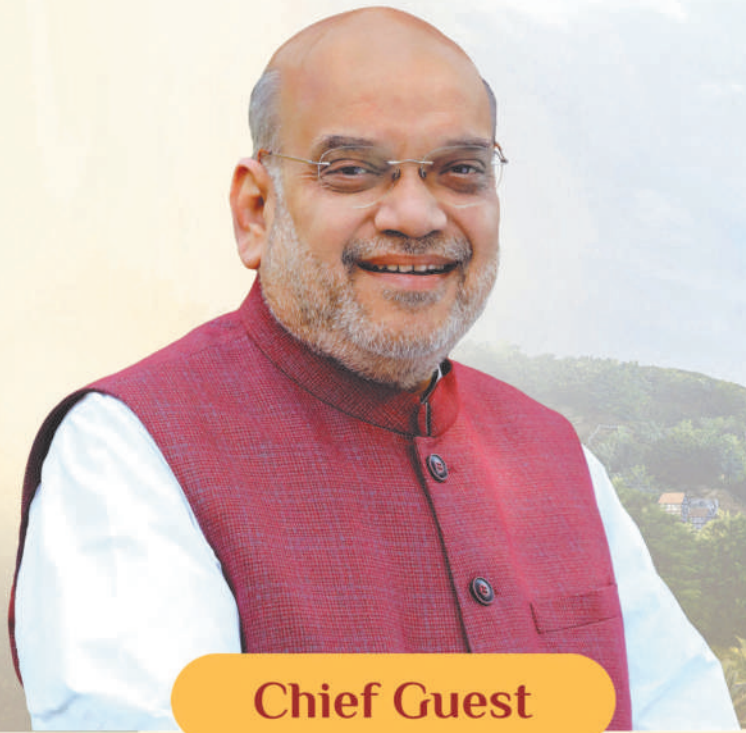




**Strengthening Law Enforcement with Advanced Infrastructure**



Chief Guest

**Shri Amit Shah**  
 Union Home Minister & Minister of Cooperation



In august presence of

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
 Chief Minister, Assam

**Shri Pabitra Margherita**  
 Union Minister of State, External Affairs, etc.

**Shri Sarbananda Sonowal**  
 Union Minister, Ports, Shipping & Waterways

**Shri Jayanta Mallabaruah**  
 Minister, Housing & Urban Affairs, etc., Assam



**Inaugural Ceremony**

**Office Building of Commissioner of Police, Guwahati**

&

**Intelligence City Surveillance System, Guwahati**

Features

- All Branches of Police
- Capacity: 400 officers
- Verification Branch (All in One)
- Police Library & Archives

Project cost  
**₹111 crore**

Features

- Advanced Command & Data Facilities
- 2000 Surveillance Cameras
- 60 Citizen Safety & Alerting Systems

Project cost  
**₹181 crore**

Environment Friendly

- 100% rainwater harvesting
- Water treatment plant
- Sewage treatment plant (STP) - 40 KLD capacity

- STP water to be reused for flushing
- Solar panels - 42.3 KW capacity
- GRIHA 3-Star rating provision

Project cost  
**₹292 crore**

**29 December 2025 3 PM Police Commissionerate, Khanapara, Guwahati**

Eyes jet engine, naval propulsion programmes

# Rolls-Royce plans big investment in India

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** British aero-engine maker Rolls-Royce on Sunday said it is looking at making India its third "home market" outside of the UK in line with a plan to unlock the full potential of opportunities across an array of domains, including jet engines, naval propulsion, land systems and advanced engineering.

In an interview to PTI, Sashi Mukundan, the executive vice president of Rolls-Royce India, elaborating on the move, said the company is planning for a "big investment" in the country, and listed developing a next-generation aero engine in India as a priority to power the combat jets that New Delhi will produce under the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme.

Mukundan also highlighted how Rolls-Royce can contribute significantly to addressing India's requirement for electric propulsion capability for boosting the Indian Navy's combat prowess.

The AMCA engine core can be modified into a naval marine engine and it can also be used for electric propulsion, he suggested, noting that Rolls-Royce is among a very few engine makers globally to have the capability to "marinize the aero engine".

Mukundan, without divulging specific details, said Rolls-Royce was eyeing making a significant investment to expand its footprint in India, noting that the country has "scale, policy clarity and a strong push" towards a defence and industrial ecosystem that is expanding rapidly and becoming more sophisticated.

"If everything goes well, it would be a significant investment. It'll be big enough that people will notice it, but I don't want to put a number to it. What matters is the impact of this investment, which would be the development of the entire value chain and ecosystem here across sectors that we operate in," he said.

The top Rolls-Royce executive said the company will firm up two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with two defence public sector undertakings in India. While



one pact is for manufacturing the engines for the Arjun tanks, the other is for engines for the future ready combat vehicles.

In October, CEO Tufan Erginbilgic, during a business roundtable had conveyed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India is going to be very critical for Rolls-Royce going forward.

"We have developed two other home markets outside the UK -- the US and Germany. We want to make India our next one. What do we mean by that? We want to do everything across the field, and it's not just defence," Mukundan said. "That ambition cuts across defence, naval propulsion, land systems, manufacturing, advanced engineering skills and technology development, all of which align closely with India's own priorities," he said.

On the engines for AMCA, Mukundan said extensive discussions and background work are underway on how to move forward.

"If India is thinking about next-generation engines, Rolls-Royce is probably the best partner. We have the capability, we have the experience both in India and globally, and we have repeatedly demonstrated that we can do it," he said.

Mukundan said all of the engine design work can be done in India, with the relevant technology transferred and all new intellectual property (IP) rights can be jointly owned with India.

"Once you own design IP, you have strategic control. Manufacturing then becomes the next stage, and that is always more complex. It's about ensuring that capability is built systematically and safely," he said.

The top executive said that Rolls-Royce engines for AMCA could be helpful for India in developing electric propulsion for naval engines.

Elaborating on it, he said essentially, electric and hybrid propulsion naval engines are marine gas turbines, which are built from the aero engine core.

"Rolls-Royce is one of the few engine makers who have the capability to marinize the aero engine at scale. Why this matters is that it is not viable to build an entire marine propulsion supply chain from scratch here because the quantities in the navy are very low," he said.

"But if the aero-core derivative is built and co-designed in India, the overlapping supply chain becomes justifiable and can support both the aero and naval marine," he noted.

Mukundan also highlighted Rolls-Royce's dominance in the global jet engine manufacturing.

"If we look at it globally, we've been building and certifying engines every 18 months, including combat and commercial. If I talk specifically about combat, we power the Eurofighter Typhoon with our EJ200 engine, which is

one of our recent engine programmes, with 90 kilonewton thrust capacity."

He also said that Rolls-Royce is leading the mandate of the Global Combat Aircraft Programme, which is an initiative of the UK, along with Japan and Italy, to develop a sixth-generation aircraft engine.

"We were also part of a joint program where GE and Rolls-Royce together developed an engine specifically for the fifth-generation F-35, which is another example of recent engine development, particularly in the thrust range or even above the thrust range that India is looking to build," Mukundan said.

The F-136 engine was the only engine specifically developed for the F-35 aircraft, with engine development led by GE Aviation and Rolls-Royce.

The executive vice president sounded bullish on India and especially pointed out the Indian government's "visible focus" on building indigenous capability across naval, land and air domains.

"Over the long term, India will be a major global power. And India is increasingly supporting others in the Global South. For us, there is a lot to work with, and it is all linked," he said.

"It's not just about market access; India is one of the few places where all the pieces genuinely fit together." "For Rolls-Royce, that makes India not just an important market, but a long-term strategic home," he said.

Mukundan also briefly touched upon the commercial aviation sector in India and described it as a rapidly growing market where Rolls-Royce has the most advanced technology offerings to power and propel the growth.

"We are already partnering in expansion plans of some of the biggest carriers in the country."

"Then there is energy security where we are supporting backup power generation for critical defence and civil infrastructure, such as airports, as well as data centres and the semiconductor industry," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

## Paying tribute to martyrs

Named after two icons of Assam's cultural landscape, the state-of-the-art auditorium is the largest in the region and is expected to serve as a major hub for cultural, literary and public events.

Amit Shah's visit comes at a time when Assam is witnessing significant infrastructure expansion and administrative reforms. The series of engagements reflects the Centre's dual focus on strengthening governance and celebrating Assam's cultural identity.

## FIR filed over 'Karbi Go Back'

The Assam Gorkha Sammelan—jointly condemned the slogans and distanced their respective communities from the remarks. The organisations stated that xenophobic comments targeting the indigenous Karbi community were unacceptable and posed a serious threat to the district's long-standing communal harmony.

Community leaders have appealed for restraint and calm, with many viewing the FIR filed by non-tribal organisations as a significant step towards de-escalating ethnic tensions and reinforcing social cohesion in the Sixth Schedule area.

## Over 87 acres of grazing

High Court against the administration's notice, the DC said.

"Today, the eviction was carried out in the land encroached by the remaining 367 families," he said. About 20 excavators were pressed into service while heavy security deployment was made in the area to ensure peaceful eviction. An alleged encroacher, Alap Uddin Haji, who lost his house, claimed that they did not know that it was VGR land that his family had been occupying.

"We have been living here since my father's time. We have nowhere to go now," he said. Haji also claimed that he had been trying to secure the rights of the land for several years, but the authorities had not informed him of the actual status of the land. (PTI)

## Assam cabinet approves

This move aligns Assam with the National Incentive Framework, enabling the state to avail incentives of up to ₹150 crore, he said. (PTI)

## Cong to contest 100 seats,

party flag and paid floral tributes to the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and Assam's cultural icon Zubeen Garg. A procession was also taken out in Tezpur on the occasion, with top state party leaders, including former presidents Bhupen Borah and Ripun Bora, participating in it. (PTI)

## Situation in KA dists improves

Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands in the tribal belts by the Hindi-speaking people.

Agitators from the Karbi community had been on a hunger strike for 15 days, demanding the eviction of alleged illegal settlers, who mostly hail from Bihar, from VGR and PGR lands in the tribal belts.

The protesters went on a rampage on Monday after police took away three agitators from the protest site during the early hours, reportedly to a Guwahati hospital as their health had deteriorated, which the administration later claimed was for their hospitalisation.

Kheroni area in West Karbi Anglong district witnessed widespread violence on Tuesday, as one person was killed in police firing and another was burnt alive inside his house. There was an attempt to evict the settlers last year, but a petition was filed in the Gauhati High Court, which passed an interim order staying the eviction process. A tripartite meeting was held on Friday between the state government, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the protesters, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assuring the agitators that the government would move the Gauhati High Court for an early order on its previous stay on eviction in grazing lands in both the districts. (PTI)

## Governor stresses on strength

maintained that programmes like the Ashtalakshmi Darshan Youth Exchange play an important role in strengthening national integration by providing young minds an opportunity to understand the cultural diversity, development perspectives and shared heritage of the nation.

Encouraging the students to draw inspiration from positive national narratives, he called upon the students to internalise these messages and actively contribute towards the service of the nation in their respective spheres.

The Ashtalakshmi Darshan 2025 programme, which was underway from December 15, aimed to promote cultural and educational exchange among students of different states. The programme hosted visiting undergraduate student delegates from Himachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. (PTI)

## Missing film Yakasik

community living in riverine areas of Assam. The film earlier won the Best Feature Film Award at the inaugural Dharti Aaba Tribal Film Festival 2025 held in Ranchi, Jharkhand, from October 14 to 16.

Reflecting on the film's journey, Dutta said it was made on a shoestring budget, with several collaborators extending support beyond financial considerations.

Sound designer Amrit Pritam and sound mixer Debajit Changmai, both from Assam and currently based in Mumbai, co-produced the film and handled the sound work without charge. Several technicians also accepted nominal remuneration, while the songs were recorded by Dutta's wife using a mobile phone. The film, he said, was put together over more than a year under challenging circumstances.

Dutta described the recognition the film has received so far as encouraging and said he was hopeful of further success at the Ajanta Ellora International Film Festival. He also noted that among the films selected in the competition was a work by Anupama Roy, who won the Best award at the 82nd Venice Film Festival in September 2025 for her debut film Songs of Forgotten Trees in the Horizons section.

## Batadrava project and resolve

naamghars and institutions central to Assamese cultural and spiritual life. From Batadrava to Barpeta, many such centres faced systematic assault which has been a calculated attempt to uproot Sanatan culture and replace it with an alien, fundamentalist identity. This was neither accidental nor sporadic; it was the result of a long, deliberate conspiracy to destabilise Assamese national existence.

The Satras established by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, centres of spiritual, social and cultural life, came under unprecedented threats. They are custodians of Borgeet, Sattriya, Chali dance, Jhumura, Dashavater, ancient manuscripts and centuries-old heritage. When these institutions fell into the hands of encroachers, Assam's identity, culture, language and collective self-respect faced near-collapse.

The Report of the Assam Sattra Land Review and Examination Commission revealed alarming realities: Over 15,289 bighas of satra land across Assam were encroached. In Barpeta alone, 7,137 bighas had been taken over. The same pattern was seen in Bajali, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Kamrup, Bongaigaon, Majuli and Dhubri. Many satras and naamghars were erased forever.

### Our Government's Resolve

The BJP-led NDA government is fully committed to safeguarding our pride and the very soul of our culture. In the Assam Vision Document 2016-2025, released ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections, the BJP committed itself to freeing the lands of Assam's satras, along with other religious, cultural and allied institutions, from illegal encroachment.

Reaffirming this resolve, our party reiterated in its 2021 Assembly Election Manifesto that the lands of satras and the sacred worship sites of indigenous communities would be restored by removing unlawful occupation. To further strengthen Assam's spiritual and cultural institutions, we also pledged financial assistance of ₹ 2.5 lakh to every Naamghar and indigenous place of worship across the state. Going beyond electoral assurances, our government has taken sustained and concrete measures to reclaim the lands of satras, Naamghars and indigenous worship centres from encroachers. At the same time, with the objective of revitalising Assam's national and civilisational life, several visionary and transformative initiatives have been undertaken.

In the Budget for the financial year 2021-22, as Finance Minister, I had announced specific measures for the development of Batadrava Thaan. In that Budget Speech, I had stated:

"Our Government proposes to develop Batadrava Thaan in Nagaon district into a centre of art, culture, research and spirituality. To transform the precincts of Batadrava Thaan and its surrounding areas into a unique cultural, religious and tourist attraction, the Public Works Department has prepared a comprehensive project report. The total estimated cost of this project is ₹ 188 crore. For the first phase of this project, I propose an allocation of ₹ 50 crore."

### The Batadrava Cultural Project

Later, after taking oath as the Chief Minister of Assam, we oversaw a large eviction drive towards the end of December 2022 to clear the encroachers from the Batadrava area, the sacred birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva. With the aim of transforming this cultural heartland into one of the foremost centres of culture and tourism, the Government of Assam undertook an ambitious project.

The Borduwa Cultural Project, developed at a cost of ₹ 227 crore, has been designed not only to make the historic site a major attraction for visitors but also to reflect the life, ideals and artistic heritage associated with Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and the broader cultural traditions of Assam. The project has been implemented across 165 bighas of land in three phases.

The entire complex has been conceptualised in the form of a tree, with the Guru Asana of Mahapurush at the centre, from which all other buildings extend like interconnected branches. The project incorporates traditional Assamese architectural elements and cultural motifs, along with detailed visual representations of the life of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. The various buildings have been constructed in the likeness of traditional musical instruments, dance forms, performance styles and aspects of Assamese lifestyle.

In addition, the project includes an exhibition depicting the life of Lord Krishna, a theatre designed for dramas, bhona performances and other cultural presentations, a centre for performing arts and other amenities. For tourists, the project provides guest houses, a tribal guest house, a health centre offering medical services for visitors and staff and the Manikanchan Griha—a space designed to introduce tourists to the artistic dimensions of the Naamghar culture intrinsic to Assamese national life. Other features at Batadrava Thaan, such as the Manikanchan Jalarashi, a viewing tower for security and surveillance, walkways, and designated parking areas for vehicles, have also been integrated into the project. This project will elevate Batadrava into a national and international destination for cultural and spiritual tourism, taking Sankardeva's legacy to future generations.

It is our privilege that the Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah, has graciously agreed to inaugurate this iconic project. For his profound affection towards Assam, we remain deeply grateful. Assam's national existence cannot remain secure unless the satras are protected from encroachment. People of Assam must stand united to resist any form of religious aggression. We reject any attempt to distort history by calling Sankardeva—Madhavdeva's sacred land "Sankar-Ajaan's Assam." Such malicious motives aimed at erasing Madhavdeva's name and diminishing Sankardeva's legacy will never be allowed to succeed.

On this historic day of the inauguration of the Batadrava Cultural Project, I reaffirm our unwavering commitment to safeguarding Assam's identity, culture and spiritual heritage.

## Satcom services after security clearance, spectrum allocation, says Scindia

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Satellite communication services will be rolled out in the country after players in the segment, including Elon Musk-owned Starlink, comply with the demands of security agencies, Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said.

The minister, in an interview to PTI, said the government will soon be in a position to allocate spectrum to satcom players - Starlink, Eutelsat One, and Jio SGS - once Department of Telecom (DoT) finalises spectrum pricing.

"There are two issues that need to be addressed. One by the licence holders OneWeb, Reliance Jio, and Starlink, which is to comply with security clearances regarding international gateways, ensuring data remains in India, and so on," Scindia said.

The minister added that the government has already allocated provisional spectrum to satcom companies to demonstrate compliance capability with security agencies. "They are in the process of doing that, so they need to comply," Scindia said. He noted that the government is in the process of finalising spectrum pricing,

which is being dealt with by DoT and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai). "Hopefully that should be resolved soon," Scindia said. Trai and DoT have differences on several points over spectrum for satcom services.

Earlier this month, Trai rejected several suggestions made by the DoT on spectrum allocation for satcom services, including levying a 5 per cent annual spectrum fee on satellite communication players instead of 4 per cent, and scrapping a ₹500 fee per connection in urban areas, among other points. DoT is expected to give its presentation before the apex decision-making body in the telecom sector, the Digital Communication Commission (DCC). The DCC will decide on the future course of action on spectrum pricing, which may include seeking Cabinet approval on the final decision. Talking about relief sought by Vodafone Idea (VIL), the minister said the DoT is still working on it. "We are today applying our minds on that. It is work in progress within the Department of Telecommunications," Scindia said.

VIL, in a letter to the DoT earlier this year, said its liabilities to the government are to the tune of around ₹ 2 lakh crore, which includes ₹ 1.19 lakh crore towards spectrum dues.

The company said that in case of no support, the Centre will face significant direct monetary loss with no recovery of spectrum dues, equity value of ₹ 53,083 crore becoming nil, and no recovery of AGR dues.

The Supreme Court has given the government an option to resolve the issue within the ambit of its policy-making powers.

When asked about the sustainability of repeated relief to VIL, the minister said no relief has been given to the company so far.

"We have not given any relief as such. We have converted our dues into equity. Therefore, we hold a 49 per cent equity stake in Vodafone against dues of close to, if I recall correctly, ₹37,000 crore. That is now the Government of India's equity stake in that company," Scindia said. In the absence of any relief, VIL needs to pay around ₹ 18,000 crore by March 2026, and a similar amount every year for the next six years. (PTI)

## Ambuja Neotia to revive stalled Usshar project in Kolkata

**KOLKATA, Dec 28:** The NCLT has approved a resolution plan submitted by Ambuja Housing and Urban Infrastructure Company Ltd (AHUICL) to take over and complete the stalled Usshar residential project at Batanagar near Kolkata, a company statement said on Sunday.

The decision by the Kolkata bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) marks a breakthrough in the "parcel-wise" resolution of the debt-ridden Riverbank Developers Private Ltd (RDPL), the original promoter of the 223.8-acre Calcutta Riverside township.

The Usshar project had been in a state of limbo for several years with no progress in construction, leaving hundreds of homebuyers in uncertainty.

Ambuja Neotia, which was previously associated with the project restricted to only management consultancy, has now committed to completing the remaining construction and handing over the residences to the buyers.

Under the terms of the court-approved plan, AHUICL, a subsidiary of the Ambuja Neotia



Group, will acquire the 9.4-acre parcel dedicated to the Usshar project with an upfront payment of ₹ 34 crore.

The resolution is specifically structured to isolate this residential asset from the broader financial liabilities of RDPL, which entered the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) following defaults on bank loans.

Ambuja Neotia Group Chairman Harshvardhan Neotia stated that the approval brought much-needed clarity and stability to a

project that has faced prolonged instability. He emphasised that the group's approach is to revive the Usshar project responsibly, with a focus on transparency and care for all stakeholders, particularly the homebuyers. With the NCLT mandate now in place, the Ambuja Neotia Group is expected to initiate a structured revival plan immediately, the official said.

The focus will shift to regulatory compliance under the West Bengal Real Estate Regulatory Authority (WBREERA) and estab-

lishing a clear execution timeline, according to the statement.

Earlier reports indicated that financial creditors held an 83.24 per cent voting share in the committee of creditors, while homebuyers accounted for approximately 11.2 per cent.

The Ambuja Neotia group clarified that the acquisition was strictly limited to the Usshar project and did not involve the assumption of any other liabilities or debts of Riverbank Developers.

This "parcel-wise" resolution strategy is being viewed as a landmark move for the regional real estate sector, realtors said.

By carving out a single project from a mega-township, the tribunal has ensured that a viable segment of the development can move toward for completion without being held back by the legal and financial entanglements of the entire 262-acre site.

The larger township, which originally grew out of a redevelopment of the Bata India factory land, includes other residential phases, a golf course, and retail spaces that remain subject to separate resolution tracks. (PTI)

Situation in KA dists improves, tight vigil on Mobile net services restored in violence-hit districts



GUWAHATI/ DIPHU, Dec 28: Mobile internet services in violence-hit Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts of Assam were restored on Sunday following improvement in the law-and-order situation.

The order said that the law and order situation in the two districts has "improved and normalised, and it appears that there is no further apprehension of breach of public peace and tranquillity for the time being".

Over 87 acres of grazing land cleared Eviction drive in Biswanath dist carried out

TEZPUR, Dec 28: An eviction drive to clear over 87 acres of grazing land in Biswanath district was carried out by the administration on Sunday, affecting more than 360 families, an official said.

Assam cabinet approves ₹ 115.11 cr NABARD loan for infra push

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: The Assam cabinet approved raising a ₹ 115.11 crore loan from NABARD to fast-track infrastructure projects in four districts, Public Health Engineering Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah said.

FIR filed over 'Karbi Go Back' slogans

KHERONI, Dec 28: Tensions in West Karbi Anglong have taken a legal turn with the Kheroni Police Station registering an FIR against three persons for allegedly raising provocative "Karbi Go Back" slogans during the recent unrest in the region.

The FIR was lodged following complaints supported by video footage and reports that surfaced during the peak of the violence in Kheroni.

The accused have been identified as Vikas Chauhan, Yuvraj Pathak and Dhanu Verma, police sources said.

Himanta recalls Jaitley's leadership

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday paid tributes to former Union minister Arun Jaitley on his birth anniversary, stating that his contributions continue to inspire people.

Shah's multiple programs in Assam today Paying tribute to martyrs of Assam movement to inauguration of Jyoti Vishnu Auditorium

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah is set to have a series of engagements on his visit to Assam on December 29 (Monday), during which he will take part in important programmes spanning tributes to martyrs, cultural heritage development and major administrative infrastructure inaugurations.



Centre, and a state-level exhibition on the new criminal laws at Khanapara at 2:30 pm. The event is expected to highlight the modernisation of policing and the implementation of the newly enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and related criminal justice reforms.

Cong to contest 100 seats, Gaurav on Assam polls

TEZPUR, Dec 28: Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi said on Sunday that the party will contest 100 seats in the 126-member state assembly elections next year, leaving the remaining constituencies to its alliance partners.

Governor stresses on strength of youth in shaping country's future

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya has stressed on the strength of the youth for shaping the country's future.

Missing film Yakasik Omede gains traction at int'l film festivals



From riverine Assam to global screens, a grass-roots Missing film carries indigenous voices and fragile floodplain life to the world

JORHAT, Dec 28: As 2025 draws to a close, the makers of the Missing-language film Yakasik Omede have reason to celebrate, with the film continuing its strong run on the international festival circuit.

alongside 10 other debut features from different parts of the world for the Jaffna festival, while it will compete with eight films in the Ajanta Ellora festival's Indian competition segment.

Sonowal cautions BJP workers against complacency, infighting ahead of 2026 Assam polls

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal asked BJP workers not to become complacent or indulge in infighting ahead of the 2026 assembly polls in Assam.

with us, but it is important that there is no infighting within our own party," he said.

claimed. Sonowal claimed that peace and stability returned only after the BJP formed the government in Assam in 2016, through dialogue, decisive action and signing of multiple peace accords.

Opium, smuggled cigarettes worth over ₹ 1 cr seized

GUWAHATI, Dec 28: Contraband goods, including opium, worth over ₹1 crore have been seized in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Batadrava project and resolve to protect our national existence

By: Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma



Batadrava! This single word evokes a profound spiritual and emotional bond for Assam and the Assamese people. This sacred land is the birthplace of the great saint, reformer and cultural visionary Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva — the architect of our national consciousness.

Dr Maheswar Neog described how Sankaradeva, enriched by Indian philosophy and his pilgrimages to major sacred sites across the country, absorbed the spiritual currents of his time: "He travelled

for several years across northern India, visiting many sacred places. In two verses of Kirtan-Ghosa, he gives us a hint of what he saw and heard: Orissa Baranasi thaye thaye. Kabir geet sishwasabe gawe' (From Odisha to Varanasi, everywhere and in every place, the cultured and refined sing the poet's songs.)

Lohityar jale anukul (The village named Bordowa is unmatched in fertility / Nourished by the waters of the Lohitya.) Batadrava is also associated with a remarkable woman of the Vaishnavite era — Sati Radhika, whose name too is remembered with honour.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*The less you talk, the more you're listened to.*  
- Pauline Phillips

## SIR tension in West Bengal

As the Election Commission of India started sending notices to unmapped voters to appear before the officials for hearing from December 27, 2025, tensions in West Bengal have considerably escalated. There are about 32 lakh voters in this category, who are facing a prospect of deletion from the final voter list. These are in addition to already deleted 58.2 lakh voters from the Draft Electoral Rolls released on December 16, 2025. It should be noted that the BJP has been claiming for quite some time that SIR would purge about 1.5 crore "bogus" voters from the electoral roll of West Bengal. Referring to this, the TMC supremo and TMC leader Mamata Banerjee accused Election Commission on December 22 while addressing over 14,000 TMC booth-level agents at Netaji Indoor Stadium that they are to delete names of 1.5 crore voters. The prospect of deletion of lakhs of unmapped names of voters has become a reality who are being called in the first phase of hearing under SIR. Notices were sent to about 10 lakh such unmapped voters on Monday, December 21, who could not link their names with those of family members in the 2002 electoral rolls. Notices to another 22 lakh voters will be sent within couple of days. In the enumeration phase 31,68,424 unmapped voters were identified.

The matters do not end here, since it is only the first phase of verification. Voters having other logical discrepancies will be taken in the next phase, officials of the State Election Commission have been quoted saying. Though the micro-observers will be from the state according to officials, the ruling TMC is not relying on them. Even CM Mamata Banerjee has alleged in while addressing the TMC booth level workers in Kolkata on December 22, alleged that the micro-observers lack knowledge of the local Bengali language. CM Mamata Banerjee has also asked BLAs of her party to keep track of micro-observers appointed by ECI, who are Central Government employees. Banerjee has alleged gross errors in the draft electoral rolls and directed her party's BLAs to ensure that no genuine voter is deleted from the rolls. She said that thousands of legitimate voters have found their names deleted and questioned how corrections can be made within a short span of time.

Banerjee is the second leader from the opposition after Congress Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, who has directly and most sharply attacked the Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. SIR process has clearly been problematic and 46 lives have been lost so far. Who is responsible for this, CM Mamata has asked. Tensions at personal and political levels are mounting in West Bengal, and political clashes have been reported from several parts of the state.

## Gold's race to magic \$5000 most keenly watched milestone for 2026

By: K Raveendran

Gold's surge has turned a long-running Indian household instinct into a global macro trade. With spot prices pressing above the \$4,500 an ounce mark late in 2025 and year-to-date gains running above 70 percent, the metal is headed for its strongest annual performance since 1979. The question now animating dealing rooms as much as Indian jewellery hubs is straightforward: when does the "magic" \$5,000 level arrive, and does 2026 deliver it quickly enough to feel inevitable rather than speculative?

From an Indian perspective, the \$5,000 conversation is not just about global price charts. It is about what the price means in rupees, how it reshapes household balance sheets, what it does to the current account through imports, and how it influences the Reserve Bank of India's reserve composition at a time when central banks worldwide have been accumulating bullion. India's own reserves illustrate the point: gold's share of the country's foreign-exchange reserves has climbed sharply over the past year, a shift attributed to both valuation effects from higher prices and ongoing reserve management choices. In other words, India is not only consuming gold; it is increasingly carrying gold risk—and reward—on the sovereign balance sheet too.

Any \$5,000 timeline has to start with arithmetic. From \$4,500 to \$5,000 is roughly an 11 percent move. That is modest compared with the scale of 2025's rally, which helps explain why a target that once sounded like science fiction now feels like a question of sequencing. The more useful frame is not "can it happen?" but "what must remain true for it to happen quickly?" The key variables are real interest rates in the United States, the dollar's trajectory, central-bank and ETF flows, and the market's appetite for hedges against geopolitical disruption.

That macro mix matters disproportionately for India because gold, here, sits at the intersection of culture and capital. Households treat it as a store of value and a portable form of security; traders treat it as a currency proxy; policymakers watch it as an import-driven swing factor. When global investors buy gold as a hedge against currency debasement or policy risk, Indian buyers experience it as a double-whammy: higher international prices and, at times, rupee weakness that inflates the local price further. Even if dollar gold stalls, a softer rupee can keep domestic gold buoyant; conversely, a firmer rupee can cushion the blow if dollar gold spikes. That currency overlay is why the \$5,000 in 2026 debate can understate the Indian reality: the number that dominates Indian conversation is often the rupee price per 10 grams, not the dollar price per ounce.

So what does the range of credible 2026 paths look like? One influential view places \$5,000 within reach by late 2026 rather than as a distant, multi-year aspiration. J.P. Morgan's research note published in mid-December projects gold pushing towards \$5,000 an ounce by the fourth quarter of 2026, with even higher levels presented as plausible over a longer horizon. It suggests a structural repricing story: sustained official-sector buying, persistent demand for hedges, and a world in which policy uncertainty is not episodic.

To pull \$5,000 forward into the first half of 2026, the market would likely need an intensification of the same catalysts that powered 2025: sharper-than-expected US easing, a renewed down-leg in the dollar, and continuing central-bank accumulation without a meaningful supply response. The World Gold Council has described 2025's move through \$4,000 as unusually fast, noting the pace at which successive milestones were cleared. A market that can traverse \$3,500 to \$4,000 in little more than a month can, under the right conditions, cover another 11 percent quicker than many assume—especially if momentum traders and systematic funds join what began as a macro hedge.

But India has to weigh the opposite scenario with equal seriousness: a cooling phase that delays \$5,000 into late 2026 or beyond. Gold is not immune to valuation fatigue. A year of 70% gains increases the risk of abrupt drawdowns if the macro narrative changes—if inflation cools faster than expected, if real yields rise, or if the Federal Reserve signals restraint longer than markets anticipate. Even without a dramatic policy shift, positioning can become crowded. In those moments, Indian households often behave differently from global funds: jewellery demand tends to soften at elevated prices, while investment demand can pick up through coins, bars, ETFs and digital formats. The result is a complicated domestic demand pattern rather than a simple "higher price equals higher buying" story. The Indian policy lens adds another layer. High gold prices can worsen the import bill when volumes do not fall proportionately, with implications for the current account and, indirectly, the currency. That can push policymakers towards steps that temper demand—through duties, compliance tightening, or incentives that channel savings into financial assets. At the same time, elevated prices can strengthen household balance sheets where gold ownership is widespread, providing a form of collateral and a psychological consumption backstop. (IPA Service)

## Generation gap and its impact on society

If we look closely into every family in our society, one thing becomes very clear: with the rapid pace of time, the deep emotional connection that once existed among people is now developing profound cracks. This crack is the generation gap, which stands as a complex challenge in the current social environment. The social setting or moral values in which the older generation built their personalities have largely become irrelevant or unsuitable for the times in the eyes of today's younger generation. The root of this ideological conflict lies not merely in the difference of age, but rather in the rapid changes of the contemporary world and the new horizons of individual aspirations. In earlier times, our society had a strong sense of collective responsibility, where the directives or judgments of elder family members were considered inviolable. But in the present era, since individual freedom and independent thinking have gained paramount importance, an invisible wall has risen between the elders and the youth. This wall is not limited only to conversations; it is equally strong in perspectives on life. The unique kinship and mutual interdependence that characterised Assamese society are gradually disappearing. As a result, a kind of void has been created at every level of society, raising various questions about our future social security and unified living. The impact of this generation gap on society is so profound that it has given birth to instability in everything from human behaviour to mental states.

The decline of joint families and the increase in nuclear families in the structure of Assamese society have intensified the generation gap further. In the past, when grandparents, parents, and grandchildren all lived together under one roof, the exchange of knowledge and experience happened naturally. The experiences of the older generation guided the younger one through difficult times in life, while the vibrancy of the youth brought waves of joy into the monotonous lives of the elders. But nowadays, due to livelihood pressures or the demands of modern lifestyle, people have embraced the concept of nuclear families, depriving the younger generation entirely of the proximity of elders. This separation has eliminated the emotional bonding that was needed between the two generations. Elders often feel that their advice or experiences are not valued by today's children, while the younger generation sees the elders' interference as merely an obstacle or an imposition of outdated ideas. In middle-class Assamese families, this problem has now created a complex mental crisis. The bond of affection between parents and children has become confined to duty fulfilment alone. This social change has weakened the emotional foundation of our society. Since the family is the fundamental unit of society, these cracks within families are affecting the entire Assamese society, pushing it towards an uncertain future.

The rapid expansion of information technology and extensive mechanisation have

given the generation gap a new and complex dimension, where communication channels have increased unprecedentedly, yet heart-felt connection among people has diminished considerably. The ease with which today's younger generation integrates with various technological tools often makes those same tools irritating and incomprehensible to elders. As a result, spontaneous conversations between two generations living in the same house have become rare. The youth find the entire world on the screens of their handheld devices, so they show no interest in sitting with elders to learn about old societal stories or moral lessons. This mechanisation has largely stripped away the liveliness and joy of mutual exchange that existed in society. While elders prefer sitting in open spaces or gathering in public places to share their thoughts, the younger generation prefers retreating to their private rooms and staying engrossed in the illusory online world. This difference in mindset affects not only within homes but also social festivals and celebrations adversely. The sense of unity that once existed among everyone during Bihu or other religious events has now been replaced by mechanical displays and

lifeblood alive has been replaced by opposition and discord. This situation has drawn a huge question mark over the future stability of Assamese society.

In traditional Assamese society, the primary goal of education was to secure a government job or certain respected professions. Elders still persistently pressure their children to follow the same safe and secure path. But for today's youth, the world is much larger, and they want to create a distinct identity through new creative endeavours. This difference in outlook often causes permanent unrest in a home. Parents think their children are heading towards an uncertain future, while children feel that elders make no effort to understand their dreams and potential. This mutual distrust drives the younger generation away from their homes and loved ones. Many talented young men and women from Assam now live permanently outside the state or abroad just to preserve their independent mindset and career comfort. As a result, a severe demographic crisis has emerged in our society. In Assam's villages and towns, only elderly people remain, as their children have moved far away in pursuit of better lives. This situation has

created an extreme challenge to the social and mental security of elders. At a time when they need emotional companionship and special care from their children, they are forced to battle loneliness. This is considered the most tragic consequence of the generation gap.

The older generation gave priority to sacrifice, patience, and collective interest over personal gain. For them, societal norms and honour were paramount. But in the present time, personal success and extreme financial comfort have taken centre stage. Since the younger generation has grown up in a highly competitive environment, their desire to overcome all obstacles and move forward is so strong that they often do not hesitate to ignore essential human emotions. This mechanical mindset has created a kind of insensitivity in society. What elders describe as social unity or togetherness, the youth regard as mere waste of time or the activity of useless people. The tendency to gather wholeheartedly at namghars or public events, as in the past, is fading away. The younger generation wants to dismiss old societal norms as blind beliefs, even though they may have deep social foundations. This lack of harmony has created a chaotic environment in society. Elders' well-meaning advice is now seen by the youth as an attack on their freedom, leading to increased rebelliousness among them. For the healthy development of society, a beautiful union between the experience of elders and the boundless energy of the youth was essential, but unfortunately, we now see the opposite picture.

The negative impact of the generation gap on mental health is extremely complex, and its consequences are far-reaching for society. When elders do not receive adequate response, love, or respect within the family, they suffer from deep inferiority and intense

depression. They feel that they have no need or place in this new society. On the other hand, the younger generation, unable to maintain proper balance between their dreams and societal pressures, experiences extreme anxiety and instability. They hesitate to share their inner thoughts or sorrows with elders, knowing that elders will view their modern life's complex problems as mere luxuries or weaknesses. This lack of communication has made it common for the younger generation to be pushed towards various misdeeds or addictive substances. Behind the recent increase in suicides or premature deaths in Assam lies the destructive hand of this generation gap. If a healthy environment existed within families where everything could be openly discussed, many terrible problems could have been resolved at the outset. Elders need to make their old rigid rules somewhat flexible and try to understand the new problems of the youth, while the youth need to realise the value of elders' sacrifices. This has now become inevitable for society. To prevent society from completely breaking down, this emotional distance must be bridged by any means.

In conclusion, completely eliminating the generation gap from our society may not be possible for anyone, but every conscious individual in society needs to be vigilant to reduce its harmful effects and build a beautiful social environment. The most important step for this should be to increase mutual communication and boundless tolerance. Elders must openly accept that there is a vast distance between the society of their time and today's ultra-modern society, so they need to adapt their old thinking to the times. They should learn to welcome the new thoughts, courageous steps, and scientific outlook of the younger generation without hesitation. Similarly, the younger generation should deeply realise that the experiences of elders can provide very simple solutions to many complex and difficult life problems. They should continually strive to recognise their own roots, rich culture, and heritage. The responsibility of carrying forward the best traditions and human values of Assamese society rests entirely on the younger generation. Various social organisations and educational institutions can also play a very important role in this regard. Regular discussion forums or cultural programmes should be organised to build healthy harmony between the two generations, where everyone can exchange views openly without any hesitation. Only through selfless love, deep respect, and boundless patience can we fill this poisonous chasm of the generation gap. If we want to leave behind the society of our aspirations in a healthy, strong, and affectionate form for future generations, we must sincerely begin this work of harmony from this very moment. Since change is the law of nature and inevitable, our sole aim should be to positively embrace that change and collectively move forward courageously towards building a better and more humane society.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

tendencies to show off one's presence. The younger generation wants to judge traditions through the lens of modernity, where dry logic holds more place than emotion. In contrast, elders view traditions with respect and faith. Due to these two opposing thought processes, an emotional void has been created in society, putting a pause in the continuity of our cultural heritage.

Differences in cultural identity and language use have made the generation gap more evident and painful. The natural interest or respect that the older generation had for the rich vocabulary and pure usage of the Assamese language is gradually declining among the youth. The kind of mixed language the younger generation has adopted for education or work poses a serious threat to our unique linguistic identity. When elders speak about preserving linguistic purity or emphasise correct pronunciation, the youth dismiss it as annoying discipline or a meaningless requirement of the old era. Moreover, significant changes have occurred in clothing and food habits as well. The traditional Assamese cuisine or distinctive attire that defined our society is now used by the younger generation only on special festival days. In daily life, they are so influenced by globalisation that their connection with their native identity has become extremely weak. This change mentally hurts elders, as they constantly fear that their descendants have completely lost their true identity. This process of cultural conflict has created a silent division in society. Since culture is the lifeblood of a community, the harmony needed between two generations to keep this

## Dismantling MGNREGA: An outrageous assault on the Indian constitution

By: Prabhat Patnaik

Several employment schemes, each limited in scope and constrained by the availability of fiscal resources, had existed in different states of the country earlier; what the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme enacted in 2005 did was to introduce a uniform, nationwide, essentially centrally-funded, demand-driven scheme: one person per rural household could get up to a hundred days of employment on demand, failing which the person demanding work would have to be compensated. A demand-driven scheme confers a right on the people; the MGNREGS therefore introduced a right. The Indian Constitution had put economic rights, including the right to work, not among the Fundamental Rights but among the Directive Principles of State Policy; MGNREGS represented an attempt to rectify this lacuna, and to realise, no doubt partially, a Constitutional vision.

The legislation underlying MGNREGS was discussed in public fora for months; it was deliberated upon by a Parliamentary Committee which gathered testimonies from lots of people; and finally, when a consensus had been built around its various provisions, it was passed unanimously in parliament. It thus constituted an embodiment of the nation's will and realized for the people a right that the Constitution had envisaged. An abrogation of that right is ultra vires the Constitution, if not in letter, then certainly in spirit.

Yet, this is precisely what the NDA government has done. It has taken away a right of the people simply through passing a resolution in parliament by a voice vote. A Constitutionally-approved right of the people, which the entire nation had willed them to enjoy, has been abrogated by a mere voice vote in the parliament. This is an outrageous act. As if aware of the utter impropriety of what it was doing, the government resorted to a massive hush-hush. The proposed bill to replace the MGN-



REGA was introduced on the 15th of December, discussed on the night of the 17th and passed by voice vote on the 18th, without being referred to the parliamentary standing committee on rural development, despite a written request by the Chairperson of that Committee, and without the permission being given to move any amendments to the bill. This introduces an astonishing and utterly undemocratic precedent: any right of the people, even when conferred in accordance with the will of the nation and the provisions of the Constitution, can be snatched away at any moment by a mere voice vote in parliament.

The government, in its characteristic fashion, has been working overtime to spread confusion about the contents of the new bill: it puts out that instead of a maximum of 100 days of employment as under the MGNREGS, now people can have up to 125 days of employment which makes the new bill superior to the MGNREGS. What it hides is that the new Act does not amount to MGNREGS plus 25 extra days of employment; it does away with MGNREGS altogether and hence the need to provide employment on demand. Instead of a demand-driven scheme, and hence a rights-based scheme, it now makes the provision of employment dependent upon the whim of the central government. This is done in many ways.

First, the provision of employ-

ment will henceforth be in specific regions designated by the central government, rather than in rural India as a whole. So the question of every rural household being entitled to 100 days of employment (let alone 125 days) does not arise. Second, the magnitude of funds made available to states by the central government will be determined by the latter, independent of how much demand for employment exists in any particular state. Third, the states have to provide 40 percent of the funds and the Centre 60 percent, compared to the situation under MGNREGS where the Centre provided 90 percent of funds, whose size moreover was supposed to depend on the demand for employment. Hence if the Centre now feels that a state should get Rs. 60 of its funds, but the state, being fiscally stressed, as all states currently are, manages to provide only Rs. 20, not the needed Rs. 40, then the total size of the programme in that state would be Rs. 50, and not Rs. 100. This not only whittles down the programme, but provides the Centre with a convenient scapegoat: if employment is not being provided in accordance with what the people demand, then, it will argue, the reason lies with the states.

The maximum number of employment days being raised to 125 therefore means nothing: the new employment scheme is not demand-driven; it is supply-driven, and hence abrogates a right con-

ferred on the people under the MGNREGS.

The NDA government's assault on the Constitution is not confined to the abrogation of a right; it encompasses an assault on federalism too. Without consulting with the states, despite being fully aware of the fiscal constraints on state governments, the Centre has unilaterally, and completely out of the blue, raised the share of the contribution of states to the employment scheme to 40 percent from the current 10 percent. But that is not all: the size of the total expenditure in each state will be determined by the Centre; the regions where this expenditure is to be incurred will be determined by the Centre; the employment projects on which this expenditure is to be incurred will be determined by the Centre; and if a state government wishes to spend more than what the Centre has ordained it should, then it can do so only in accordance with norms determined by the Centre.

The states in other words are suddenly being called upon to spend more, but all the decisions about where and how they can spend will be determined by the Centre. This amounts to treating state governments as mere vassals of the Centre, a travesty of the federalism envisaged in the Constitution. It is not just the states that are being trampled upon; the role of local self-governing institutions is being diminished too. The employment projects for MGNREGS that used to be planned by LSGIs are now going to be dictated by the Central government, which constitutes a further assault on the Constitutional vision of democratic decentralization enshrined in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

The VB-G RAM G therefore is not only an attack on the rural poor, who constitute by far the poorest people in India; it also amounts to a massive and multi-pronged attack on the Indian Constitution. The attack on the poor is palpable: MGNREGS is the life-line that has sustained lakhs of the rural poor, a fact that was particularly underscored during the pan-

demic when thousands of workers displaced by the lockdown had managed to survive there only because of the rights they enjoyed under the MGNREGS which ensured them work. The attack on the lives of the poor through the demolition of MGNREGS takes simultaneously the form of an attack on their rights and on the Constitution in general. This abrogation of rights will reduce the rural poor from proud citizens of a free country to a bunch of desperate mendicants. As their condition of life deteriorates, the central government will no doubt come forward with some largesse, dispensed along with photographs of Narendra Modi, which would still leave them materially worse off than before, but indebted to Modi for whatever crumbs they get. The reduction of the working poor from the status of citizens to that of mendicants is the ultimate goal of all fascist formations that invariably promote a cult of the "leader".

The assault on the Constitution is also an integral part of this very process. The Indian Constitution which emerged from the anti-colonial struggle took the "nation", consisting of its people, as its starting point; the government under the Constitution is supposed to serve this "nation". Fascistic formations however invert this entire relationship: the "nation" is identified with the "leader" and the people are supposed to be beholden to the "leader", and serve him in all possible ways, including by electing him again and again. The abolition of people's rights, the reduction of the status of the people to that of mendicants who must remain eternally grateful to the "leader" for the few crumbs they get, and the scuttling of the Constitutional order to facilitate this transition from democracy to fascist authoritarianism, thus constitute one integral process. The demolition of the MGNREGS, which was a remarkable scheme and which constituted the largest employment programme in the entire world, is a huge stride towards effecting this transition. (IPA Service)

# APCC leaders visit West Karbi Anglong, condole victims of recent violence

### Congress delegation meets victims' families, demands probe, slams state government

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Dec 28:** As tensions in West Karbi Anglong's Kheroni begin to ease, a high-level delegation from the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) visited the region on Sunday to meet families affected by the recent wave of violence.

The Congress leaders first visited the residence of Suruj Dey, a specially-abled youth who was tragically burned alive by protesters during the peak of the unrest. The delegation met with the grieving family members to take stock of the situation and offer their condolences.

The visiting team included prominent political figures such as Pranay Rabha (APCC vice president & Former Minister), Jadab



Swargiary (MLA, Dudhnoi), Bitupan Saikia (General Secretary, APCC), Mansing Rongpi (Former MLA) and Augustin Engti (President, West Karbi Anglong District Congress).

While interacting with the family, the leaders assured them that the party would demand a high-level investigation to ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice. Following the visit to the

Dey household, the delegation proceeded to the home of Linus Phangocho, who lost his life in a police firing incident during the clashes. The leaders expressed their solidarity with the family

and gathered details regarding the circumstances of the shooting.

Addressing the media, the Congress leaders criticised the BJP-led state government, alleging that the tragic loss of lives and the escalation of violence were a direct result of the administration's "gross negligence" and failure to maintain law and order. "These unfortunate incidents could have been avoided if the government had acted with responsibility. It is their failure that has led to this tragedy," said APCC General Secretary Bitupan Saikia.

The situation in Kheroni continues to be closely monitored by the district administration with security forces keeping watch to prevent further flare-ups.

# Draft voter lists released for Dibrugarh, Morigaon and Hojai ahead of 2026 elections

### Voters can now verify details, submit claims and objections before final electoral rolls are published

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Dec 28:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday released the draft photo electoral rolls for Dibrugarh district, with January 1, 2026 as the qualifying date.

According to the draft voter list published on December 27, 2025, the total number of voters in Dibrugarh district stands at 10,43,679. Of these, 5,05,235 are male voters, 5,38,434 are female voters and 10 belong to the third gender category.

In the 87th Chabua-Lahowal Assembly Constituency, the total number of voters is 1,79,089, comprising 86,324 male voters, 92,764 female voters and one third gender voter. The 88th Dibrugarh Assembly Constituency has a total of 1,96,675 voters, including 94,172 male voters, 1,02,501 female voters and two third gender voters.

The 89th Khawang Assembly Constituency has 1,56,880 voters, of which 76,162 are male voters, 80,715 are female voters and three are third gender voters. In the 90th Dulaijan Assembly Constituency, the total number of voters is 1,78,920, including 87,156 male voters, 91,761 female voters and three third gender voters.

The 91st Tingkhong Assembly Constituency has a total of 1,75,064 voters, with 84,595 male voters and 90,469 female voters. The 92nd Naharkatiya Assembly Constituency has 1,57,047 voters, comprising 76,822 male voters, 80,224 female voters and one third gender voter.

According to the final electoral rolls published on January 6, 2025, the overall voter turnout in Dibrugarh district increased by 1.35 per cent. The voter turnout rose by 1.63 per cent in the 87th Chabua-Lahowal constituency, 1.18 per cent in the 88th Dibrugarh constituency, 1.03 per cent in the 90th Dulaijan constituency, 1.30 per cent in the 91st Tingkhong constituency and 1.24 per cent in the 92nd Naharkatiya constituency.

The draft voter lists are available for public inspection at the office of the Election Registration Officer (Additional Deputy Commissioner/Office of the District Commissioner) and at the respective polling stations.

Voters can submit claims and objections related to inclusion, deletion or correction of entries from December 27, 2025 to January 22, 2026, through prescribed forms at the office of the Election Registration Officer or through the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) of the concerned polling stations.

All objections and claims will be disposed of by February 2, 2026 and the final voter list will be published on February 10, 2026. Special camps will also be organised on January 3 and 4, and January 10 and 11, 2026, at designated polling stations and Gram Sabhas with the assistance of BLOs to facilitate inclusion and correction of voter details.

**Our Morigaon Correspondent adds:** As per the revised schedule of the Election Commission of India, the Integrated Draft Photo Electoral Roll for the three Assembly constituencies of Morigaon district—52 Jagiroad (SC), 53 Laharighat and 54 Morigaon was released on Thursday. The draft rolls were formally published by District Commissioner and District Election Officer (DEO) Anamika Tewari during a press meet held here.

According to the draft electoral roll, Morigaon district has a total of 7,61,691 voters. Of these, 2,50,142 voters are from the Jagiroad (SC) Assembly Constituency, including 1,24,729 male voters and 1,25,411 female voters. The Laharighat Assembly Constituency has 3,01,581 voters, comprising 1,55,191 male voters and 1,46,384 female voters.

The Morigaon Assembly Constituency has a total of 2,09,968 voters, with 1,03,819 male voters, 1,06,147 female voters and 10 voters belonging to the third gender category. These voters will exercise their

franchise in the Assembly elections scheduled for 2026.

Election Officer Morigaon, Indrajit Das, informed that as per the final voter list, the district has witnessed an increase of 17,250 voters. Of the newly added voters, 8,378 are male and 8,872 are female.

**Our Hojai Correspondent adds:** In a significant step towards ensuring free and fair elections, the draft photo electoral rolls for Hojai election district were officially released on Saturday with January 1, 2026, as the qualifying date. The draft rolls cover all three Legislative Assembly Constituencies of the district—62 No. Binnakandi, 63 No. Hojai and 64 No. Lumding.

The draft rolls were unveiled during a press meet held at the DC's Conference Hall in Srimanta Sankardevnagar in the presence of District Commissioner and District Election Officer Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati. The event was also attended by Lumding Co-District Commissioner Chandan Borgohain, Additional District Commissioner Bonny Inam Shadab, ADC Pratham Raja Sarma, Election Officer Aradhana Sarma, election officials, representatives of political parties and Booth Level Officers (BLOs).

According to the latest data, the total electorate of Hojai district stands at 7,65,284 voters, including 3,88,987 male voters, 3,76,290 female voters and seven third-gender voters. The publication of the draft rolls marks a crucial stage in the electoral process, enabling eligible voters to verify their inclusion and check personal details such as name, age, address and photograph.

The district election authorities have urged citizens to carefully review the draft electoral rolls. Voters, whose names are missing, incorrectly entered or require correction can submit claims, objections or applications for rectification within the stipulated period.

## Six cattle electrocuted after contact with live power line



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 28:** In a shocking incident, six cattle were electrocuted after coming in contact with a live 11,000-volt electric wire at Simbargaon Talirbari in Kokrajhar district on Sunday.

According to reports, a high-voltage power line passing through the village snapped and fell into a nearby paddy field. The cattle were electrocuted when they accidentally came in contact with the live wire while grazing in the open field.

The incident occurred in the afternoon in a paddy field near Simbargaon Thakurbari village, triggering concern and anger among local residents. Villagers alleged negligence on the part of the power department and said the accident could have been avoided with proper maintenance of the power lines.

Local people expressed shock over the incident and urged the concerned authorities to ensure proper management and regular inspection of high-voltage electric wires, especially in rural areas where such lines pass through agricultural fields. "The loss of cattle in this incident has caused serious hardship to the farmers of the area," said local residents, demanding immediate steps to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

## OBITUARY



**R**ashida Begum, the retired vice principal of Dr Birichi Kumar Baruah College, Puranigudam breathed her last on December 22 due to old age ailments. Rashida Begum, also known as Reena, a strong and inspiring mother, educationist and social worker, whose demise has left a permanent void in the lives of her family and well-wishers. With her passing, the family said they have lost not only her everlasting love but also the strength and guidance she always imparted. Though she is no longer physically present, her values and memories will continue to remain with them.

Rashida Begum passed away at her G B Road, Amulapatty residence. Family members said that while she has left this world, she will continue to live on through her ideals, compassion and the impact she made on countless lives. A pioneer of women empowerment much ahead of her time, Rashida Begum was the first lady lecturer of Goalpara College in 1969. She later became the founder lecturer of Dr Birinchi Kumar Baruah College, Puranigudam, Nagaon and eventually retired from the same institution as its vice-principal. Her academic journey included graduation from Lady Keane College, Shillong and a Master's degree in Assamese from Gauhati University.

At the time of her death, she is survived by two sons, two daughters-in-law, one daughter, five grandchildren and a host of other relatives. The family prayed for her eternal peace, seeking blessings from the Almighty and expressing hope that Allah grants her a place in heaven.

## AATSU condemns brutal assault on student

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 28:** The All Assam Tribal Students' Union (AATSU) expressed deep sorrow and strong condemnation over the brutal assault that led to the tragic death of Anjel Chakma, a final-year MBA student from Tripura at Jigyasa University, Uttarakhand. In a press statement, AATSU president Harisarwar Brahma said Anjel succumbed to injuries weeks after a racially motivated attack on December 9 in Selaqui, Dehradun, while he and his younger brother went out to buy groceries. The attackers allegedly hurled racial slurs including "Chinki," "Chinese," "Nepali," and "momos," and assaulted the brothers when they protested, stabbing Anjel in the head, neck and abdomen.

Uttarakhand Police have arrested five accused—Avinash Negi, Shaurya Rajput, Suraj Khawas, Ayush Badoni and Sumit Kumar, four locals and one from Manipur. One prime accused, reportedly a Nepalese national, remains absconding with police issuing a non-bailable warrant and a reward for information leading to his arrest. Murder charges have been added to the initial FIR.

AATSU highlighted that the incident underscores the persistent racism faced by people from Northeast India and called it a grave failure of safety, accountability and basic human values. The organisation expressed solidarity with Anjel's family and peers, demanding a fair, transparent and impartial investigation and strict action against those responsible.

The student body urged peers to remain united, voice concerns peacefully and ensure such tragedies are neither forgotten nor repeated.

## Joint operation foils poaching bid in Raimona National Park

**HT Correspondent**  
**GOSSAIGAON, Dec 28:** A joint operation carried out by the Forest Department and the Sashtra Seema Bal (SSB) has foiled an attempt at illegal poaching inside Raimona National Park. Acting on a tip-off, a team from the Central Range of the Forest Department, led by Ranger Parish Basumatary and assisted by SSB personnel, launched a coordinated operation inside the protected forest area on Sunday. During the operation, the team detected the movement of suspected poachers deep inside the forest.

However, the suspects managed to flee after becoming alert to the presence of the security personnel, taking advantage of the dense forest cover and the difficult terrain of the national park. Although no arrests could be made, the joint team recovered a handmade firearm along with other incriminating materials believed to have been used for illegal hunting. Forest officials said the seizure indicates organised poaching activities, posing a serious threat to the biodiversity of the national park. Officials informed that an investigation

has been initiated to identify and apprehend those involved. Patrolling and surveillance have also been intensified in and around Raimona National Park to prevent any recurrence of such incidents.

The Forest Department in coordination with the SSB, reiterated its commitment to wildlife protection and conservation of the region's fragile ecosystem. The authorities also appealed to the public to share information related to illegal wildlife activities, warning that strict action would be taken against offenders.

## Bodo organisations kick off 3-day joint annual conference in KA

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, Dec 28:** The playground of Langhin Pamgaon Higher Secondary School has turned into a hub of cultural and organisational activity as a grand three-day joint annual conference of 13 Bodo organisations began on Sunday.

The event unites five district-level and eight regional-level bodies, celebrating key milestones, including the 75th Diamond Jubilee session of the Karbi Anglong District Bodo Kachari Samaj. Former Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Executive Member Sarat Brahma inaugurated the conference by opening the main welcome gate and essential facilities, including delegate camps and dining halls.

Eight regional presidents simultaneously hoisted their respective organisational flags with leaders from the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) and UBPO presiding. A Shahid Tarpan (martyr's tribute) was performed by Chakra Khakhlari to honour those who sacrificed for the community.

The day included both physical and intellectual activities. Retired DSP Prahlad Khakhlari inaugurated a volleyball match, followed by delegate meetings discussing the Bodo community's future roadmap in the region.

The conference, running from December 28 to 30, is expected to draw thousands of attendees and high-profile guests, focusing on Bodo literature, culture, and socio-economic development.

## Diamond jubilee celebrations of Brahma Dharma Committee conclude

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, Dec 28:** The three-day mega event marking the 75th Diamond Jubilee of the All Karbi Anglong District Brahma Dharma Committee concluded with religious fervour on Saturday at Langhin Phatikjan. The celebrations were held in conjunction with the 42nd Annual Session of the Langhin Regional Brahma Dharma Committee.

The event, which commenced on December 25, witnessed significant participation from spiritual leaders, local representatives and devotees from across the region. The 'Akhanda Yajna' (continuous sacrificial fire) and 'Mangalik Yajna' remained the central focus throughout the three-day programme.

Member of Parliament Amarsing Tisso and Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Lunsing Teron graced the opening day and took part in the sacrificial offerings. Tributes were paid to revered spiritual leader Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma through floral offerings and ceremonial lamp lighting.

On the second day, a theological seminar

was organised, focusing on the principles and philosophy of Brahma Dharma. A major organisational development also took place with the dissolution of the existing committee to pave the way for the formation of a new executive body to guide the district committee in the coming years.

The concluding day featured an open religious meeting moderated by Someshwar Basumatary. Eminent speakers, including Choneswar Basumatary and Biren Basumatary, delivered discourses highlighting the spiritual significance of 'Brahma' and the ritualistic importance of 'Yajna'.

The programme was attended by several prominent personalities, including Kalyan Rabha president of ABSU, Sarat Brahma president of the reception committee, Barendra Kumar Basumatary president of the district committee and Nakul Chandra Basumatary secretary of the district committee.

The successful completion of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations underscored the enduring legacy and influence of the Brahma Dharma movement in the Karbi Anglong region.

## Margherita Congress marks 140th Foundation Day

**HT Correspondent**  
**MARGHERITA, Dec 28:** The Margherita Block Congress Committee on Sunday organised a vibrant celebration to mark the 140th Foundation Day of the Indian National Congress at the premises of Margherita Congress Bhawan. Party workers, local leaders and supporters gathered in large numbers to commemorate the historic occasion, which coincides with the party's founding on December 28, 1885, in Bombay (now Mumbai) by Allan Octavian Hume and other visionaries. The programme began with the hoisting of the Congress flag by Chitra Borgohain, president of the Margherita Block Congress Committee. This was followed by speeches highlighting the party's enduring legacy in India's freedom struggle, its role in nation-building and its continued commitment to secularism, social justice, integrity and equality. Subsequently, a meeting was held under the presidency of Chitra Borgohain. Among those present were Margherita Block Congress Committee vice presidents Toufik Khan and Bachu Dey, general secretaries Deepjyoti Taye, Arup Sharma and Alfaz Ahmed, Tinsukia District Congress Committee vice president Satender Prasad, Tinsukia District Congress Committee Gorkha Cell president Rudra Prasad Sharma, along with representatives of the Mahila Congress, Margherita Assembly Youth Congress, Seva Dal and NSUI. On the occasion, Indian National Congress party workers of Margherita remembered and paid rich tributes to iconic leaders such as Allan Octavian Hume, WC Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Anandmoan Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu and others who shaped the Congress's historic role in transforming India into a democratic republic.

# NFR achieves major milestones in modernisation, safety and connectivity

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has continued its robust momentum in advancing rail infrastructure and passenger services across the North Eastern region, registering significant achievements in modernisation, safety and connectivity during 2025.

During the year, thirteen pairs of trains under NFR have been upgraded from conventional ICF coaches to modern LHB rakes, offering enhanced safety features, improved ride comfort and higher operational efficiency for passengers. At the same time, substantial progress has been made in railway electrification. As of March 2025, a total of 3,724.57 route kilometres (RKM) had been electrified. In 2024-25, electrification works covering 1,141.38 route kilometres were completed, while 146.44 route kilometres were electrified in 2025-26 up

to October 7, 2025. With this, the total electrified network over NFR has reached 3,871 route kilometres.

Division-wise electrification stands at 788.55 RKM in Katihar, 713.87 RKM in Alipurduar, 782.72 RKM in Rangiya, 1,104.63 RKM in Lumding and 481.21 RKM in Tinsukia division, reflecting steady progress towards sustainable, energy-efficient and environmentally friendly rail operations in the North Eastern region.

Safety continues to remain a foremost priority for NFR. The zone has strengthened level crossing gates through modern signalling and interlocked arrangements with 624 interlocked level crossing gates now operational. Additionally, 582 sliding boom installations have been provided to improve road visibility and enhance protection for road users.

Technology-driven initiatives

have also been expanded with AI-based Intrusion Detection Systems deployed across important elephant corridors to prevent train-animal collisions. These measures have reportedly helped protect over 160 elephant lives in 2025 alone, reinforcing NFR's commitment to passenger safety as well as environmental conservation.

NFR's contribution to national development was recently highlighted during the inauguration and foundation-laying ceremony of development projects worth over ₹ 9,000 crore at Aizawl in Mizoram. During the event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the Bairabi-Sairang railway line to the nation, emphasising the historic significance of connecting Aizawl to India's national railway network and its potential to transform lives through better access to education, healthcare and employment. The Prime

Minister also underlined the role of railways in India's growth story and in advancing regional connectivity under the Act East Policy.

Further strengthening passenger amenities, Haibargaon Railway Station became the first station in Assam to be inaugurated as part of the nationwide dedication of 103 redeveloped Amrit Stations by the Prime Minister, symbolising the government's focus on modern, passenger-centric infrastructure.

In addition, the Railway Protection Force under NFR has successfully recovered 174 lost mobile phones through the CEIR portal with 146 devices returned to their owners through prompt action. Collectively, these achievements highlight NFR's continued dedication to modernisation, safety, passenger satisfaction and the overall development of the North Eastern region.

# 'Bhupen da ka surila safar'

### Sonowal releases Hindi book on Bhupen Hazarika



**GUWAHATI, Dec 28:** Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday emphasised that books on contributions on legends of one state in languages of other areas strengthen cultural dialogue and foster emotional and intellectual connect.

Releasing a book on musical maestro Bhupen Hazarika here, 'Bhupen da ka surila safar' (Bhupen Da's Melodious Journey), Sonowal said that the singer was not merely the voice of Assam, but a resonant expression of India's collective conscience.

"Bhupen da's music emerged from deep human sensitivity, social concern and an unwavering commitment to harmony and national unity. This Hindi-language work will serve as an important bridge, introducing the rich cultural legacy of the North East to the Hindi-speaking heartland of the country," he said. The former Assam chief minister emphasised that such literary contributions strengthen cultural dialogue and foster emotional and intellectual connectivity between the North East and the rest of India.

The Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways added that the book will inspire younger generations to understand and appreciate Hazarika's thoughts, ideals and timeless artistic vision.

The 184-page book, authored by Guwahati-based journalist Azhar Alam and published by the Assam Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, explores the life, creative genius and enduring legacy of Bharat Ranta awardee Hazarika. (PTI)

## SC to hear suo motu case on Aravalli hills today

Court steps in to safeguard the Aravallis, a vital green barrier against desertification and ecological degradation



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Amid a row over the definition of Aravalli hills approved by it, the Supreme Court has taken suo motu cognisance of the issue and is slated to hear the matter on Monday.

As per the cause list, a three-judge bench vacation of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices JK Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih is likely to hear the matter.

The case is titled as 'In Re: Definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges and Ancillary Issues'.

The top court on November 20 had accepted a uniform definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges and banned grant of fresh mining leases inside its areas spanning Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat until experts' reports are out.

The apex court had accepted the recommendations of a committee of MoEF&CC (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) on the definition of Aravalli hills and ranges to protect the world's oldest mountain system.

The committee recommended that "Aravalli Hill" will be defined as any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief and an "Aravalli Range" will be a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other.

The committee, while defining Aravalli hills, said, "Any landform located in the Aravalli districts, having an elevation of 100 metres or more from the local relief, shall be termed as Aravalli Hills... The entire landform lying within the area enclosed by such lowest contour, whether actual or extended notionally, together with the Hill, its supporting slopes and associated landforms irrespective of their gradient, shall be deemed to constitute part of the Aravalli Hills."

The panel also defined Aravalli Range and said, "Two or more Aravalli Hills ... located within the proximity of 500m from each other, measured from the outermost point on the boundary of the lowest contour line on either side forms Aravalli Range."

"The area between the two Aravalli hills is determined by first creating buffers with a width equal

to the minimum distance between the lowest contour lines of both hills ... The entire area of landforms falling between the lowest contour lines of these Hills as explained, along with associated features such as Hills, Hillocks, supporting slopes, etc., shall also be included as part of Aravalli Range."

The SC delivered a 29-page judgement in the suo motu matter arising out of the long-running environmental litigation in TN Godavari Thirumulpad case.

"We further accept the recommendations with regard to the prohibition of mining in core/inviolable areas with exception as carved out of the ... committee's report," CJI Gavi, who authored the judgement, said.

The bench also accepted the recommendations for sustainable mining and the steps to be taken for preventing illegal mining in Aravalli Hills and Ranges.

It also directed the authorities to identify permissible areas for "mining and ecologically sensitive, conservation-critical and restoration priority areas within the Aravalli landscape where mining shall be strictly prohibited or permitted only under exceptional and scientifically justified circumstances".

"We further direct that till the MPSM (Management Plan for Sustainable Mining) is finalised by the MoEF&CC through ICFRE (Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education), no new mining leases should be granted," it said.

The bench further directed that mining can be permitted if sustainable mining is allowed as per the MPSM which will be finalised by MoEF&CC in consultation with the ICFRE.

"In the meantime, the mining activities in the mines which are already in operation would be continued in strict compliance with the recommendations made by the Committee," it said.

Calling the Aravallis a "green barrier" that prevents the eastward spread of the Thar desert and supports rich biodiversity, the court held that a clear, scientific definition was essential for ensuring environmental conservation, regulating land use, and determining permissible mining activities. (PTI)

## PM says 2025 year of proud milestones for India

'Bharat ready to move forward in 2026 with new hopes and new resolutions'

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said 2025 was a year of proud milestones for India as he highlighted Operation Sindoor, saying it became a symbol of pride for every Indian and showed the world that the country does not compromise on its security.

Addressing his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' address, the last in 2025, Modi said the country's impact was visible everywhere in the outgoing year.

"2025 was a year of proud milestones for India. Whether in national security, sports, scientific innovation or on the world's biggest platforms, India's impact was visible everywhere," he said.

The prime minister said during Operation Sindoor, images of love and devotion toward 'Maa Bharti' (Mother India) emerged from every corner of the nation and people expressed their emotions and gratitude in their own unique ways.

"Operation Sindoor" became a symbol of pride for every Indian. The world witnessed clearly that today's India does not compromise on its security," he said.

India carried out precision strikes under Operation Sindoor on terror infrastructure in Pakistan on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people.

India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the military confrontation.



Modi said the same spirit was witnessed when national song 'Vande Mataram' completed 150 years.

"I had urged you to share your messages and suggestions using the hashtag #VandeMataram150, and our fellow citizens participated in this campaign with immense enthusiasm," he said.

The prime minister noted that 2025 has truly been a memorable year for sports, with the men's cricket team clinching the ICC

Champions Trophy and the women's cricket team winning the World Cup for the first time.

Besides, India's daughters scripted history by winning the Women's Blind T20 World Cup.

The tricolour flew high with pride after a dominant victory in the Asia Cup T20 and para-athletes brought home a haul of medals at the World Championships, he said.

Modi also said that India has taken a giant

leap in the field of science and space, and Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian to reach the International Space Station.

Today, he said, the world looks toward India with great hope and the biggest reason for this expectation is the country's Youth Power.

"Nations across the globe are deeply impressed by our achievements in science, constant innovations, and the expansion of technology," he said.

The prime minister said the number of cheetahs in India has increased to more than 30 in 2025.

Taking note of various events held during the year, he said in 2025, faith, culture, and India's unique heritage all came together.

"The Prayagraj Mahakumbh organised at the beginning of the year astonished the entire world. At the end of the year, the 'Dhwajrohan' ceremony at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya filled every Indian with pride," he said.

Modi said the excitement towards 'swadeshi' was also evident among one and all and people are purchasing only those goods that bear the sweat of an Indian and the fragrance of Indian soil.

"Today, we can proudly say that 2025 has given India even greater confidence. It is also true that this year we had to face natural disasters at very many places. Now, the country is ready to move forward in 2026 with new hopes and new resolutions," he added. (PTI)

## Kerala CM accuses Congress of enabling BJP's growth, cites Thrissur panchayat

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 28:** Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday accused the Congress of facilitating the BJP's growth in the state, citing recent political developments in Mattathur panchayat in Thrissur district.

In Mattathur, eight Congress councillors resigned from the party and joined hands with the BJP to support an independent candidate for the president's post, preventing the LDF from retaining control of the local body.

In the panchayat election, the ruling LDF emerged as the single-largest front with 10 seats, followed by the Congress with 8 and the BJP with 4.

Two others, including Congress rebel K R Ouseph, were also elected. When the election to the post of panchayat president was held on Saturday, Ouseph decided to support the LDF.

In view of this, the eight Congress councillors resigned from the party and backed independent candidate Tessi Jose along with the BJP for the president's post.

This 'alliance' of resigned Congress councillors and the BJP secured victory in the election.

However, the councillors later clarified that they had not joined the BJP, even as the Congress's Thrissur District Congress Committee issued orders suspending the councillors, including Ouseph, from the party.

In a Facebook post, Vijayan said the Congress was a party constantly waiting

for an opportunity to make a "single jump" into the BJP, and that such a jump was witnessed at Mattathur.

He alleged that all Congress candidates who were elected as panchayat members defected to the BJP, enabling it to seize power.

"Only eight Congress members were left in the UDF there. The BJP swallowed them whole, leaving not even one behind," he said, adding that such a political spectacle was unprecedented in Kerala.

Drawing parallels with other states, Vijayan recalled that in 2016, 43 out of 44 Congress MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh, including the Chief Minister, defected overnight to the NDA.

He also referred to Pudukcherry, where the BJP came to power in 2021 despite having no MLAs, and to Goa, where the entire Congress legislative party merged with the BJP in 2019.

Vijayan alleged that Congress leaders joined hands with the BJP in Mattathur to prevent an LDF president from coming to power.

"What is being proven here is that those who remain in the Congress today will not hesitate to become BJP overnight. Congress leaders feel no moral conflict in replacing the hand symbol with the lotus," he said.

He further claimed that BJP-Congress adjustments were evident in several places across the state, as reflected in the local body election results.

"The Mattathur model is the latest

chapter in that strategy," he said.

Vijayan, in a X post, said that what happened in Mattathur Panchayat in Kerala yesterday reveals a vicious trend: Congress members joining hands with the BJP to seize power.

"This politics of turncoats directly strengthens the Sangh Parivar's project by normalising defections and eroding democratic mandates. Such conduct, seen earlier in Arunachal, Goa and Pudukcherry, fuels the BJP's ambitions in Kerala. The Congress leadership must respond clearly to this dangerous drift," he wrote.

Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, VD Sathesan, denied allegations that Congress members had switched to the BJP in Mattathur panchayat.

He said the CPI(M) was raising the Mattathur incident as it had no other issues to discuss.

"In Mattathur, when the CPI(M) attempted to install an independent councillor as panchayat president, Congress councillors supported another independent candidate," he said.

He added that the councillors were suspended for violating the party's decision. "They have not switched to the BJP," he said.

The Opposition leader also hit out at Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, alleging that he was aligned with the BJP.

"He will sign wherever Narendra Modi asks him to. Such a person is now ridiculing us," he said. (PTI)

## Ramesh questions environment minister; claims Aravalli redefinition will fragment it

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Amid a row over the redefinition of the Aravallis, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Sunday posed four questions to Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav and claimed that the move will lead to fragmentation and undermining of the geographical and ecological integrity of the entire mountain range.

In a letter to Yadav, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said there are understandably widespread concerns with the redefinition of the Aravalli Hills that restrict them to landforms having an elevation of 100 metres or more.

"In this connection, please permit me to raise four specific questions for your consideration. Is it not a fact that the definition of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges in Rajasthan, since 2012, has been based on a report of the Forest Survey of India (FSI) of August 28, 2010, that said the following:

"All such areas having a slope of three degrees or more shall be delineated as hills, along with a uniform 100-metre-wide buffer added to the downhill side to account for possible expansion corresponding to a 20-metre hill height, equivalent to the contour interval of 20 metres. Flat areas, tabletops, depressions and valleys falling within these delineated regions shall also be included as part of the hills," Ramesh posed.

He also asked whether it was not a fact that the FSI, in a communication to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change dated September 20, 2025, had stated that "the smaller hill formations of the Aravallis serve as natural barriers against desertification by stopping heavier sand particles-thus protecting Delhi and neighbouring plains from sandstorms."

"Because the protective effect of a barrier against wind-blown sand scales directly with its height, even modest hills of 10 to 30 metres act as strong natural wind breakers".

"Is it not a fact that the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) constituted by the Supreme Court had, in its report of November 7, 2025, concluded that 164 mining leases in Rajasthan were inside the Aravalli Hills and Ranges as defined by the then-prevailing FSI definition?" Ramesh asked. (PTI)

## Conspiracy being hatched to erase Mahatma Gandhi's name from all spheres of life: Odisha Congress

**BHUBANESWAR, Dec 28:** Odisha Congress chief Bhakta Charan Das on Sunday alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to erase Mahatma Gandhi's name from all spheres of life.

Das made the remark, without taking any name, while addressing party leaders and workers at a programme organised on the occasion of the 140th Foundation Day of the Congress. "While many former prime ministers have upheld the ideals and name of Mahatma Gandhi, now there is a threat to the Constitution, and a conspiracy is being hatched to erase the name of

Mahatma Gandhi from all spheres of life," he claimed.

The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president, however, asserted that under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, the party would foil this attempt and would continue working for the people of the country.

He sought the cooperation of all party workers and leaders to strengthen the Congress.

"Today, when the country faces serious problems and democratic crises, Congress stands as the voice of the people," he said.

Das said he salutes every Con-

gress worker whose courage, sacrifice and unwavering commitment have kept the party's ideals alive.

"This party stands strong because of you. I also bow in tribute to the great freedom fighters who built the Congress and led India to Independence," he told the party workers.

"Born in 1885, the Congress shaped India's democracy and Constitution and today, when these values are under threat, we continue to stand firmly with the people. The fight for justice and democracy will go on," Das said. (PTI)

## JUP chief Humayun Kabir's son detained for assaulting policeman

**KOLKATA, Dec 28:** Janata Udayan Party (JUP) chief Humayun Kabir's son Golam Nabi Azad was on Sunday detained for allegedly attacking a policeman posted at their residence in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, an officer said. Trinamool Congress said Azad, better known as Soheli, committed a cognisable offence by raising a hand on the policeman, who was posted as a personal security officer (PSO) of Bharatpur MLA Kabir, and police took action as per the law, while claiming that the ruling party has nothing to do with it.

A senior police officer said Soheli was detained on the basis of a complaint lodged with Shaktipur police station by Constable Juma Khan, alleging that the legislator's son assaulted him this morning when he applied for a few days' leave. "On the basis of the complaint, the accused has been detained for questioning. The matter is being investigated and necessary legal action will be taken," the police officer told PTI. Kabir, who floated his party after being suspended from the TMC and laid the foundation stone for a Babri

Masjid-style mosque in Muslim-majority Murshidabad, claimed that police have cordoned off his residence in Shaktipur area following the incident.

Kabir, who has announced that his party would contest the upcoming assembly elections in the state, was away from his residence for some work when the incident happened. "My son objected to the entry of a policeman inside my house today and this angered the law enforcers who levelled false allegations against my son, accusing him of misbehaviour," he told reporters in Berhampore.

Kabir alleged that he was being targeted by the police at the behest of the Trinamool Congress.

A police force cannot cordon the house of an elected representative under "flimsy pretext", the MLA said.

"I will gear up the SP's office in Murshidabad on January 1 in protest against this harassment, which is politically motivated. I demand an explanation from senior police and administration officials about today's incident. They cannot intimidate me," Kabir said. (PTI)

## Shah pays tributes to Jaitley, Tata on their birth anniversaries



**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah paid tributes to former Union minister Arun Jaitley and noted industrialist Ratan Tata on their birth anniversaries on Sunday. In a post on 'X', Shah remembered Jaitley as a peerless constitutional and legal expert and an orator par excellence who left an indelible legacy as a parliamentarian and will be remembered for his contribution to several landmark legal issues.

"His dedicated role in strengthening the party with his sharp legal acumen will live on withstanding every test of time," Shah said. In another message posted on 'X', the home minister said Tata reshaped Indian enterprise with integrity and compassion.

Paying tributes to Tata, Shah said, "From building indigenous industry to selfless philanthropy, he showed that true success lies in service to the nation. His legacy will inspire a self-reliant Bharat." (PTI)

## Vulture released in Pench reserve flies 750 km in 17 days to reach Nashik

Tracking a comeback: GPS-tagged vulture's long flight highlights revival of India's crucial scavenger species

**MUMBAI, Dec 28:** A long-billed vulture named J132 that was released in Maharashtra's Pench Tiger Reserve earlier this month has travelled nearly 750 km in 17 days and reached close to Anjaneri hills near Trimbakeshwar in Nashik district, officials said on Sunday.

The vulture was released on December 11 as part of a conservation programme jointly run by the state forest department and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), whose researchers said the bird reached a location about 38 kilometres from Anjaneri on December 27.

It followed a route covering Nagpur, Wardha, Yavatmal, Hingoli, Washim, Buldhana, Jalna and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar districts before entering Nashik region, these researchers added.

Officials said the final destination of the tracked vulture has been kept confidential to ensure its safety.

"The bird roosts in the evening, feeds in the morning and then flies to the next location. Activity data suggests it has had at least two full meals during its



journey," BNHS researcher Manan Singh said.

The vulture is part of the second batch of captive bred birds released in Pench. A total of 14 vultures were brought from Pinjore in Haryana to a specially created pre-release aviary in Pench Tiger Reserve in April 2025 and were trained for eight months to survive in the wild.

These included eight white-rumped vultures and five long-billed vultures, all fitted with GPS tags to monitor their movements.

After acclimatisation and training, the birds were released on December 11 by Maharashtra Chief Wildlife Warden Sreenivas Reddy and BNHS president Praveen Pardeshi.

From December 12 to 15, all the re-

leased vultures were observed feeding along with wild vultures in Pench, officials said. While the white-rumped vultures have largely remained around the Pench area, the long-billed vultures have begun exploring wider regions, they added.

Apart from J132, another long-billed vulture -- LBV AB 1 from the same batch has reached Dhanora in Gadchiroli district, a known vulture habitat, the officials informed.

"The released vultures are fitted with GPS transmitters, which would help in long-term scientific monitoring of movement, habitat use and survival of the released birds. The journey of J132 has generated significant interest among the birding community. Monitoring will continue to strengthen vulture conservation efforts in central India," BNHS director Kishor Rithe said. Chief Wildlife Warden Shrinivas Reddy said similar tagging operations have also been completed in Melghat and Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserves, where vultures would be released soon. (PTI)

## Organisation should be strengthened: Tharoor supports Digvijaya's views

**NEW DELHI, Dec 28:** Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday came out in support of the views of his party colleague Digvijaya Singh, saying the organisation should be strengthened.

At the 140th Foundation Day event at the Congress' Indira Bhawan headquarters, Tharoor was seated next to Digvijaya Singh and exchanged notes.

Ahead of the CWC meet on Saturday, Singh created a flutter by lauding the organisational power of RSS-BJP as he shared Narendra Modi's old picture and said how a grassroots worker went on to become the chief minister and prime minister by sitting at the feet of their leaders. He also raised the issue of strengthening the Congress organisation at the grassroots level, asserting it was much needed in the fight against the ruling BJP and to oust it from power. A day later, Digvijaya Singh said he had already stated whatever he had to say. "For 50 years I have been with the Congress party, and I have fought these communal forces, whether in the assembly, parliament or in the organisation," he noted.

"I have basic differences and am opposed to their ideology. I have and will continue to fight against such people," Singh claimed. When asked to comment on his Saturday's remarks, he said, "Every organisation needs strengthening."

Tharoor, when asked to comment on the issue, said, "The organisation should be strengthened, there is no doubt." On being seated next to Singh and whether the two exchanged views on the matter, Tharoor said, "We keep talking with each other, we are friends and talk to each other." "It is the 140th foundation day of the Congress. It is a very important event for the party. It is a day in which we look back on our very remarkable history and the contributions the party has made to the nation," he also told reporters. (PTI)

## Uttarakhand CM has assured to arrest all accused in Angel Chakma murder case: Manik Saha

AGARTALA, Dec 28: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said his Uttarakhand counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhami, has assured him to arrest all the accused persons responsible for the murder of a resident of the northeastern state in Dehradun.

Twenty-four-year-old Angel Chakma of Nandannagar in West Tripura district was attacked by a group of six people when he objected to a racial slur at Dehradun on December 9 and succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment on December 26.

"I have already spoken to Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Pushkar Singh Dhami ji, regarding the tragic incident involving our student Angel Chakma, a resident of Nandannagar, who was brutally assaulted by a group of miscreants in Dehradun on December 9 and later he expired at Graphic Era Hospital," Saha told the reporters at Hezama



in West Tripura district.

Termining the incident as tragic and unexpected, he said the chief minister of Uttarakhand informed him that five accused persons have already been arrested in connection with the case, while another is on

the run.

"The Delhi leadership, who are aware of the incident, has also passed necessary directions to the state (Uttarakhand) government to act into the case to ensure justice for the victim's family," he said.

Tipra Motha Party (TMP) supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma has assured that the murderers of Angel Chakma, a final semester student of MBA, would get due punishment.

"I have personally spoken to the family members of the victim on Saturday. We will ensure that the murderers get due punishment. I request all, including Youth Tipra Federation (YTF) members, to assist the family in their moment of grief," he wrote on Facebook on Saturday.

The TMP's youth organisation (YTF) on Saturday said, "We stand in solidarity with his family in this moment of profound grief. Those responsible for this heinous act must be identified and brought to justice without delay. We urge the authorities to ensure a fair, thorough and time-bound investigation so that accountability is upheld." (PTI)

## Two arrested, arms and ammunition seized in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 28: Two persons have been arrested and arms and ammunition seized from their possession in Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Sunday.

The arrests and seizures were made on Saturday.

One person, identified as Rebanta Kshetrimayum (49), was arrested from his house in Pangei Lairam Manipal area. A 9mm pistol along with 18 cartridges were seized from his possession, a police statement said.

Security forces also nabbed one Aribam Gunindro Sharma (30) from his residence at Haotan Thangjam Khunou area. Thirteen cartridges of different calibres and three empty 12-bore cartridge shells were seized, it added. (PTI)

## PB Dasgupta urges journalists to be bold yet responsible, reflects on APUWJ-APC journey

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 28: PB Dasgupta (87), veteran journalist and founding father of the Arunachal Press Club (APC) and the Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ), on Sunday said that journalists are among the strongest agents of social change, provided they pursue their profession with a positive, ethical and responsible approach.

Addressing journalists during his visit to the Arunachal Press Club, Dasgupta appealed to media persons to remain bold, principled and fearless in their reporting, while also highlighting the negative aspects prevailing in society in the larger interest of the people. He emphasised that exposing social ills through accurate and well-researched reporting is as important as promoting constructive narratives.

Dasgupta, who visited Arunachal Pradesh after a gap of nearly 20 years, inspected the APC premises, an institution he once envisioned during his tenure as a journalist with the Press Trust of India (PTI) and while serving as president of the then All Arunachal Pradesh Working Journalists Union (AAPWJU). He was accompanied by his wife.

Recalling the early days, Dasgupta became visibly emotional on witnessing a permanent, well-equipped press club for working journalists of the state. He reminisced about the humble beginnings of the then Itanagar Press Club, which functioned from a small government-rented office at IG Park and expressed happiness at seeing the dream materialise.

Interacting with journalists, Dasgupta narrated how the idea of forming APUWJ and APC took shape. He said that wherever journalism flourishes, there is a need for an organised body of working journalists and a press club to facilitate professional activities. APUWJ was formed in 1981 and



with the support of just about 10 members, the proposal for a press club was formally placed before the state government in 1993.

A firm believer in ethical and research-based journalism, Dasgupta urged journalists to view their profession as a service to society and the nation, rather than a pursuit for personal recognition. "Journalists should never expect appreciation. It is our duty and responsibility to serve society," he said.

Dasgupta also recalled that during his time, Arunachal Pradesh did not have a local newspaper, which prompted him to later found the state's first newspaper, Echo of Arunachal.

"We journalists have immense responsibility and also the power to shape opinion. This power must be used for the welfare of the state, by acting as a mirror to society," he added, calling for unity within the journalistic fraternity for the greater good of the community.

He stressed that every report or visual disseminated by the media contributes to public opinion and therefore must be based on deep research, accuracy and a commitment to educating the people. "A

journalist should always remember that he or she serves not only individual, but the country," he said.

Sharing personal experiences, Dasgupta said that though he was initially reluctant to work from Itanagar, he developed a deep attachment to the people of the state and continued to work here for over 24 years. He recalled that during his posting with PTI, the Northeast was facing serious challenges and few journalists were willing to work in the region.

Dasgupta served as the longest-serving president of APUWJ from 1981 to 1995 and as APC president from 1982 to 1995.

He also acknowledged the pivotal contributions of two other stalwarts, AK Bhattacharyya of United News of India (UNI) and Prem Bahadur Rai of Hindustan Samachar, without whose vision, he said, the APUWJ and APC would not have been possible.

Earlier, APC president Amar Sangno, APUWJ General Secretary Sonam Jelly, along with members of both organisations, felicitated the veteran journalist and acknowledged his immense contribution to shaping the two bodies.

## African swine fever confirmed in Tripura; containment measures enforced

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 28: The Tripura Animal Resources Development Department (ARDD) has confirmed an outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) among pigs at the Nalkata Regional Foreign Pig Breeding Centre in Dhalai district, following the discovery of several pig deaths under unusual circumstances.

The state government has declared Nalkata as the epicenter of the viral infection and implemented strict containment protocols. Villages within a 1 km radius have been designated as "infected zones," while areas within 10 km have been marked as "surveillance zones." Infected zones will witness humane culling of all pigs with carcasses buried or incinerated and movement of live pigs, pork products



and pig feed is completely prohibited. Transport vehicles carrying pigs must have valid sanitation certificates.

Authorities have also issued guidelines prohibiting movement of suspected or infected pigs and materials that may have come into contact with them, including feed, bedding and carcasses. Animal markets, fairs, exhibitions, or gatherings involving pigs

are banned unless allowed by a veterinarian for public interest reasons. Municipal Panchayat, Rural Development, Revenue and Agriculture Department officers will assist veterinarians in enforcing these measures. Violations, such as disposing of carcasses in rivers or water bodies, may attract imprisonment, fines, or both under the Animal Disease Prevention and Control Act, 2009.

In surveillance zones, similar restrictions apply, except penalties related to carcass disposal in water bodies. Pigs in these areas will be closely monitored through clinical, virological and serological checks with special attention given to animals near forested regions in consultation with forest authorities to prevent further spread of ASF.

## Woman beaten up, forced to wear garland of shoes in Tripura for extramarital affair

AGARTALA, Dec 28: A woman was beaten up by a group of villagers in Tripura's Dhalai district for her alleged involvement in an extramarital affair, police said on Sunday.

The woman, a mother of two sons was dragged out of her house at Harerkhola village under Kamalpur police on Saturday morning and beaten up by the group, a police officer said.

The villagers also forced the woman to wear a garland of shoes.

"After being informed, a police team rushed to the spot and recovered the woman lying on the road. Later, she was taken to the district hospital at Ambassa, where she underwent a CT scan. She is out of danger," the officer said.

A case has been registered at Kamalpur police station against some persons on Saturday and an investigation is underway, he said.

One person has been arrested in connection with the case so far, the officer said.

Tripura Commission for Women (TCW) chairperson Jharna Debbarma on Sunday strongly condemned the incident and said police have already registered a specific case into the incident and arrested one accused person.

"We strongly condemn the torture and humiliation of the woman. People don't have the right to take the law into their own hands. I urge the police to take lawful action against those who are involved in the incident," she said.

Debbarma added, "We will send a team to Kamalpur to meet the victim tomorrow as the TCW has a role to play in such cases. The TCW will try to ensure justice for the woman." (PTI)

## Govt committed to development of Kokborok, minority languages: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 28: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said that the present state government is working on a priority basis for the development of the janajatis up to the last level, and that the state government will take the Kokborok language to the highest possible level through its development.

Chief Minister Manik Saha made these remarks while participating in the popular 129th Mann Ki Baat programme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, organised at Hejamara in the Simma Assembly constituency on Sunday.

While discussing the programme, Saha said that if one is in the Bharatiya Janata Party, one must always work and stand by the side of the people. "For a long time, we did not see any positive initiatives for the development of the janajatis in the state. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government and the party are making relentless efforts to free them from the tendency of being misunderstood. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also working very sincerely for the welfare of tribal people. I extend my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to all the mothers and sisters present here today," said Saha.

He said that in the Mann Ki Baat programme, the Prime Minister highlighted the Jan Arogya Yojana.

"He launched a scheme of Rs 5 lakh per year for poor people for health services, something no one could have imagined earlier. We have implemented almost 100 percent of the target of 14 lakh beneficiaries in our state under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. But there were many more people left

out. Therefore, we boldly started the Chief Minister Jan Arogya Yojana so that all the people of Tripura come under the ambit of Jan Arogya Yojana. Tripura is the only state where 100 percent coverage has been achieved under the Jan Arogya Yojana, and this has been possible only because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Today, the Prime Minister also spoke about cancer. I myself have done a lot of work related to cancer and have undergone cancer surgery. I would like to tell the mothers and sisters present here that we should stay away from eating betel nut with paan, as betel nut causes oral cancer in most cases," he said.

In his speech, the Chief Minister said that many people talk a lot about language today.

"This government is sincerely trying to develop the Kokborok language. Since coming to power, this government has been working to develop the janajatis in a way that no one has done before. Efforts are ongoing for the development of Kokborok, Manipuri, and other minority languages. The state government will take the Kokborok language to the highest possible level. If the Chakmas have their own script, why should we adopt another foreign script? Many will argue about this. So, if necessary, we will use the script that the country has or create one ourselves," said Saha.

The Chief Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very sincere about the development of the janajatis.

"So, no matter how many obstacles we face, we must develop the janajatis. This development will continue until the last stage," he added.

## BJP rule 'not permanent': Manipur CLP leader Ibobi Singh

IMPHAL, Dec 28: Manipur Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Okram Ibobi Singh on Sunday said that the rule of BJP in the country and state is "not permanent" and claimed that peace and coexistence will flourish when the Congress party is strengthened.

Speaking at the 140th foundation day of the Congress, Singh said, "BJP is not permanent. How long will they govern? Let us see how long they will dictate. Let's wait for the elections."

The three-time former Manipur chief minister alleged that in the last three years, several departments have become obsolete, and the financial situation in the state has almost collapsed.

He said, "I strongly believe that only when Congress comes to power at the Centre and the state here, only then can a progressive government come where people will live in harmony. Peace and coexistence can only come when the Congress party is strengthened."

Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra said maintaining party ideology and discipline by party leaders and workers is necessary for a Congress member.

Keisham claimed that the Congress government can bring peace and development in the state.

"Congress will definitely come to power in the 2027 state elections," he claimed. (PTI)

## Trekker from UP dies in Sikkim

GANGTOK, Dec 28: A 45-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh has died at the popular Goechala trekking route in Sikkim, police said.

The man, identified as Suraj Kumar Tiwari, along with two friends, was on an eight-day Goechala trekking expedition in the Khangchendzonga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

He had completed the trek and was ascending on Thursday when, around 9 AM, he suddenly fell ill near Kokchurong camp, showing

symptoms similar to paralysis, a police officer said.

Fellow trekkers and guides provided him with first aid. With the help of locals and other trekkers, he was carried towards Yuksom, but he died near Phedang campsite at an altitude of 12,100 ft around 8 PM on Thursday, he said.

His body was brought to Gyalshing District Hospital on Friday and after the conduct of a post-mortem examination and legal formalities, the body was handed over to his family on Saturday.

Tiwari is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

This was the third death on the Goechala route in 2025, prompting tourism stakeholders in Yuksom to urge authorities to strengthen medical facilities and emergency rescue systems, especially along the Dzongri-Goechala corridor.

Earlier, a trekker from Kolkata and another local from Gyalshing died in separate incidents linked to acute mountain sickness. (PTI)

## Large number of tourists visited Mizoram to witness Christmas, community feasts: Minister



AIZAWL, Dec 28: Mizoram witnessed an increase in tourists visiting the northeastern state this year to take part in the Christmas celebrations involving traditional feasts at different local churches, a minister said.

The tourist footfall in this year-end festivity has surged more than ever before, most apparently due to the railway link, which made travel more affordable and several tourism promotional initiatives collectively taken by the government and the people, Mizoram Tourism minister Lalnginglova Hmar said.

He said that, unlike before, more foreign and domestic tourists were seen participating in several church services, zaikhawm (congregational singing services) and community feasts organised by local churches to witness the rich culture of Mizos in celebrating Christmas, which is a blend of religious and traditional fervour.

He said that hotels and homestays were packed with tourists since November, which indicated the surge in tourists during these festivities.

State Tourism Director R Lalrodingi told PTI that all hotels and homestays in Aizawl were completely sold out on Christmas eve, which led the department to request empty Paying Guest (PG) hostels and other establishments to accommodate the tourists.

Lalrodingi said that many tourists from India and abroad were seen participating in church service, zaikhawm, community feasts and exploring tourist destinations in and around Aizawl, although their number is yet to be established.

"... the opening of the railway line has made travel more affordable and the government, as well as the general public has done an outstanding job to expose the state's tourism potential," Hmar also told PTI.

The Tourism director said the state government is making efforts to make Mizoram an attractive tourist destination during winter, particularly during the festive season.

"Our collective efforts to promote our tourism potential have led to positive results and tourists are now exploring our state. We have been constantly monitoring and instructing hotels and homestays to show hospitality and the general public is also well aware of tourist reception. Our priority is to provide a quality stay to outsiders and make Mizoram a quality tourist destination," Hmar said.

He, however, expressed regret that many international tourists could not visit Mizoram due to the reimposition of the Protected Area Permit (PAP) by the Centre in December last year.

Around 5.2 lakh tourists visited Mizoram

during the 2024-25 fiscal, which is a 139.5 per cent increase over the previous fiscal, according to officials.

Over 4 lakh tourists, including 7,346 foreign tourists, visited the state from April to October this year.

The inauguration of the Bairabi-Sairang railway line by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 13 contributed a lot to the tourist surge in Mizoram.

The Mizoram government, in collaboration with the Union Ministry of Tourism, organised a winter festival from December 15-20 and the first-ever Christmas parade was organised on December 23, which was led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma.

The state tourism department, in association with Siphir local council, Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Sakawrhmutual development committee will organise a tourism event at Sakawrhmutuai hills, a tourist spot about 21 km from Aizawl, on December 31 to witness the last sunset of the current year as part of bidding farewell to the outgoing year.

Other tourism events, including mass angling, will also be organised by the department on January 6 and 7 in the Tuivai river and Phuaibuang village in Saitual district near the Manipur border, which is home for beautiful cherry blossoms. (PTI)

# MCG curator in 'state of shock' at 2-day Test finish

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Melbourne Cricket Ground head curator Matthew Page confessed he was "in a state of shock" after 20 wickets fell on the opening day of the Boxing Day Test, admitting that the pitch was heavily in favour of the bowlers.

Page opted to leave 10mm of grass -- up from 7mm last year when Australia famously beat India late on day five. But the decision backfired as 36 wickets fell in just 142 overs across six sessions and England went on to defeat Australia by four wickets late on day two on Saturday.

"I was in a state of shock after the first day," Page told the press at the MCG on Sunday.

"We're obviously disappointed it's gone two days. We produced a Test that was captivating, but it hasn't gone long enough. We'll learn from that and make sure we get it right next year."

"I've never been involved in a Test match like it and hopefully I'm not involved in a Test match like it again."

Despite winning the match, England's first Test win in Australia since 2011, captain Ben Stokes strongly criticised the overwhelm-



ingly bowler-friendly pitch, saying such conditions elsewhere in the world would unleash "hell".

"We know this hasn't gone as we planned. We're trying to balance that contest between bat and ball throughout, over the four or

five days, to provide that captivating Test for all," Page said.

Batters from both sides struggled with significant sideways movement generated by the wobble seam. Page said the extra grass was left on the pitch due to the hot

weather forecast for days three and four.

"We left it longer because we knew we were going to get (hot) weather at the back end that we knew we needed our grass (for). You look back at it and you go,

'well, it's favoured the bowlers too much days one and two'.

"If that doesn't happen, then we set ourselves up really good for day three and four," Page added.

More than 90,000 fans were expected for the sold-out third day. But the early finish, the second in the series, is likely to cost Cricket Australia (CA) over AUD 10 million.

While several former players slammed the pitch, Australia opener Travis Head, whose second-innings 46 was the highest score of the match, he felt for Page and his team.

"I feel for him. It's bloody tough. You leave 1 or 2mm on with high-quality bowling, you find yourself short, or you take 2 or 3mm with high-quality batting and you leave yourself the other way," Head said.

"Everyone wants to see someone win. Everyone wants to see wickets. No one wants to see a bloke get 300. There needs to be a balance, and sometimes we're going to see the balance, like last week (the third Test in Adelaide) err to the batters, and some weeks we're going to see it err to the bowlers." (PTI)

## Abhishek's Sunday Sixes: Inside out hits on tough net pitch

JAIPUR, Dec 28: Around 10 minutes into his net session on a quiet Sunday morning here, Punjab skipper Abhishek Sharma paused and turned to teammate Gaurav Chaudhary with a question that revealed his intent and imagination.

"Field kya hai?" he asked, enquiring about an imaginary field placement.

The lanky off-spinner replied instantly: "Mid-off single saving ke liye rakha hai (mid-off fielder is to save singles)." What followed was predictable yet breathtaking. A familiar bat swing, a perfectly completed arc and the ball was dispatched out of sight cleanly.

For world's No. 1 T20 batter, defence was almost an afterthought for close to an hour as he launched at least 45 sixes at the picturesque Anantam Cricket Ground, slightly off Jaipur city limits, built on farmland.

It resembled a specialised batting session where Abhishek wanted to face only spinners -- off-breaks, leg-breaks and slow left-arm orthodox -- on a surface where the ball gripped repeatedly and offered substantial turn if bowlers hit the right areas.

The left-hander did ask the groundsman to run the light roller, but the degree of difficulty did not lessen, as deliveries from the net bowlers continued to misbehave -- some rearing up unexpectedly while others kept alarmingly low.

Abhishek encountered problems whenever the length was marginally shortened, but the way he used his feet was pure joy to watch.

After getting beaten or seeing

the ball jump off the spot, he would walk down the track, tap his bat at the indentation and then demonstrate his mastery.

Whenever the length was pulled back, he would dance down the track and loft both off-breaks and googlies (turning away from the southpaw) inside out over extra cover. On at least five occasions, the ball landed in the portico of an adjacent high-rise residential building.

The inside-out shot was repeated so often that the team's head coach Sandeep Sharma jokingly quipped in Punjabi:

"Tu apni century poori karan layi extra cover de upar hi chakke maarna chanda ae (You want to complete your century with only sixes over extra cover)."

A red fielding net was placed at short extra cover for the false shot, where the bat face normally closes against deliveries that stop and arrive late. He fell into that trap once but quickly adjusted, choosing to hit a few straight sixes instead.

When the 25-year-old arrived for training, around 45 minutes after the rest of the squad, he wanted to practise on one of the five centre strips -- all red-soil tracks.

However, since the match strip was not marked, BCCI protocols did not allow him to bat there. He then bowled left-arm spin for close to 40 minutes, exchanging batting notes with the head coach and assistant coach Uday Kaul.

Once the entire team had completed their session, it was time for the skipper to put his pads on. (PTI)

## Touching 160kmph means more to me than any wicket I've taken: New Australian Hall of Famer Lee

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Former Australian bowler Brett Lee was so obsessed with bowling fast that he had made it his goal as a nine-year-old to clock 160kmph, and nothing else -- not even personal milestones or smashing the stumps of the best batters -- mattered to him so long as he was touching that magical speed.

Lee, 49, who has been inducted into Australian Cricket's Hall of Fame, said he dedicated his life to achieving that dream, while crediting his mother, Helen, who was a sprinter, for the necessary genetics.

"That (160kmph) means more to me than any wicket I've taken. Of course, the team comes first - to win the (2003) World Cup, the 16 straight Test wins, that's the pinnacle; that's why you play the game," Lee was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

"But in terms of personal milestones, it wasn't wickets for me. Because I'd set my goal at such a young age to hit that 160(kph) barrier and to go past it... when you dream about something, you dedicate your life to achieving that dream, and it comes off, it's very special." Lee ended his two-decade-long career with 718 international wickets across formats, making him one of the best exponents of extreme speed across generations, as he sent shivers down the spine of top batters across the world.

Lee said he was naturally gifted to become a pace bowler with his body structure and athleticism equipping him for the role. "For me, run-up was my most important asset. Then it was having a braced front leg. That's something you're either born with, or you're not, (and) that will allow you to get that speed through the crease. For me, that's something that came naturally - that part of my action took care of itself.

"And then you've got the front arm - the snap down of the left arm which created my pace; the quicker my left-arm came down, the quicker my right arm would follow," he added. He had once said that from the age of nine, he wanted to bowl fast. "I got that enthusiasm and that really good vibe out of seeing the stumps either break or be knocked over."

Lee recorded over 160kmph twice in his career -- the first was at the 2003 World Cup in South Africa where he dismissed Sri Lanka's Marvan Atapattu with



a 160.1kph delivery in the semifinal. "At that stage we were under a bit of pressure (defending 212), and needed the best out of me. And that was to just steam in and bowl as quick as I could on a good length... looking up (at the scoreboard) and seeing I went past 160(kmph) was a pretty special moment," he recalled. He then famously clocked his fastest recorded delivery at 160.8 kmph during the fifth ODI against New Zealand in Napier on March 5, 2005.

"It's quite ironic, I felt my fittest when I bowled my quickest ball (160.8kph) in Napier against the Kiwis, but that was a time when I ended up spending 18 months out of the Test team," he said.

"That was when I felt like I probably should've been in, but if you look at the attack we had... there were a number of guys putting their hand up and taking wickets. Looking back, I felt like I was raring to go, but I couldn't get the nod."

Lee admitted it was a tough phase for him but he did not give up. "That was hard to take, but I had to get on with it - I had to suck it up. And I knew I just had to keep bowling fast, keep taking wickets in one-day cricket, and the opportunity would present itself."

Lee painted himself as someone who was willing to fight till the end and not chicken out when pressure started building. (PTI)

## WORLD RAPID CHESS

# Humpy in joint lead; Gukesh, Erigaisi well-placed as Carlsen suffers rare loss



DOHA, Dec 28: Reigning champion Koneru Humpy displayed her trademark composure and tenacity to remain in joint lead in the women's section while Indian star players D. Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi also remained in the hunt in the 'Open' category on Day 2 of the FIDE World Rapid Championships here.

With three more rounds to go in the women's section on Sunday, Humpy shared the lead with China's Zhu Jiner on 6.5 points out of a maximum eight. The duo was trailed by as many as 10 players on six points, including India's Dronavalli Harika.

However, it was classical world champion Gukesh's fighting spirit that stood out on Saturday despite the Indian ace claiming before the start that he didn't have a lot of expectations from the season-ending competition.

Gukesh and Erigaisi were placed comfortably on 6.5 points in a cluster of 13 players after nine rounds with just a point separating the India duo from joint leaders Vladislav Artemiev and Hans Niemann (7.5 point each).

Starting with two draws, against Dutch GM Anish Giri and Alexey Sarana, Gukesh prevailed over Spain's David Anton in a topsy-turvy Round 8 game.

In the following round he was decimated by Nodirbek Abdusattorov in the King's Indian attack, the Indian's only defeat so far in the competition.

However, it was 27-year-old Russian GM Artemiev who held centre stage after inflicting a rare defeat on world No.1 and five-time world rapid champion Carlsen, and Erigaisi.

Joint leaders Artemiev and Niemann are chased by four players half a point behind -- Carlsen, Alexey Sarana, Yagiz Erdogmus and Nodirbek Abdusattorov.

Giant-killer Artemiev was in great form as he opened with a victory as black against Erigaisi, coming back from a lost position and playing much of the game on in-playment.

In Round 7, Artemiev defeated Carlsen in a game where the world's top-rated player made a grave mistake on move 15, which cost him dearly. This win put Artemiev on 6.5 points, a full point ahead of the field.

Artemiev concluded the day with two calm draws with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Alexey Sarana.

"I am pleased with my performance, and everything is feeling good," Artemiev told FIDE.

After a 4.5/5 on day one, Carlsen's performance dipped on day 2 with the Norwegian playing the Sicilian against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in round 6. The world No.1 soon found himself with tripled pawns on the e-file and spent more time looking for the moves. After testing Carlsen for a few moves, Vachier-Lagrave agreed to split a point.

The big defeat came in round seven when after surrendering on move 30, the Norwegian stormed out of the playing hall, visibly unhappy.

Carlsen bounced back in round 8, with a win against Armenian GM Shant Sargsyan and in the final round of the day he was better on time against US GM Ray Robson. With two straight victories, Carlsen joined the group of four players on seven points.

**Humpy joint leader**

The women's event remained closely contested with two-time world rapid champion from India, Humpy defeating Sara Khadem to emerge the sole leader with six points at the end of the Round 7, followed by eight players half-a-point on behind.

A draw in Round 8 against Russia GM Goryachkina Aleksandra took the Indian stalwart's tally to 6.5, while Zhu Jiner defeated India's women's World Cup champion Divya Deshmukh in the last round of the day to join Humpy at the top.

Sunday will be the third and final day of the World Rapid with four more rounds in 'Open' and three in Women's section set to be played. (PTI)

## New year will bring new hope for Indian women's hockey: Drag-flicker Deepika

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: After a challenging year marked by injuries, inconsistent performances and missed opportunities, Indian women's hockey drag-flicker Deepika Sehrawat is confident the new season will bring renewed hope and momentum for the national team.

The 22-year-old forward, who is set to return to action for Delhi SG Pipers in the Women's Hockey India League (WHIL) after a five-month injury layoff, said the past year had been difficult for the national side.

"Many things will change in the new year. The World Cup qualification will be our first challenge, and then there are the Asian Games," Deepika told PTI Bhasha. She was ruled out of the Asia Cup in August after slipping during a practice session before the team's departure, a setback she described as one of the toughest phases of her career.

"The five months away from hockey were very difficult. I used to get angry and cry, wondering why I was out of the team. My preparation was very good. Now that I am fit, I don't want to leave any stone unturned," said the Hockey India's Best Emerging Player award winner for 2025.

The national team endured a disappointing season, finishing last in the FIH Pro League and getting relegated to the second-tier Nations Cup. It also missed out on direct qualification for the World Cup after losing to China in the Asia Cup final. Closer to the end of the year, the side was caught in turmoil when head coach Harendra Singh had to resign following allegations that his coaching style was "outdated and dictatorial".

India will now have to secure their place through the World Cup qualifiers in Hyderabad in March, where England, Scotland, Korea, Italy, Uruguay, Wales and Austria will also compete. The top-three teams will qualify for the tournament to be hosted by Belgium and Netherlands in August. "We have to show that the Indian team is second to none. We need to bring back the momentum that women's hockey gained after finishing fourth at the Tokyo Olympics," Deepika said.

Deepika, who made her senior team debut in 2022 during the Pro League in Bhubaneswar, believes that repeated mistakes and lack of communication hurt the team last year. "We should have focused more on correcting recurring mistakes. The same errors that led to our exit from the Pro League were repeated in the Asia Cup. Better communication within the team was also needed," she added.

She also emphasised the importance of mental fitness, crediting her HIL franchise for supporting her comeback. "If a player is mentally relaxed, physical fitness comes naturally. When we are happy, our performance improves. I wanted to make my comeback through the HIL, and after the national camp ended, the franchise arranged a 15-day camp for me in Jaipur and showed faith in me. That helped me return fit," she said. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: Indian badminton navigated a difficult 2025 marked by injuries and uneven top-level performances, but Lakshya Sen's title win, a World Championships medal from Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, and encouraging strides by the next generation offered measured optimism in a transitional season.

The year often felt more like one of re-assessment than consolidation, with established names struggling for consistency as fitness setbacks disrupted preparation and rhythm across the calendar.

Against that backdrop, Sen's triumph at the Australian Open Super 500 emerged as the most significant individual achievement of the season. The title marked a return to form after a difficult period following his fourth-place finish at the Paris Olympics.

It was Sen's first Super 500 crown since the Canada Open in 2023 and his first title overall since winning the Syed Modi International Super 300 in December last year. He also came close to adding another trophy but couldn't cross the final frontier, finishing runner-up at the Hong Kong Open.

In an otherwise stop-start year, Satwik and Chirag reaffirmed their status as India's premier doubles pair despite battling injury and illness early in the season.

The duo claimed a bronze medal at the World Championships in Paris, reached the finals of the Hong Kong Open and China Masters, and ended the year on a positive note by becoming the first Indian men's doubles pair to reach the knockout stage of the BWF World Tour Finals.

For former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth, the season offered glimpses of a revival but there was no silverware. He rolled back the years with runner-up finishes at the Malaysia



Masters and the Syed Modi International, falling just short in his bid to end a prolonged title drought.

At the Syed Modi International, Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly successfully defended their women's doubles title, providing a rare moment of stability in a fluctuating season.

**Youngsters step up**

The most encouraging signs came from the next generation. Ayush Shetty, 20, delivered a season of promise, winning the U.S. Open Super 300 and showing the tools required to compete consistently on the BWF World Tour.

He also recorded notable wins over Japan's Kodai Naraoka, former world champion Loh Kean Yew, Chinese Taipei's Chou

Tien Chen and Canada's Brian Yang, underlining his upward trajectory.

Even more eye-catching was the rise of 16-year-old Tanvi Sharma, who won silver in the girls' singles at the World Junior Championships.

She narrowly missed a maiden Super 300 title after reaching the U.S. Open final and also produced one of the season's standout wins by defeating former world No. 1 Nozomi Okuhara at the Syed Modi International.

Tanvi capped her year with another runner-up finish at the Guwahati Masters.

Unnati Hooda also made steady gains, playing a key role in India's bronze-medal finish at the World Junior Team Championships before clinching the Odisha Masters

Super 100 title to rise to world number 23. Her victory over senior compatriot PV Sindhu at the China Masters drew further attention.

Sanskar Saraswat's maiden Super 100 title at the Guwahati Masters further underlined the growing depth of domestic talent.

**Established names struggle**

For India's senior shuttlers, however, 2025 proved largely frustrating. Sindhu, the two-time Olympic medalist, managed three quarterfinal finishes but also suffered six first-round and four second-round exits. A hamstring issue early in the year disrupted her campaign before a foot injury forced her to withdraw from all remaining BWF events from October onwards.

HS Prannoy, a 2023 world championships bronze winner, endured an even tougher season, with the lingering effects of a mid-2024 chikungunya bout and recurring injuries severely hampering his form. An ankle injury at the India Open in January and a rib muscle injury at the Korea Open in September restricted consistent training, contributing to nine second-round exits and eight first-round losses.

India's struggles were also evident in team events, with underwhelming performances at the Asia Mixed Team Championship in February and Sudirman Cup in May, reflecting the broader lack of depth and fitness at the elite level.

Off the court, debate was sparked when chief national coach Pullela Gopichand flagged the absence of alternate career pathways for athletes who fail to reach the top, his remarks advising youngsters against pursuing sport without financial security divided opinion within the sporting community. (PTI)