played 20 ODIs having cut his teeth in March 2021.

With the ICC World Cup 2027 looming large on the horizon, India need capable back-up to lead pacers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, and Arshdeep has shown that he can be the third pacer if the team combination demands so.

So, it's time to set a few of those numbers right. (PTI)