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CM claims unprecedented devp in Barrak Valley in last 5 years

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday asserted that the Barrak Valley has witnessed "unprecedented development" over the past five years, particularly in the area of connectivity, as he laid the foundation stone for a major bridge project over the Barak River at Madhuraghat in Silchar.

On the second day of his two-day visit to the region, the chief minister launched the construction of a 340-metre RCC bridge connecting Madhuramukh with Silchar city through Gandhighat.

The project, taken up under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) for 2025-26 at a cost of over ₹79 crore, includes approach roads and safety components.

Once completed, the bridge will shorten travel between Itkholra and Dudhpatal by around 8 km, easing the movement of people and goods and reducing fuel expenditure and essential commodity prices.

Calling the project a fulfilment of a long-standing public demand, Sarma assured that the bridge would be completed within two years.

He emphasised that the Barrak region has seen transformative progress in connectivity, citing the

completion of major bridges such as Annapurna Setu, Badri Setu and Sonai Setu.

The Silghat bridge is nearly 50 per cent complete, while another bridge at Karatigram is expected to be ready by October next year, he said.

Highlighting a series of ongoing infrastructure upgrades, the chief minister noted that the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation is constructing several bridges over the Barak at Katakhal, Sialtek, Gauri Setu, Sonabari Ghat and other locations.

He said these projects collectively symbolise a scale of development that the valley "had never witnessed before."

Sarma added that approval for the proposed Dolu airport is likely soon.

He also confirmed that the elevated corridor project for Silchar city—estimated at around ₹564 crore—has been approved.

Terminating the current phase as a "golden period" for the Barrak Valley, he said the government remains committed to sustaining the region's rapid infrastructure expansion with continued public cooperation. Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Minister Kaushik (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tezpur University row: Protesters vow to keep institution shut till communication on VC's removal

Central team allowed to leave after written assurance

TEZPUR, Dec 7: Agitators at Tezpur University on Sunday vowed to enforce a shutdown at the institution, which has been witnessing sustained protests since mid-September against alleged irregularities by Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh, till a formal communication from the Centre regarding the VC's removal is received.

The picturesque campus on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in Sonitpur district of Assam witnessed high voltage drama from Saturday afternoon till early on Sunday as a top delegation from the Union Ministry of Education, led by Secretary Vineet Joshi, could not leave the premises around midnight and was stuck inside their vehicles for more than three hours.

The high-level team was allowed to leave post midnight following a written assurance on a blank paper by the Department of Higher Education's Joint Secretary Saumya Gupta, who was a part of the delegation.

The hand-written assurance, ac-



cessed by PTI, said that VC Singh will not administer the central varsity till a "strict and time-bound inquiry against him" is completed.

Students, teachers and non-teaching staffers, under the aegis of a joint platform Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF), have been protesting against the beleaguered VC since mid-September over alleged corruption and other irregularities committed by him, and

demanding his removal along with an inquiry against his actions.

The TUUF expressed disappointment that even after 79 consecutive days of peaceful protests, no concrete resolution or actionable assurance had been provided to remove the VC.

"The students, faculty and non-teaching staffers are going for a complete non-compliance and non-cooperation until a concrete agree-

ment is officially received. After 79 days of sustained agitation, the fraternity remains resolute, awaiting the MoE's formal confirmation," TUUF said in a statement.

It acknowledged receiving the informal written communication from the MoE team, indicating that an inquiry will be initiated into the allegations concerning the VC.

"Students view this as a preliminary step, but emphasise that the protest will continue until an official, formal notification is issued and concrete action follows," TUUF said.

The students of this central university have enforced a "complete shutdown" of all activities, including those related to academics, on the campus since November 29 for an indefinite period, forcing the administration to cancel all end-term examinations.

The MoE's hand-written assurance, which facilitated their exit from the campus early on Sunday, highlighted that it had a joint meeting with the agitators and there were "multiple issues" with the governance (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

I am not with agitation, but with dialogue: Himanta on varsity protests

UDHARBOND, Dec 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday denounced the ongoing agitation at Tezpur University and said he is not with any form of protests but supports all forms of discussion.

The situation at the varsity had been tense since mid-September, with students accusing VC Shambhu Nath Singh and the authorities of not showing due respect to singer Zubeen Garg even as the state was mourning his death.

"Where there is an agitation, I am not there. I will be there if there is a discussion," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of an official function here.

The students of the central university have enforced a "complete shutdown" on the campus since November 29, forcing the administration to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC to hear wife's plea challenging Sonam Wangchuk's detention today



NEW DELHI, Dec 7: The Supreme Court will on Monday hear a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, terming his detention under the National Security Act "illegal, and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights".

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and N V Anjaria is likely to hear the matter.

On November 24, the top court had deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the UT of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo.

On October 29, the top court sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

According to the amended plea, "The detention order is founded upon stale FIRs, vague imputations, and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus devoid of any legal or factual justification..."

"Such arbitrary exercise of preventive powers amounts to a gross abuse of authority, striking at the core of constitutional liberties and due process, rendering the detention order liable to be vitiated by this court." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Parl panel to summon airline executives, regulator over flight disruptions

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: A parliamentary panel is likely to summon top executives of private airlines and the civil aviation regulator over the mass cancellation of IndiGo flights that has left thousands of travellers stranded across the country's airports.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, chaired by JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha, is likely to seek an explanation from top executives of airlines and officials from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation about the cause of disruption in air services and possible solutions.

A member said the panel has taken serious note of the difficul-

ties faced by thousands of passengers due to disruption in air services.

Even parliamentarians, who were in the national capital for the Winter Session, faced the brunt of flight cancellations by IndiGo and delays by other airlines, the panel member said.

Several MPs also received complaints from people about air fares shooting up due to the scenario. Meanwhile, CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member John Brittas, who is not part of the standing committee on transport, has demanded setting up of a joint parliamentary committee or a judicial inquiry into the large-scale disruption of flights.

IndiGo cancelled more than 220

flights at Delhi and Mumbai airports on Sunday, as the disruptions entered the sixth day even as efforts were on to normalise operations.

The aviation regulator, DGCA, on Saturday sent notices to IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers and COO and Accountable Manager Porqueras, seeking explanation.

In a statement issued on Sunday, IndiGo said the Board of Inter-globe Aviation, its parent company, has set up a Crisis Management Group, which is meeting regularly to monitor the situation. The company's Board of Directors is doing everything possible to take care of the challenges faced by its customers and ensure refunds to passengers, it said. (PTI)

Armed Forces Flag Day observed at Lok Bhavan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Assam joined the nation in observing Armed Forces Flag Day on Sunday, with a solemn ceremony held at Lok Bhavan under the leadership of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

The day, observed annually on December 7 since 1949, honours the bravery, sacrifice and steadfast service of India's armed forces.

Addressing Veer Naris, disabled soldiers, veterans, serving personnel and senior dignitaries, Governor Acharya paid heartfelt tribute to the martyrs and soldiers who guard the nation's borders in the most challenging conditions.

He said Armed Forces Flag Day serves as a reminder of every citizen's duty to acknowledge the immense contributions of the armed forces, whose courage, discipline and compassion remain central to



national security.

The Governor noted that Assam is home to nearly 42,000 ex-servicemen and more than 10,000 Veer Naris, highlighting the State's strong military legacy.

Commending the efforts of the Directorate of Sainik Welfare and the 21 District Sainik Welfare Offices, he said the State is committed to ensuring continued support for veterans and their families.

During the programme, Governor Acharya released a Wall and Table Calendar showcasing the

Directorate's activities and felicitated five Veteran Achievers from Assam for their notable contributions.

A major highlight was the launch of the 'Sainik Tujhe Salaam' initiative, under which Armed Forces veterans aged 90 and above, along with Veer Naris and Veer Mothers, will be honoured at their homes annually on Armed Forces Flag Day by district administrations and Zila Sainik Welfare Offices.

The Governor also recalled Assam's special commendation by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the National Conference in New Delhi for exemplary work in ex-servicemen welfare.

He further outlined Lok Bhavan's youth outreach initiative—the 'Assam Governor Rashtriya Kritisagya aur Jagroka Yojana'—(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Train movement affected in eastern Assam as trailer gets stuck at level crossing

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Train movement was affected for over four hours in the Tinsukia-Dibrugarh route in eastern Assam on Sunday after an oversized trailer got stuck while making an unauthorised entry at a level crossing, a North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) spokesperson said.

He said several passenger trains, including 12424 Rajdhani Express, 15928 Tambaram Express and 15946 Lokmanya Tilak Express, were affected.

The spokesperson said the trailer belonged to a private company which was engaged in contractual work for Oil India Limited, Dulaijan, and was working without proper authority and permission. "It (trailer) got stuck while mak-

ing an unauthorised entry at the railway level crossing 21DD between Lahoal and Chaulkhowa on the Tinsukia - Dibrugarh route at about 5.30 am. As a result, train movements on the route remained suspended for about four-and-a-half hours," he said.

Passengers of the affected long-distance trains were transported to Dibrugarh through road vehicles facilitated by the NFR.

Food packets and drinking water arrangements were also made for the passengers, the spokesperson added.

He said the trailer was removed from the site at 10.10 am.

"The driver of the vehicle has been taken into custody. NF Railway is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Focus now on stabilising ops: Airline official

IndiGo will do 'root cause analysis' into flight disruptions

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: IndiGo will carry out a "root cause analysis" into the flight disruptions that has happened due to a combination of factors and the focus now is to stabilise operations, which is expected by December 10, a senior airline official said on Sunday.

Amid the lack of proper crew planning while implementing the new flight duty norms being cited as a key reason for the significant operational disruptions, the official said the airline has adequate number of pilots and there is no deficiency.

"Our pilot numbers are fine while we may not be having the luxury of having a buffer," the official told PTI.

He also said there has been no



hiring freeze amid concerns being raised in certain quarters that lean-operating model might have led to the current situation.

IndiGo has been grappling with significant flight cancellations and disruptions in the last five days and the situation is getting better, with the number of cancellations coming down on Sunday.

The airline, which generally op-

erates around 2,300 flights daily, expects to operate 1,650 flights on Sunday, higher than 1,500 flights that flew on Saturday.

"We will need a root cause analysis, which will obviously take time... the disruptions happened due to a combination of factors and which factor played how much role (will be known after the root cause analysis)," the official said.

Acknowledging that the current situation is a learning experience, the official emphasised that there was no question of inadequacy.

"We are normalising operations and full stability in operations is expected by December 10," the official said.

The second phase of the flight duty (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NFR to run special trains to help passengers after flight cancellations

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) will be running special trains to clear passenger rush in view of flight disruptions, its chief spokesperson said on Sunday.

NFR CPRO Kapinjal Kishore Sharma said extra coaches of various classes have also been attached to different trains.

"The NFR has taken these initiatives in view of IndiGo flight cancellations," he said.

Two special trains -- one each from Dibrugarh to New Delhi, and Guwahati (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'First time that a free book fair was held anywhere in the world'

'Free' book fair organised in northern Assam to encourage reading

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, Dec 7: A book fair was organised in a rural area in northern Assam on Sunday, where books were distributed for free among people to encourage the habit of reading, in what the organisers claimed was the first such initiative of this magnitude anywhere in the world.

The day-long book fair in Lakhimpur district's Azad area, located over 350 km from Guwahati, offered books for free to all visitors, with special preference to students.

"This was the first time that a free book fair was held anywhere in the world. We aim to inculcate the reading habit, especially among the new generation," Jibanta Saikia, proprietor of Jonohitkhi Library, under whose banner the event was organised, told PTI.

He said the date for the free



book fair was chosen to coincide with the birth anniversary of acclaimed litterateur, the late Homen Borgohain, who hailed from this district and was an advocate of reading books.

"We celebrated Borgohain's birth anniversary as a day dedicated to books and reading. And we dedicated the free book fair in the memory of our heartthrob Zubeen Garg," Saikia added.

Bubul Hazarika, a senior journalist and advisor to the organising committee, said about 40,000 books were gathered from donors across the state for the book fair.

"We provided free books to about 20,000 readers. Students were given two books each and others got one book each," he said.

Hazarika said the educational institutions had been provided with coupons, with provision for acquiring required coupons also made at the venue.

"There are many students, especially in rural areas, who do not have access to good books due to the remoteness of their locations or financial constraints. We are trying to bridge that gap in whatever little way we can," he added.

Maini Mahanta, Guwahati-based editor and columnist, who donated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India's intangible heritage showcased at Red Fort for key UNESCO meet

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: From thematic galleries to performing arts, India showcased its rich cultural heritage at the Red Fort complex as the inaugural ceremony of a key UNESCO meeting on 'safeguarding intangible legacy' began here on Sunday evening.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is attending the event as the chief guest. The 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) will take place at the Red Fort from December 8 to 13.

This is the first time that India is hosting a session of the UNESCO panel. Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, and India's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Vishal V Sharma, were present at the opening ceremony.

According to UNESCO, the session will examine nominations submitted by state parties for inscription on the UNESCO ICH lists, review the status of existing elements, and provide international assistance for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Vishal V Sharma will chair the session. On arrival at the venue, the guests were welcomed with traditional Mysuru headgear and a scarf. Outside, artistes showcased dance forms such as bhangra of Punjab,

bihu of Assam and tribal dance forms.

Galleries mounted in British-era barracks by the National Museum, the National Gallery of Modern Art, and others will delight the delegates gathered here from across the world.

Tableau of intangible cultural heritage of India on the UNESCO list, such as Durga Puja of Kolkata and Garba of Gujarat, have been showcased at the venue.

In his address, Shekhawat said the Red Fort has been an iconic witness to the continuity of life in India. India hosting this meet is not just a matter of pride, but a reminder that cultural ethics echo through its rich past, he said.

"This event is a gateway to a dialogue for civilisations," Shekhawat said.

Ambassador Sharma emphasised the intangible cultural heritage of India, and said, "Communities are the heartbeats of heritage."

On December 5, Union Culture Secretary Vivek Aggarwal had said that India's nomination, the 'Deepavali' festival, will be examined during the UNESCO meet "on December 10, in pursuance of its inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

"And we expect a positive outcome," he had told PTI. The dossier for the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UIDAI to introduce new rule mandating registration of entities seeking Aadhaar-based verification

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: A new rule to discourage entities like hotels, event organisers, etc, from taking photocopy of Aadhaar cards of customers and storing them in physical form will be published soon, a senior government official said.

Such practices are in contravention of the present Aadhaar Act.

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) CEO Bhuvnesh Kumar told PTI that the authority has approved a new rule mandating registration of entities that seek Aadhaar-based verification like hotels, event organisers, etc, to provide them access to a new technology that will enable them to verify an individual by scanning QR code or connecting with new Aadhaar app in the works, the top official said.

"The new rule has been approved by the authority and will be notified soon. It will mandate registration of offline verification-



seeking entities like hotels, event organisers. The objective is to discourage paper-based Aadhaar verification," Kumar said.

The new verification process will also resolve issues related to several works that get hampered due to downtime of intermediate servers that connect with the central Aadhaar database.

Entities seeking offline verification will get access to API (application programming interface) through which they can update their system for Aadhaar verification.

UIDAI is beta-testing a new app that will enable app-to-app verification without needing to connect with the central Aadhaar database server for every verification.

The new app can also be used at places like airports, shops that need to sell age-appropriate products, etc.

"The ease of verification will enhance offline verification without the use of paper while maintaining privacy of users or any risk of their Aadhaar data getting leaked for misuse," Kumar said.

The new app is expected to fine-tune Aadhaar authentication service in line with Digital Personal Data Protection Act, which will be completely operational in 18 months.

The app will enable users to update their address proof documents on the new app and add other family members on the same app who don't own any mobile phone. (PTI)

Nothing Phone (3a) Lite now on sale at ₹19,999

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 7: London-based technology brand Nothing has announced the availability of its Phone (3a) Lite in India, with sales beginning.

The company has also introduced a new Blue colour option, joining the existing Black and White variants.

The Phone (3a) Lite features Nothing's signature transparent design and a refined lightweight build with IP54 resistance and an aluminium internal frame.

It sports a 6.77-inch flexible AMOLED display offering a 120 Hz adaptive refresh rate and peak HDR brightness of 3000 nits. The device is powered by a MediaTek Dimensity 7300 Pro chipset and supports up to 16 GB RAM (including virtual memory). Storage is expandable up to 2 TB.

It is backed by a 5000 mAh battery with 33 W fast

charging, and runs on Nothing OS 3.5 based on Android 15. Nothing has committed to three years of major software updates and six years of security patches.

For photography, the Phone (3a) Lite comes with a 50 MP main camera supported by TrueLens Engine 4.0, Ultra XDR, Night Mode and 4K video recording at 30 FPS.

The 16 MP front camera offers enhanced selfie and video call performance.

The updated Glyph Light system provides functional alerts, including Camera Countdown and custom contact notifications.

The smartphone is priced at ₹20,999 for the 8 GB + 128 GB variant, which effectively drops to ₹19,999 after bank offers.

It is available for purchase on Flipkart, Vijay Sales, Croma and other major retail outlets across India.

Contd. from Page 1...

Central team allowed

style of the VC. "Allegations were heard and discussed. The dept of educn (sic) is committed to initiate a strict and time bound inquiry against him and during the pendency (sic) of the same he will not be administering the university," Gupta wrote in her assurance, given on behalf of the Ministry of Education (MoE).

She also said in the assurance note that till further decision is taken, status quo be maintained.

The three-member team, comprising UGC's acting Chairman Joshi, Gupta and another Joint Secretary Armstrong Pame, along with top police and civil administration officials of Sonitpur district, reached the TU campus on Saturday afternoon to meet the agitators, but were blocked at the main gate by the agitators.

The Registrar in-charge of the university, Chandan Goswami, told PTI that the central team could exit the premises, after a written assurance was provided to the agitators.

He also said that Mass Communication Professor Joya Chakraborty, whom Singh had named pro-VC on Thursday, will not be assuming charge. Dhruva Kumar Bhattacharyya, the senior-most faculty member, will be the acting VC.

Police reinforcements were deployed at the gate since Saturday evening as the protesters raised slogans against the vice-chancellor and sought "azadi" from him and his misrule.

To prevent the police contingent from entering the campus in order to rescue the visiting team, hundreds of agitating women sat on the road blocking the main entrance gate. The police visibly did not have any women contingent. Speaking to reporters on the campus, Joshi said, "We came here to meet the students, teachers, staff members and understand their view of the recent developments. We had a fruitful discussion with them. They have given us their feedback."

He said the ministry is processing all information and appropriate action will be taken, noting that two fact-finding inquiries had already been conducted.

"Based on these, the central government will take the matter forward. Whatever decision we take, I am sure it will be in the interest of the university," Joshi said.

All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and the Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their full support to the agitation.

The VC abstained from coming to the campus after the university had witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words between him and students on September 22, leading to a situation where Singh had to nearly flee from the spot. The situation in Tezpur University had been tense since mid-September with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg even as the state was mourning his death. (PTI)

I am not with

cancel all end-of-term examinations. Asked if VC Singh has been removed following the visit of a central team to the varsity on Saturday, Sharma said, "I don't know." The CM had on Wednesday said that he spoke to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the situation, and urged him to appoint a pro-VC immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present VC. (PTI)

CM claims unprecedented

Roy, MP Parimal Suklabaidya, MLAs Mihir Kanti Shome, Dipayan Chakraborty, Nihar Ranjan Das and Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, along with senior PWD officials and district authorities, were present at the ceremony.

Armed Forces Flag Day

designed to connect students with the lives and experiences of soldiers.

Appealing for generous contributions to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund, the Governor said that while no tribute can match the sacrifices of soldiers, public support can help alleviate the hardships faced by their families. He expressed confidence that Assam will continue to work tirelessly for the welfare of serving personnel, veterans and their next of kin.

Chief secretary Ravi Kota, senior officials, serving and retired defence officers, war widows and disabled soldiers were among those present at the ceremony.

Later in the day, Governor Acharya visited the residence of Capt Jatindra Chandra Roy at Satgaon, where he felicitated the war veteran with a Prasansha Patra and a traditional phulam gamosa in recognition of his service to the nation.

SC to hear wife's

The plea said it is wholly preposterous that after more than three decades of being recognised at the state, national, and international levels for his contributions to grassroots education, innovation, and environmental conservation in Ladakh and across India, "Wangchuk would suddenly be targeted".

Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner.

Wangchuk himself condemned the violence through his social media handles and categorically stated that violence would lead to the failure of Ladakh's "tapasya" and peaceful pursuit of five years, Angmo said, adding that "it was the saddest day of his life".

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory. The government had accused him of inciting the violence.

The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India". The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier. (PTI)

Train movement affected

coordinating with OIL for taking stringent action on the concerned contractual company to prevent any such incident in the future," the spokesperson added (PTI)

Focus now on

time limitations (FDTL) norms for pilots that provides for lesser number of night landings, came into force from November 1. Since then, there have been some operational disruptions at the airline and things turned for the worse this week. Asked why other airlines are not facing similar issues, the official mentioned that for whatever reason, they had a better buffer than IndiGo in terms of the number of pilots.

"We did not have the same kind of buffer. But that does not mean that there is a question of inadequacy, no. These are two different things," the official said.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued show cause notices to the airline's CEO Pieter Elbers and the Accountable Manager Isidro Porqueras, seeking explanations for the flight disruptions.

On whether the current situation of disruptions could have been avoided, the official said, "We will do our root cause analysis... we will do that and then we will come to know (what was the) planning lapse, if at all".

For the fog season, the official said the airline is prepared and there are adequate number of aircraft and pilots. We are confident of managing the fog season. (PTI)

NFR to run

to Howrah -- would run on Monday, the CPRO said. "Further, 20 coaches will be attached to 18 different trains to help clear the rush of passengers. These trains are running on different sectors," he added. Among them is the Sairang-Guwahati Express, in which two additional coaches were attached on Saturday.

A 14-coach special train will also be operated between Dimapur and Sairang on Thursday, and another special train between Sairang and Guwahati on Friday.

IndiGo, the country's largest airline, has cancelled thousands of flights over the last few days as it grappled with significant operational disruptions mainly due to crew shortage. (PTI)

India's intangible heritage

nomination was submitted in 2023. India sent the nomination for the 2024-25 cycle.

India currently has 15 elements inscribed on the coveted UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, including the Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja, Garba dance, yoga, the tradition of Vedic chanting and Ramlila -- the traditional performance of the Ramayana.

Aggarwal had said that more than 1,000 delegates from 190 countries are expected to attend the event. The 17th-century fort complex has been closed for general visitors from December 5-14 in view of the event.

Built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as the palace fort of his capital Shahjahanabad, the Red Fort complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a centrally-protected monument. (PTI)

'Free' book fair organised

books for the event, said the initiative is a noble one and needs to be taken forward every year.

"It is a very good initiative, and more so because it happened in a rural area. The organisers took Zubeen's love for books among his music fans, especially the new generation. It is laudable," she told PTI.

Mahanta said she has provided books for different sections of readers, right from the primary level to motivational ones to those on social and political issues. (PTI)

ITC Sangeet Sammelan 2025 concludes

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 7: The 54th edition of the ITC Sangeet Sammelan, organised by the ITC Sangeet Research Academy (ITC-SRA) from December 5 to 7, concluded in Kolkata to widespread acclaim.

Held on the Academy's scenic lawns, the annual festival once again drew connoisseurs, students and classical music enthusiasts from across the country, reaffirming ITC-SRA's pivotal role in nurturing India's musical heritage for nearly five decades.

The three-day event brought together an impressive roster of legendary artists, Gurus, accompanists and the Academy's Scholars, offering listeners a rich blend of tradition and artistic excellence.

A special highlight this year was the conferring of the prestigious ITC Sangeet Samman, the Academy's Lifetime Achievement Award, on eminent vocalist Raween Sultana for her outstanding contribution to Hindustani classical music.

The Sammelan featured memorable performances by noted vocalists Parween Sultana, Ajoy Chakraborty, Ulhas Kashalkar, Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, Subhra Guha, Uday Bhawalkar and Carnatic duo Ranjani & Gayatri.

Instrumental renditions by sitarist Kalyan Majumdar, flautist Pranjal Ghatak and a mridang sankeertan led by Suresh Talwalkar added further depth to the fes-

tival.

A dynamic percussion showcase by Nayan Ghosh and Ishaan Ghosh, along with the night-long musical immersion on December 6, emerged as standout moments.

Commenting on the success of the Sammelan, ITC-SRA Executive Director and Trustee Saradindu Dutta said the festival epitomises continuity of knowledge and artistic discipline.

"The 2025 edition once again demonstrated the depth of India's classical music tradition and the Academy's unwavering commitment to nurturing exceptional talent. It is our privilege to honour artists who have shaped the art form and to present the next generation of virtuosos on our stage," he stated.

Established in 1977, ITC-SRA is regarded as one of India's foremost institutions dedicated to the preservation and advancement of Hindustani classical music.

With its residential Gurukul system and fully funded scholarships, the Academy continues to mentor outstanding young musicians under the guidance of renowned Gurus.

As the institution approaches its 50-year milestone in 2027, it remains focused on strengthening India's cultural legacy through research, education, performances and national outreach initiatives.

National Handicraft Week 2025 showcase North-East artisans

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 7: National Handicraft Week 2025 will be held from December 8 to 14 at the PWD Convention and Training Centre, Dispur, organised by the North-Eastern Regional Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles.

The event will feature artisans from across the North-East, displaying cane and bamboo crafts, handlooms, tribal artefacts and natural fibre products.

Visitors can attend live demonstrations, exhibitions, seminars and interactive sessions to explore the region's rich craft heritage.

The celebration aims to promote artisans' livelihoods and foster appreciation for handmade, sustainable products from the North-East.

WD_BLACK SN7100 NVMe SSD debuts in india for mainstream gamers

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Sandisk has announced the launch of the WD_BLACK SN7100 NVMe SSD in India, positioning it as a high-performance storage solution for mainstream gamers seeking faster loading times and greater capacity to support increasingly large and graphics-intensive games.

Built on Sandisk's latest TLC 3D NAND technology, the SN7100 delivers read speeds of up to 7,250 MB/s and write speeds of up to 6,900 MB/s for the 1TB and 2TB variants, offering up to 35 per cent higher performance over the previous generation SSD.

The drive also provides storage options up to 4TB, aimed at users with expanding game libraries and frequent content updates.

Engineered for laptops and gaming handheld devices, the SSD offers up to 100 per cent improved power efficiency at maximum speed compared to its predecessor.

The 4TB model supports endurance of up to 1,200 TBW, catering to gamers engaged in gameplay streaming, speedrun captures and intensive content creation.

"As games become more complex and storage-intensive, the gamer of today needs high-performance SSDs that offer power efficiency for longer gameplay. The SN7100 NVMe™ SSD is just the drive for the next generation of gaming as it delivers amazing performance, higher capacity and faster load times," said Khalid Wani, senior director - sales (India), Sandisk.

Key features of the SSD include support for PCIe® Gen 4, a DRAM-less lightweight design, a 5-year limited warranty, and compatibility with the WD_BLACK Dashboard on Windows for game mode, health monitoring and firmware updates.

The WD_BLACK SN7100 NVMe SSD is available in 500GB, 1TB, 2TB and 4TB models, with prices starting at ₹4,899 for the 500GB version.

It can be purchased through leading IT resellers and major e-commerce platforms across the country.

IndiGo processed ₹ 610 cr refunds so far, delivered 3,000 baggages: Govt

MUMBAI, Dec 7: IndiGo has processed refunds totalling ₹ 610 crore so far against cancelled or severely delayed flights, and delivered 3,000 pieces of baggage to passengers across the country as of Saturday, the government said on Sunday.

It also said the aviation network is moving swiftly towards full normalcy, and all corrective measures will remain in place until operations stabilise entirely.

On Saturday, the government had directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, and ensure baggage separated from travellers are delivered in the next two days.

Further, the civil aviation ministry said the airline should ensure that baggage separated from passengers due to flight cancellations or delays should be traced and delivered to them in the next 48 hours.

"IndiGo has so far processed refunds totalling ₹ 610 crore. No additional fees are permitted for rescheduling travel impacted by cancellations. Dedicated support cells have been created to proactively assist passengers so that refund and rebooking issues are resolved without delay or inconvenience," the aviation ministry said in a release.

Stating that the ministry has taken rapid and decisive steps to address the disruption caused by the recent IndiGo operational crisis and to ensure that passengers do not face continued inconvenience, it said air travel operations across the country are stabilising at a fast pace.

All other domestic airlines are operating smoothly and at full capacity, while IndiGo's performance has shown steady improvement on Sunday, with flight schedules moving back towards normal levels, the government said.

It also said that IndiGo's flight operations have increased from 706 on Friday to 1,565 on Saturday and are likely to reach up to 1,650 by the end of Sunday. "Continuous communication is mandated throughout the process. With this push, IndiGo has successfully delivered 3,000 pieces of baggage to passengers across India as of Saturday," it added. (PTI)

Gold prices may stay positive as traders await Fed's decision: Analysts

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: Gold prices are likely to remain firm in the coming week, driven by investor focus on the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy outcome, combined with weakness in the rupee, according to analysts.

The precious metal's bias remains positive amid expectations of an interest rate cut and sustained central bank purchases, they added.

"Gold is expected to remain on positive side as traders will be focusing on the US Federal Reserve's FOMC meeting outcome and the Fed Chair Jerome Powell's commentary as well, while on the data front, the focus will be on China's trade and inflation data and the US jobs data," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services Ltd, said.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold futures appreciated by ₹ 958, or 0.74 per cent, this week, outperforming the global prices.

"Gold prices in the Indian markets have rallied more than the Comex gold prices on account of rupee depreciation against the dollar. The rupee is now at the highest mark of 90, which makes gold in



Indian currency costlier," Prathamesh Mallya, DVP - Research, Non-Agri Commodities and Currencies, Angel One, said.

Mallya added that the rally in gold prices might continue in the week ahead as a boost from the rate cut, increasing central bank demand for gold, and fund buying.

In the international markets, Comex gold futures slipped by USD 11.9, or 0.28 per cent, during the week.

Mer noted that gold prices consolidated within a range during the week but stayed supported by a

weaker dollar and rising bets for an interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve (Fed) at its December 10 meeting.

Meanwhile, silver continues to outshine gold, sealing fresh record highs on industrial demand.

On the MCX, silver futures skyrocketed by ₹ 8,427, or 4.81 per cent, during the week. On Friday, the white metal surged by Rs 7,096, or 3.98 per cent, to hit a record of ₹ 1,85,234 per kilogram.

"In the first half of the week, silver futures spiked close to ₹ 1.80 lakh per kg and briefly touched fresh highs. Since then, prices have cooled off slightly but are still sitting on massive month-on-month gains," Chirag Doshi, CIO - Fixed Income, LGT Wealth India, said.

He added that markets are consolidating at higher levels after a strong run, with traders increasingly using sharp intraday spikes in silver as opportunities to book profits.

In the overseas markets, Comex silver futures rose by USD 1.89, or 3.30 per cent, during the week. On Friday, the metal soared by USD 2.4, or 4.19 per cent, to hit a lifetime high of USD 59.90 per ounce.

"Silver prices rose to yet another all-time high and moved close to USD 60 per ounce in the international market, while on the domestic market, prices rose close to ₹ 1,90,000 per kg," Mer said, attributing the rally to strong industrial demand and tight supplies.

He added that the momentum could push silver prices towards ₹ 2,00,000-2,25,000 levels in the short term.

Analysts said the coming week will be crucial for bullion prices as monetary policy cues from the Fed, macroeconomic data from China and the US, and rupee trends will guide direction. (PTI)

National training on quality fish seed production held with participation from across Northeast CM stresses innovative, scientific practices to boost aquaculture

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 7: Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma has underscored the growing importance of the aquaculture sector, noting its major contribution to food security, livelihood generation and rural prosperity in recent years. He highlighted that ensuring a steady supply of healthy, genetically robust and disease-free fish seed is essential for sustaining this progress and for building a resilient aquaculture system.

In a written message addressed to fish farmers attending a three-day national-level training-cum-awareness programme on "Quality Fish Seed Production for Enhancing Aquaculture Productivity", the Chief Minister urged farmers, researchers and entrepreneurs to adopt scientific methods and modern technologies. He said that improved seed quality enhances productivity, lowers input costs, strengthens ecological balance and supports long-term sustainability. He called for heightened scientific awareness and encouraged participants to explore new avenues for producing high-quality fish seeds while conserving the ecosystem.

More than 200 participants from Assam and other Northeastern



states attended the training, jointly organised by ICAR-CIFE (Central Institute of Fisheries Education), Mumbai and Kalong-Kapili.

Inaugurating the programme, ICAR-CIFE Director Dr N P Sahu assured full institutional support to Kalong-Kapili. He noted that quality fish seed remains scarce across the country and pointed out that species such as rohu, catla and mrigal can grow up to 5 kg within a year using advanced scientific techniques and improved varieties like Jayanti Rohu and Maha Magur. Dr Sahu said Andhra

Pradesh leads the country in fish production, while Assam ranks fourth and stressed the need to improve per capita fish consumption along with national production. He emphasised adopting intensive culture systems such as Biofloc and RAS, developing quality feeds and maintaining fish health. He further informed that trained farmers would also receive financial support from the Bank of India.

Dr Debajit Sarma, Principal Scientist and Head, Division of Aquaculture, ICAR-CIFE, said the newly inaugurated training hall at

the Aqua Techno Park of Kalong-Kapili supported by Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, would benefit farmers and stakeholders. Pointing to Assam's acidic soil, he stressed the need for liming and added that stunted fingerlings reared under high stocking density for 3-4 months can significantly enhance growth performance.

Kalong-Kapili Director Jyotish Talukdar said fish farming is an environment-friendly livelihood option for Assam, especially in areas where agriculture or industry is not feasible. Drawing from his long experience, he highlighted the potential of aquaculture as a sustainable livelihood avenue.

The event was attended by NABARD Chief General Manager Loken Das, Assam Fisheries Director Gauri Sankar Das, Dean Dr Pradip Chandra Bhuyan College of Fisheries, Raha and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank Cluster Head Chandan Buragohain.

A bilingual handbook titled "Quality Fish Seed Production for Sustainable Aquaculture Growth" was released on the occasion. The programme concluded with the distribution of fishing nets, fish seeds and presentation of certificates to farmers.

INTUC slams government move to implement Four Labour Codes Workers' body alleges haste, lack of safeguards; calls for democratic opposition

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 7: The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) has sharply criticised the government's directive issued on November 21, 2025 to formulate and implement the Four Labour Codes by amending 29 existing labour laws. In a release signed by INTUC president Hiranya Bora and secretary Purmakanta Borgohain, the organisation expressed concern that the proposed Codes leave workers' rightful entitlements and benefits in doubt.

On December 6, the Women's Cell of INTUC, Assam Branch, organised a seminar on the Four Labour Codes, which was attended by retired Advocate General Dr Ramesh Barpratna Gohain, former minister Shamsul Huda, Deputy Labour Commissioner Kanpai Das, USDM assistant professor Dr Mridula Devi, INTUC leaders, lawyers, women, youth, students, workers and farmers.

Participants at the seminar criticised the government for what they described as a hasty and one-sided approach, claiming that many states have yet to frame the necessary by-laws to operationalise the Codes. They also noted that the documents lacked clarity on key ILO guidelines and argued that workers have historically been unable to secure their rights without collective labour organisations. It was termed "absurd" that workers were expected to seek justice individually when the amended Codes do not adequately safeguard the right to organise.

However, Deputy Labour Commissioner Kanpai Das stated that the Four Labour Codes were intended to reduce labour unrest and promote a healthy relationship between workers and employers. The INTUC release further stated that workers have long been neglected due to the absence of effective programmes to safeguard their rights under the 29 existing labour laws. Speakers urged the state and central governments to prioritise strengthening the infrastructure of the labour department rather than pushing for the implementation of the Four Labour Codes.

The INTUC Assam Branch opposed what it described as the unilateral enactment of the Codes without adequate discussion and called upon progressive parties and organisations to protest their implementation democratically.

Bhakatgaon Sankardev Vidya Niketan to celebrate silver jubilee

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Dec 7: The closing ceremony of the Silver Jubilee celebration of Bhakatgaon Sankardev Vidya Niketan under Jagiroad subdivision will be held on January 11 and 12 at the school premises. In preparation, a meeting was held on Saturday at the Niketan campus to finalise arrangements.

The meeting was chaired by Kumud Chandra Deka, president of the Niketan Management Committee. During the session, the board of directors constituted the reception committee with Kumud Chandra Deka as president and Kailas Bardoloi and Giren Kumar Deka as joint general secretaries. The formation took place in the presence of office bearers, teachers, parents, conscious citizens and other stakeholders.

The meeting was attended by former student leader Munindra Bangthai, Jagi Bhakatgaon Cooperative Society president Ashok Kumar Deka, sports organisers Pradeep Bora, Sharat Chandra Deka, Pulakesh Kaushik, Montu Kumar Medhi, Ajit Kumar Roy and the head of Jagiroad Sankardev Vidya Niketan.

Undivided Darrang Koch Rajbonshi Sanmilani to celebrate grand centenary

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, Dec 7: The Undivided Darrang District Koch Rajbonshi Sanmilani is set to mark its historic centenary with a three-day celebration on December 12, 13 and 14, 2025 at the Sri Sri Hari Mandir premises in Dighirpar, Mangaldai. The milestone event will honour the organisation's founding leaders—Rajmel president late Basundhar Barua (Moujadar) and secretary late Birahua Barua (Mandal) and highlight the community's cultural and social heritage.

Publicity Committee president Hitesh Hazarika announced the detailed programme, describing the centenary as a blend of tradition, community service and intellectual engagement. The celebration will commence on December 12 with a cleanliness drive by Ai-Matri Samiti, followed by ceremonial lamp-lighting at the Namghar, Bhoral Ghar and kitchen. At 9 AM, Centenary Celebration Committee president Dr Paramananda Rajbonshi will hoist 100 centenary flags.

The opening day will also include tributes to Mahabir Chilarai and late singer Zubeen Garg, a tree plantation drive, inauguration of exhibitions on Koch Rajbonshi culture and lifestyle, a book fair, a

health camp and decorative gateways. A meeting of indigenous priests, lighting of 100 ceremonial lamps and a cultural evening will conclude the day's events.

On December 13, morning rituals and a cleanliness drive will precede the inauguration of a cultural exhibition by Sericulture Superintendent Dr Gunamani Deka. A major seminar on "Contribution of the Koch Rajbonshi Community to the National Life of Assam" will be inaugurated by former MP Madhab Rajbonshi and moderated by retired professor Ghataswar Barua. Scholars Dr Dilip Rajbonshi, Dr Ramchandra Deka and Dr Rupanjali Choudhury will present research papers. MLA Basanta Das will host a community lunch, followed by an evening cultural programme. The final day, December 14, will begin with a cultural procession flagged off by Gurujyoti Das. A grand open session at 11:30 AM, presided over by Dr Paramananda Rajbonshi and inaugurated by Assam Sahitya Sabha vice-president Padum Rajkhowa, will be the highlight. Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma will attend as chief guest, while Guwahati University professor Dr Dilip Bora will deliver the keynote address.

Dibrugarh Press Club assesses erosion-hit Brahmaputra bank as US-made geo bags deployed

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 7: Members of the Dibrugarh Press Club (DPC) on Saturday visited erosion-affected sites along the Brahmaputra in the Nagaghuli area, witnessing extensive damage caused by over a decade of severe riverbank erosion and reviewing the protective measures currently being implemented.

The delegation, led by DPC president Manash Jyoti Dutta and general secretary Ripunjyoti Das, travelled by boat with engineers from the Water Resources Department to inspect vulnerable stretches of the riverbank. The team assessed the magnitude of destruction and the progress of anti-erosion interventions underway. Officials briefed the media team on several concurrent projects along nearly 800 metres of the erosion-hit upstream segment of Nagaghuli. The protection plan combines advanced C-type geo bag screening with conventional RCC propupine structures to counter the Brahmaputra's strong erosive currents.

A key feature of the intervention is the use of geo-textile bags produced by SKAPS Industries, a geosynthetics manufacturer operating under a SKAPS India-USA joint venture. These US-made geo bags—large fab-



ric containers filled with sand or soil are being placed along critical sections of the riverbank to absorb and deflect hydraulic pressure.

Similar anti-erosion works are being executed along extended sections of the riverbank from Majjan to Mohanaghat. Officials stressed the urgency of completing key components during the winter months, noting that work continues round the clock to strengthen Dibrugarh's defences before the monsoon season.

The current protection strategy integrates modern and traditional engineering solutions. Type C geo bags are being deployed at high-risk points, while concrete propupines help dissipate the river's momentum and stabilise the bank. Enhancements

to river spurs near Dibrugarh city are also under way, comprising eight stone spurs, three permeable spurs and 47 wooden spurs positioned to redirect the river's flow and reduce erosion. The erosion threat facing Dibrugarh has deep historical roots in the devastating 1950 Assam earthquake. The magnitude 8.6 quake altered the Brahmaputra's course and raised the riverbed in the region, creating what experts describe as a perched river system where the river flows above the surrounding terrain. As a result, the DTP Dyke functions not only as a flood barrier but as a critical dam-like structure restraining the elevated river, making any breach potentially catastrophic for the low-lying city.

Veteran educator and litterateur Tilakanta Phukan passes away

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Dec 7: Tilakanta Phukan, 92, former president of the Karbi Anglong District Sahitya Sabha and retired Principal of Howraghat Higher Secondary School, passed away at his residence early Sunday at 4:15 AM.

A respected figure across Karbi Anglong, Phukan was the founding president of the Howraghat Press Club, established in 1992 and served as the Howraghat correspondent for All India Radio, Guwahati, from 1980 to 1990. He also edited the weekly magazine 'Tapat Khabar' in 1983 and contributed news to publications including Dainik Asom, Janam Bhumi, Newstar and Asom Bani during the same period.

In 1991, Phukan became Principal of Howraghat Higher Secondary School and served as General Secretary of the Assam Volleyball Association. He was elected President of the Karbi Anglong District Sahitya Sabha in 1998 and had earlier held roles as Founding Secretary of the Howraghat Sahitya Sabha (1969) and Founding Assistant Secretary of the Howraghat Sports Association (1973).

Phukan was also a prolific writer and social worker. His poetry collection 'Kiba Herai' was published in 2014, followed by 'Katha Phulor Bagicha', a compilation of moral sayings, in 2016. He received numerous accolades, including the Lifetime Cultural Sadhak Award (2011), the title Dronacharya (2015), Gyan Sadhana Award (2016), Assam Sahitya Sabha's Shubhanudhyayi honour (2017) and the Karmashree Award (2019).

A commemorative book, 'Jeevan Bithika' (The Path of Life), edited by eminent literary writer Bhabaprasad Deuri and Phukan's daughter Korabi Phukan, highlights his contributions to society, literature and education.

Community leaders, activists, social workers and writers visited Phukan's residence to pay their respects and offer condolences, mourning the loss of a luminary whose legacy enriched the cultural and educational fabric of Karbi Anglong.

Terror on four legs: 150 elephants hold Kheroni hostage for over a month

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 7: The human-elephant conflict in the Kheroni area under the Southern Forest Range, Kheroni of West Karbi Anglong district has taken a severe and alarming turn, with a herd of approximately 150 wild elephants creating widespread panic day and night.

What were once peaceful paddy fields have now become roaming grounds for the massive herd. Instead of narrow pathways between ripening paddy crops, residents now witness long lines of wild elephants moving through the sugarcane fields. For more than a month, local farmers and villagers have been forced to stay awake all night to guard their homes and crops from the marauding elephants.

The herd has caused extensive damage: devastating mature paddy crops, destroying vegetable fields, sugarcane, valuable tress & plants, demolishing homes and flattening stored grain. Several families have lost their houses completely.

Tragically, a young woman named Khusbu Rajbhar lost her life in a recent elephant attack. The presence of the elephants has also severely disrupted normal life. Movement of vehicles, including ambulances carrying patients at night, has become extremely risky. The herd has split into several smaller groups and is now scattered across villages and roads in the Kheroni and it's adjacent areas, creating an atmosphere of constant fear.

Despite repeated efforts, the Southern Forest Range, Kheroni has so far failed to drive the herd back into the forest or implement effective containment measures.

Amid the crisis, former Member of Parliament Horen Sing Bey recently visited the affected areas and interacted with distressed residents to assess the gravity of the situation.

NABARD, Kalong Kapili observe World Soil Day with plantation drive

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 7: As part of its focus on Natural Resources Management and sustainable development in rural areas, NABARD has been supporting a range of climate-related interventions across the country, including Integrated Watershed and Tribal Development programmes, UPNRM initiatives and natural-farming-based JIVA projects.

To promote awareness on soil health and its role in agricultural productivity, NABARD organised an event to observe World Soil Day with members of its JIVA project at the Borbeel cluster under Kathiatoli Block of Nagaon district on Friday. The programme was held on the theme "Healthy Soils for Healthy Cities" and was attended by NABARD DDM Rajendar Perna, Kalong Kapili coordinators Oinam Naresh and Bikram Mudoi, along with selected champion farmers of the project.

Addressing the gathering, Rajendar Perna highlighted NABARD's long-standing efforts in supporting sustainable development in rural and agriculture-allied sectors. He emphasised the importance of topsoil and its health in improving the production and productivity of agricultural commodities. Stressing that soil forms the foundation of life by supporting crops, oxygen-producing plants and biodiversity, he called for greater attention to soil conservation. He also explained the significance of soil test values such as pH, organic carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and urged farmers to reduce harmful chemical use by gradually shifting to natural inputs like cow dung, vermicompost, daincha, jivamrut and bheejamrut.

25 Bodo organisations hold intellectual meet at BU

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 7: An intellectual meet representing 25 Bodo organisations was held on Sunday at the Jhwahlo Nileswhar Brahma Auditorium of Bodoland University to discuss concerns arising from the Assam Government's Group of Ministers (GoM) recommendations on granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six heterogeneous communities of the state.

Organised by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the meeting saw participation from major bodies such as the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Assam Tribal Sangha and CCTOA, among others. Nearly 1,200 delegates attended the deliberation.

After the meeting, ABSU president Dipen Boro told reporters that tribal organisations had unanimously rejected the ministerial report recom-

mending ST status for the six communities. He said an interim advisory has already been submitted to the state government and a detailed report will be issued within a month.

Boro cautioned that the proposed inclusion of what he described as "2 crore people" into the existing "45 lakh ST population" could adversely affect tribal political rights, constitutional protections, land security, identity, reservation, education and employment opportunities.

He also criticised BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary, alleging that the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) reportedly issued by him does not safeguard the interests of indigenous tribals. Boro questioned Mohilary's commitment to tribal welfare and accused him of "unnecessarily targeting ABSU at a time when tribal identity is facing a grave threat."

Kohira Lab-Grown Diamond Jewellery celebrates 1-year anniversary

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Kohira, a leading lab-grown diamond jewellery brand in Guwahati, successfully celebrated its first anniversary, commemorating a year of offering sustainable, IGI-certified diamond jewellery to customers in the Northeast.

Since its launch in December 2024 at the Ground Floor, Roodraksh Mall, Bhangagarh, Kohira has introduced modern, ethical jewellery with timeless craftsmanship to the region. Over the past year, the brand has served more than 500 customers seeking purity, value, and responsible luxury.

The anniversary celebration was graced by popular Assamese film actress Priyam Pallabee, who attended as the Guest of Honour and unveiled Kohira's new anniversary special collection.

Speaking on the occasion, Kohira promoters Shalini Kaseria and Sushmita Bajaj expressed their gratitude, saying, "We are deeply thankful for the love and trust the people of the Northeast have shown us over the past year. This anniversary reflects a growing shift towards conscious, modern luxury."

Armed Forces Flag Day observed with solemn ceremony Districts pay tribute to martyrs, veterans and families

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 7: The Armed Forces Flag Day 2025 was observed on Sunday by the Zila Sainik Welfare Office, Diphu, Karbi Anglong in the presence of the ex-servicemen community of the district. The programme was organised to honour the martyrs, veterans and the brave men and women in uniform who have fought valiantly and continue to safeguard the sovereignty and security of the nation.

On this solemn occasion, the nation collectively reaffirms and renews its solidarity with the Armed Forces personnel. The day serves as a reminder of our responsibility to express gratitude not only to the martyrs and the living heroes who were wounded in the line of duty, but also to acknowledge the invaluable contributions and sacrifices made by their families, who remain an inseparable part of their service to the nation.

Our Tezpur Correspondent adds: Armed Forces Flag Day was observed with solemnity and rev-



erence at the Circuit House War Memorial in Tezpur, where a wreath-laying ceremony was held to honour the soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice for the nation. The programme reflected the district's collective gratitude and reaffirmed its commitment to the welfare of ex-servicemen, war widows and their families.

The ceremony was attended by Additional District Commissioner



GUWAHATI, Dec 7: The Assam IT Department in partnership with EleTs Technomedia, successfully hosted the National Digital Innovation Residential Summit 2025 at Vivanta Taj, Guwahati. Led by Principal Secretary K S Gopinath Narayan IA&AS and co-chaired by Additional Secretary Ashwani Kumar IAS, the summit brought together over 50 speakers from more than 20 states to discuss India's digital transformation and next-generation governance.

Key state leaders, including Additional Chief Secretaries Biswaranjan Samal IAS and B Kalyan Chakravarthy IAS, joined national officials from various ministries and states to deliberate on AI-enabled governance, digital infrastructure, emerging technol-

gies and innovations in service delivery.

Highlighting Assam's achievements, the summit noted the delivery of over 900 services via the Unified Assam Portal under Sewa Setu and 500 services through Dig-

iLocker. Supported by industry leaders such as Google Cloud, Salesforce, AMD and HDFC Bank, the event strengthened collaborations aimed at building an inclusive, intelligent and citizen-centric digital future for India.

The interaction at her residence highlighted the district's commitment to honouring the sacrifices of Veer Naris and their families. Observed annually on December 7, Armed Forces Flag Day serves not only as a day of remembrance but also as a reminder of citizens' responsibility to contribute to the Flag Day Fund, which supports the rehabilitation and welfare of war widows, disabled soldiers and ex-servicemen.

The observance in Sonitpur district stood as a fitting tribute to the courage and dedication of the Armed Forces, inspiring future generations to uphold the values of patriotism and sacrifice.

As part of the Governor of Assam's initiative "Sainik Tujhe

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Love has no age, no limit; and no death.
- John Galsworthy

Indian economic scenario

There is the severe fall in growing household savings that can be measured in the observation that says that at least 95 percent cannot save any money. At the best the ratio stands at ₹ 5 out of a hundred. The crisis has come down to worst in five decades. Silent and severe, the fall in household saving rates have been identified at 5.1 percent, the lowest level in last 47 years. The crisis in savings continues to deepen while the loans are soaring. It could be compared with previous generations in 1970s, 80s, and even 90s when savings were part of income. The debts have gone up to unimaginable heights and spent in clothes, cars and other luxuries. Consumption is rising much higher than income and hence, debt. Total household debt has grown to ₹ 120 lakh crore, a figure unimaginable a decade ago. But what's more worrying is where this debt is going. Earlier, families borrowed mainly to buy long-term assets like homes or gold. Today, loans are used for cars, phones, clothing, groceries—even vacations. Consumption is rising faster than income, and the gap is being filled by credit. One crisis leads to the other. There is the pressure of credit card, almost explosive. It stands now at ₹ 3 lakh crore, and 28 percent of users are defaulting. Then follows the mental stress while average credit balance ₹ 33,000 and the national average salary around ₹ 25,000. At least 19 percent of suicides are due money issues.

The crisis becomes even more intense in face of the unrestrained fall in the value of Indian rupee in the international market. In the year of January-December, 2025, there has been a sharp depreciation of 4.3 per cent against the US Dollar (USD). The forex analysts have cautioned that Indian Rupee (INR) has become the worst performing currency in Asia and now if the trade deal with the US does not take place soon, it may further slide to 90 per USD. In fact, more than domestic fundamentals, the rupee's trajectory now hinges on global dollar strength. Now for many months, the INR has been facing depreciation pressure, though not so much because of the current account that has been benign, but because of capital outflows. Indian rupee has come down against Asia FX (foreign Exchange), but mostly against current account surplus countries. The INR has weakened at the rate of four percent calendar year-to-date.

India is facing twin external shocks: U.S. tariffs and high precious metal prices. The combination of adverse geoeconomic and geopolitical environments is weighing upon India's merchandise trade deficit. The fall or the sharp depreciation in the INR is the consequence of the cumulative impact of several factors. First and foremost, the US administration has imposed 50 per cent tariff on India that has been hurting our exports leading to a record 41.7 billion dollar trade deficit in October triggering a rupee slide.

Degrees without skills: Assam's education crisis

By: Lalit Nath

In this fast-changing world, the job market is also transforming every moment. Millions of opportunities are being created daily in new and emerging fields. Young men and women are finding avenues to establish themselves in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Cyber Security, Content Creation, Game Development, Digital Marketing and many more. Yet the impact of these changes has not reached far into Assam's education system. As a result, when our students step out of college with a degree in hand, they are invariably confronted with one question: "What is your skill?" They have no answer, because our education system remains trapped in an outdated mould.

Of course, from the National Education Policy of 1968 to the New National Education Policy of 2020, several policies have been formulated with the aim of modernising education. But in reality, most educational institutions continue to follow old syllabi and examination methods. Even today, schools and colleges are largely limited to three streams—Arts, Science and Commerce. Modern subjects such as Coding, AI, Digital Design, Animation and Graphics Design remain outside the mainstream curriculum. Whatever little is taught under Computer Science or IT is mostly theoretical. Due to the lack of practical knowledge, even engineering students often hear the names of GitHub or Virtual Reality for the first time during job interviews. Similarly, commerce students become acquainted with tools like Canva, Figma or Adobe Illustrator only at the interview stage.

Companies today give priority to skills over marks or degrees. The real keys to employment are the ability to communicate effectively, teamwork, problem-solving and the capacity to quickly master new technologies. But our examination system is still confined to rote learning and rank lists. Even students who score 95% find themselves unable to give clear answers to simple questions in interviews. This disconnect is pushing Assam's youth behind in the job market, forcing many into unemployment. Yet Assam's new generation is now waking up. They have realised that life holds many possibilities beyond government jobs. What they did not get in college, they are teaching themselves. Through online platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, freeCodeCamp, YouTube and Khan Academy, thousands of Assamese youth are today working in high positions in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Delhi and even in America and Canada. Some are earning dollars through freelancing from home, others have launched start-ups and attracted funding worth crores. Seeing these success stories on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, village boys and girls are opening their laptops. There is no longer fear in their eyes only confidence and one question: "Why can't I do it?"

Despite this change, deep reform of the education system remains essential. Education must be freed from the confines of examinations and transformed into real preparation for life. The curriculum must include practical skills—project-based learning, internships and industrial visits. Soft skills such as communication, critical thinking and leadership must be given importance. Otherwise, we will only keep increasing the number of educated youth; we will fail to build complete human beings. There is no shortage of talent among Assam's young people, the shortage is only of opportunity and proper direction. The education system must create those opportunities so that the youth learn to think, solve problems, create and stand on their own feet.

The question now is, how long will we continue producing students who merely pass examinations?

Today's youth have laptops, internet and dreams. Yet the old burden of degrees still weighs on their backs. They have already begun throwing off that burden themselves. Our task now is to place a new map in their hands—one that does not mark the address of jobs, but only the path of creation. One day, a generation will emerge from the soil of Assam that will not merely seek jobs, it will create them. A generation that will not only dream corporate dreams, but dreams of its own land. A generation that will change the world not by going to Bengaluru or America, but from Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Tezpur itself.

Let us not wait for that day. Let us begin it today. Because time is in our hands and the key to the future is in the hands of Assam's youth.

The decline of Assamese social life and our responsibilities

When one carefully observes the present-day social structure of Assam, an unknown and invisible apprehension shakes the mind of every conscious citizen of the community. In the fertile soil nourished by the mighty Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, the diverse and colourful social fabric that has taken shape, with its strong values and humane relationships, appears to have been slowly eaten away by an insidious worm. The close mutual bonds, affection, trust, and simplicity of the past have gradually been replaced by intense artificiality, competition, and an atmosphere of suffocating distrust. This change is not the result of any single day or particular incident; rather, it is the tragic and heartbreaking consequence of prolonged neglect, self-forgetfulness, and gradual disconnection from our roots in the flow of time. A society is not merely a collection of people bound by blood and flesh; it is a living entity that survives on ethics, culture, tradition, and philosophy. Yet, at present, that foundation seems to be growing steadily weaker. This decline is not confined only to economic or political limitations; it is essentially a profound cultural, intellectual, and moral degeneration that is pushing the future of our community towards an uncertain darkness.

One of the primary and root causes of this tragic downfall in our social life is the abnormal and rapid spread of consumerist mentality. The high place that simplicity, hospitality, and contentment once held in Assamese society has now been devoured by an intense and insatiable desire for quick wealth and luxury. Today, success is measured solely by the yardstick of money and property. The tendency to give greater importance to personal gain and displays of power rather than to human qualities, honesty, sacrifice, or selfless contribution to society has increased alarmingly. As a direct result, corruption, deceit, violence, and immorality are spreading rapidly through every pore of society. When materialistic thinking alone gains exclusive dominance over religion, philosophy, spirituality, and ethics in a society, the spiritual death of that society becomes inevitable. This tendency is particularly noticeable and terrifying among the present younger generation. The mentality of achieving more profit in less time instead of through hard work and dedication has led them astray. It has taken us far away from our traditional culture of believing that "work itself is religion" and has robbed us of our mental peace.

Another extremely sensitive and important aspect of this social decline is the directionless and mechanical nature of our education system. The true purpose of education was to build human beings, shape character, illuminate the mind with the light of knowledge, and prepare good citizens for society. Regrettably, education today has been reduced merely to acquiring degrees, chasing marks, and securing jobs. Instead of depth of knowledge and pursuit of wisdom, an educated class has been created that carries only the burden of information, conspicuously lacking social responsibility, empathy, and sensitivity. Moral education, spiritual thought, and the practice of values are gradually disappearing from our educational institutions. As a result, even highly educated individuals forget their minimum duties towards society and remain absorbed only in narrow self-interest. We have failed to realise the eternal truth that education is not merely bookish knowledge but a philosophy of life. Because of this failure, intolerance, extremism, and disorder are increasing in society. The sacred and respectful relationship between teachers and students has also faded, which is extremely unfortunate and thought-provoking for our national life.

Our joint family system has broken down, and in today's modern social structure the concept of nuclear families has taken root everywhere. Consequently, children are deprived of the affectionate company of grandparents from whom they could have learnt the first lessons of life, moral teachings, and knowledge of traditions through stories. The natural tradition of respect for elders and affection for the young, which was a hallmark of our society, is gradually vanishing. People have become utterly lonely even within the four walls of their homes. Excessive use of technology and mobile phones has pushed people mentally far apart even when they are physically close. Even under the same roof, heartfelt exchange among family members has diminished. This emotional distance has created a terrifying mental void that later gives birth to various social problems and psychological depression. The cruel culture that has emerged—of neglecting aged par-



The terrible lack of work culture is another serious ailment of our society. As a community we have gradually become dependent on others. The fact that we have to rely on labourers coming from outside to do the work of our own land is an extremely shameful and dangerous situation. A middle-class mentality that looks down upon physical labour has weakened our economic backbone. The fascination with earning money easily and without effort has led our youth astray. Disinterest in agriculture and local industries has turned us into merely a consumer society. Yet there is no alternative to a strong work culture to build a self-reliant and dignified society. Until we understand the dignity of labour and stop feeling ashamed to do our own work, economic and social progress will remain impossible.

generation is rushing into this dark world. It not only destroys individual lives but cripples entire families and society. Parallel to this, the rising crimes and violence against women reveal the mental perversion of our society. In a society that once worshipped woman as the embodiment of power, the insecurity of women has tarnished our honour.

Now a huge question mark stands before us: what is the way out of this deep and all-consuming crisis? What should we do? First of all, we must go through a profound and impartial self-analysis. Instead of continuing to blame others, we must be ready to correct our own mistakes. We have to recover our lost values. For this, the role of the family is paramount and indispensable. Parents must take the responsibility of raising their children not merely as career-oriented machines but as good and sensitive human beings. Giving sufficient time to children, trying to understand their mental world, talking

openly with them, and introducing them to our heritage and traditions are extremely urgent. The home is the first school where the process of character building begins, and only when this foundation is strong will the future be beautiful. A radical and constructive change is needed in our education system. Instead of remaining confined to textbook knowledge, students must be given practical education in ethics, social service, spirituality, and humanity. Teachers must not merely perform professional teaching; they must become ideals of life for students. An open environment must be created in educational institutions where students can think freely without fear and be inspired by noble feelings of patriotism and love for society. The practice of literature, music, and culture must be taken seriously from the school level so that they recognise their roots and draw strength from them.

We must bring a new tide of work culture into society. The mentality of honouring all kinds of physical labour must be cultivated from childhood. Our youth must be made to understand that no work is small or shameful. Only by choosing the path of self-reliance through agriculture, animal husbandry, or small industries can we become economically strong. We must reduce dependence on government grants or loans and take a firm resolve to become self-reliant. For this, a complete change in society's overall perspective is essential. A farmer, a rickshaw puller, or a small trader must receive the same respect and dignity in society as a high-ranking officer—this is the responsibility of all of us.

We must be extremely restrained and conscious in the use of technology and social media. Technology is our helper, but we must ensure it does not become our master and control our time and minds. Social media should be used for constructive purposes, knowledge pursuit, and spreading positive messages, not for creating division, hatred, or misinformation. The addition to living in the virtual world disconnected from reality must be reduced. We must bring back an environment of direct human contact, face-to-face conversation, friendly gatherings, and active participation in social events.

At present, the sight of a section of our youth falling into the clutches of drugs and slowly heading towards death shakes the heart of any conscientious person. This is not merely a law-and-order problem; it is a deep social disease. Due to family neglect, frustration, lack of proper upbringing, and absence of right guidance, our future

helped destroyed our uniqueness and identity. Under the influence of globalisation, we have reached a state where we cannot find our own roots. By abandoning our traditional attire, food habits, and customs, we are following a trend that does not suit our soil and climate. A large section of the new generation feels hesitant or incapable of speaking or writing correctly in their mother tongue—an act tantamount to suicide for a community. A nation that does not know how to honour its own language and culture can never have a bright future. The kind of distorted behaviour and exhibitionism that prevails in the name of culture is an ominous signal for our national life. Excessive commercialisation in the name of practising folk culture has drained the life force from our arts and reduced them merely to objects of entertainment.

The terrible lack of work culture is another serious ailment of our society. As a community we have gradually become dependent on others. The fact that we have to rely on labourers coming from outside to do the work of our own land is an extremely shameful and dangerous situation. A middle-class mentality that looks down upon physical labour has weakened our economic backbone. The fascination with earning money easily and without effort has led our youth astray. Disinterest in agriculture and local industries has turned us into merely a consumer society. Yet there is no alternative to a strong work culture to build a self-reliant and dignified society. Until we understand the dignity of labour and stop feeling ashamed to do our own work, economic and social progress will remain impossible. The solution to unemployment does not lie solely in dependence on government jobs; it is possible only through entrepreneurial attitude and creative work, but we hesitate to accept this truth.

Lack of political will and a deep leadership crisis are other major reasons for the present miserable state of our society. The absence of far-sighted, knowledgeable, and sacrificial leaders capable of guiding society in the right direction is keenly felt today. Politics has turned from a sacred platform of social service into a tool for seizing power and earning money. Divisive politics has sown seeds of hatred among different classes and ethnic groups. The bond of brotherhood and unity that once existed has been torn apart for political gain. Even the conscious sections of society often adopt opportunistic silence, which encourages wrongdoers and anti-social elements. The courage to raise voice against injustice or stand for truth is steadily diminishing among people. This atmosphere of fear, apprehension, and indifference has accelerated social decay and plunged ordinary people into despair.

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The practice of our language and literature should not remain confined to meetings or festivals but become part of daily life. All of us must work with personal responsibility for the correct use and promotion of the Assamese language. Speaking, writing, or reading in one's own language is not something inferior; it should be considered a matter of pride. At the same time, we must remain respectful towards the languages and cultures of various ethnic communities living in Assam and strengthen the process of building a greater Assamese nation. Our strength lies in unity amidst diversity. We must reawaken that strength and write a new history of harmony.

Undoubtedly, a broad and healthy social movement is now needed in this direction, where intellectuals, social workers, writers, and conscious citizens come together and fearlessly raise their voice against the inconsistencies in society. Relentless efforts must continue to eradicate social evils such as superstition, harmful customs, witch-hunting, and dowry. To stop the spread of addictive substances, ensure women's safety, and similar issues, we must build social resistance in every village and town instead of depending solely on the police. We must have the courage to socially boycott criminals.

Finally, one thing must be clear to all of us: stopping this decay in our social life is not the sole responsibility of any single individual, organisation, or only the government. It is the collective and moral duty of every Assamese. If we do not become conscious right now, our future generations will inherit a crippled, bankrupt, and wayward society, and history will hold us accountable for it. Time has not yet completely run out. By bringing positive change in our thoughts and consciousness and creating a beautiful and balanced synthesis of old values and modernity, we must dream of building a new and strong Assam—a land of peace, prosperity, and brotherhood where people care hoofdst for one another, where every life is safe, and where our language and culture can stand tall with pride on the world stage. Our goodwill, sacrifice, and united effort will surely tear through this darkness and show the path to light, and our social life will once again become vibrant.

The Global economy and the new age of artificial intelligence

By: Chafikhur Rahman

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the global economy faster than any previous technology. From large industries to small businesses, AI is changing how people work, how companies grow, and how governments make decisions. It brings exciting opportunities for innovation, but it also raises serious concerns that require cooperation among nations.

Around the world, companies are using AI to predict market trends, design products, manage supply chains and communicate with customers more efficiently. Factories are adopting AI-powered machines to improve production with less waste. Hospitals are using AI to detect diseases earlier and more accurately. Even farmers are using AI to monitor soil health and crop growth, leading to better harvests. These advancements are

helping businesses work faster and make fewer mistakes, which strengthens the global economy.

AI is also creating new industries such as autonomous vehicles, smart manufacturing and advanced robotics. Many experts believe AI will contribute trillions of dollars to the world economy in the coming decades. Countries like the United States, China, Japan and many in Europe are competing to lead in AI research and development, creating a global race for technological leadership.

However, the rapid rise of AI is also causing concern. Many people are worried that machines will replace human workers, especially in routine jobs such as factory work, data entry and basic customer service. AI can perform these tasks quickly and at lower cost. At the same time, AI is creating new job opportunities, including roles like data analysts, robot

technicians and cyber-security experts. These jobs require new skills and many workers are not yet prepared for this shift. This makes it essential for governments and companies to invest in education and skill development so that people can learn how to work with AI instead of being replaced by it.

Another major worry is the misuse of AI. Powerful AI tools can be used to spread misinformation, create fake videos, conduct cyberattacks or carry out surveillance. There is fear that AI-generated fake news could influence elections or create social unrest. Biased algorithms may also lead to unfair treatment in hiring, lending, or policing. If AI systems used in critical sectors like healthcare or energy are hacked, the consequences could be serious.

Because AI technology is advancing quickly, many countries do not yet have strong rules to guide its safe use. Without clear

regulations, the risk of misuse increases. This challenge cannot be solved by any one country alone because AI is a global technology. A breakthrough in one part of the world can spread everywhere within days. That is why international cooperation is crucial.

Countries must work together to create shared standards for AI safety, transparency and accountability. Global discussions have begun, but much more needs to be done. Nations should exchange research, support one another in building secure AI systems, and agree on ethical principles that protect human rights and global peace. It is also important to ensure that developing countries have access to AI resources, knowledge and training. If only wealthy nations benefit from AI, global inequality could grow, creating economic and social tensions.

The central challenge for the

global economy is finding the right balance between progress and responsibility. Governments need to create policies that support innovation while preventing harm. Companies must use AI ethically and be open about how their systems must make decisions. Citizens must stay informed and learn how to use AI tools wisely.

If managed well, AI can drive economic growth, medical breakthroughs, environmental protection, and improve everyday life. But if mismanaged, it can deepen inequality and introduce serious risks. AI is not just a technological development, it is an economic, social and ethical challenge. The future of the global economy will depend on how wisely and cooperatively the world guides this powerful technology. With responsibility, planning and international unity, AI can help build a safer, fairer and more prosperous future for everyone.

The rising burden of Brain disorders

By: Satvabrat Borah

A strange paradox defines our era. Medicine has never been more advanced; robotic arms perform microsurgically repair brain aneurysms, artificial intelligence detects Alzheimer's years before symptoms appear, and gene therapies promise to halt inherited neurodegeneration. Yet, in the shadow of these triumphs, a slower, more pervasive catastrophe is unfolding. Neurological disorders have quietly overtaken every other category of illness to become the leading cause of disability on earth. More than three billion people, over forty percent of humanity, now live with a condition that affects the brain, spinal cord, or peripheral nerves. Stroke, migraine, dementia, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, autism spectrum disorders, multiple sclerosis, motor neuron disease, and the lingering neurological aftermath of infections together impose a burden greater than cardiovascular disease and cancer combined. This is no longer a problem confined to ageing societies in Europe and East Asia; it is a universal phenomenon that reaches from the slums of Lagos to the villages of Assam, from Silicon Valley executives to Amazonian indigenous communities. The brain, the organ that allowed us to conquer the planet, is, for the first time in human history, becoming the weakest link in our survival.

Longer life expectancy, the crowning achievement of twentieth-century public health, is the most obvious driver. When global life expectancy was forty-five years, few people lived long enough to develop Alzheimer's or vascular dementia. Today, with expectancy approaching eighty in many countries and still climbing, the cumulative risk of neurodegeneration has become inevitable. By 2050 the number of people living with dementia is projected to exceed 150 million, a tripling in just three decades. Yet age alone cannot explain the full picture. Autism diagnoses have risen more than thirty-fold since the 1970s. Attention-deficit disorders affect one in ten school-age children in some nations. Early-onset Parkinson's, once considered exceptionally rare, is increasing. Young adults in their twenties and thirties are presenting with strokes that were almost unknown in those age groups a generation ago. The neurological crisis spans the entire human lifespan in a way no previous disease burden ever has.

Modern existence itself has become neurologically hostile. The human brain evolved in conditions of intermittent stress, abundant physical movement, and long periods of boredom, face-to-face social contact, and nights of complete darkness. Almost none of those conditions apply today. Chronic low-grade stress, driven by economic insecurity, social comparison, and 24-hour news cycles keeps cortisol and adrenaline circulating at levels that erode neural architecture over decades. Sleep, the brain's only opportunity for deep repair has been sacrificed to screens and shift work; global surveys suggest a billion people are chronically sleep-deprived. Sedentary behaviour, unheard of in ancestral environments, weakens the cerebrovascular system and



starves the brain of the neurotrophic factors released during movement. Ultra-processed diets high in refined carbohydrates, seed oils, and chemical additives provoke systemic inflammation that crosses the blood-brain barrier. The combination is lethal to long-term neurological health, yet it describes the daily reality of a growing majority of humanity.

Environmental neurotoxins have joined the assault. Fine particulate air pollution is now the largest single environmental risk factor for stroke worldwide, responsible for almost one in five cases. Lead, banned in petrol across most of the world, still contaminates soil and water in thousands of communities, irreversibly lowering IQ and increasing impulsivity in children. Mercury from artisanal gold mining and coal combustion crosses the placenta and damages developing brains. Glyphosate, organophosphates, and other agricultural chemicals are increasingly implicated in Parkinson's disease clusters. Plasticisers such as bisphenol A and phthalates, present in almost every human body, disrupt endocrine signalling essential to neural development. Climate change adds cascading threats: heatwaves trigger strokes, shifting mosquito ranges spread Zika and Japanese encephalitis with their devastating neurological sequelae, and drought-induced malnutrition impairs foetal brain growth. The planet we have engineered for convenience and profit is proving uniquely toxic to the three pounds of tissue that make us human.

Infectious diseases, far from retreating, have

opened a new neurological front. COVID-19 alone is likely to leave tens of millions with persistent cognitive impairment, chronic fatigue, autonomic dysfunction, and elevated risk of Parkinson's and dementia years later. In the tropics, dengue, chikungunya, and scrub typhus frequently cause encephalitis or Guillain-Barré syndrome. Cerebral malaria continues to damage or kill hundreds of thousands of children annually. HIV, even when suppressed by antiretrovirals, causes chronic neuroinflammation. The antibiotic era gave us the illusion that infections were solved problems; instead, many have simply changed address, attacking the brain in subtler, longer-lasting ways.

The global response remains woefully inadequate. There are fewer than one neurologist per million people in most of Africa and large parts of Asia. Waiting times for MRI scans in public hospitals routinely stretch to months. Rehabilitation, the only route to meaningful recovery after stroke or traumatic brain injury, is virtually non-existent outside a handful of wealthy cities. Families become the default care system, usually women who abandon education or employment to provide round-the-clock support they were never trained to give. The economic cost is astronomical; the human cost is beyond calculation.

India illustrates the crisis in especially stark terms. With a nation of 1.4 billion, records approximately 1.8 million strokes every year, the large majority in people under sixty-five. Diabetes, now affecting more than one in ten

adults, drives an epidemic of peripheral neuropathy and accelerates vascular dementia. Air pollution in the Indo-Gangetic plain routinely exceeds safe levels by factors of ten or more, translating directly into higher stroke and cognitive decline. Rapid urbanisation has replaced morning walks and home-cooked meals with commuter stress and processed food. Mental health disorders, themselves neurological in mechanism, have reached pandemic proportions, with depression now the leading cause of disability among young Indian women. Specialist care remains concentrated in a few metropolitan hubs; most districts lack even a single neurologist. When a stroke occurs in rural Bihar or Odisha, the golden hour for thrombolysis is almost always lost to distance and disorganisation. The result is a generation of young disabled survivors dependent on families already struggling with poverty.

Within India, Assam reveals how regional factors can intensify an already severe national picture. Flood-prone, agriculturally dependent, and historically under-resourced in healthcare, the state sees high rates of hypertension driven by salt-heavy diets and stress. Japanese encephalitis, transmitted by mosquitoes thriving in flooded paddy fields, periodically sweeps through children, leaving survivors with permanent cognitive and paralysis. Road traffic accidents on poorly maintained highways produce a steady stream of traumatic brain injuries. Alcohol use disorders are rising among young men, increasing the risk of cerebellar de-

generation and Wernicke's encephalopathy. Diagnostic facilities remain scarce; many districts have no CT scanner, let alone an EEG or MRI machine. Patients routinely travel hundreds of kilometres to Guwahati for specialist care, often arriving too late. Community rehabilitation is essentially non-existent, so families shoulder burdens that would break even the strongest support systems elsewhere.

The crisis forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about progress. We have built a world that extends lifespan while eroding the quality of the years we gain. We celebrate connectivity yet foster epidemic loneliness. We generate unprecedented wealth alongside unprecedented neurological disability. The same species that split the atom and sequenced the genome cannot ensure that its children sleep properly or breathe clean air. Technology offers dazzling solutions, from deep-brain stimulation to CRISPR, yet the majority of humanity lacks access to basic stroke care or epilepsy medication.

Reversing the trajectory demands action on every level. Primary prevention must target the modern environment itself: stricter air-quality standards, removal of neurotoxic chemicals, urban design that encourages walking, food systems that prioritise whole foods over ultra-processed products, and workplace cultures that protect sleep and mental bandwidth. Secondary prevention requires vastly expanded screening for hypertension, diabetes, and dyslipidaemia, coupled with accessible acute stroke networks and epilepsy treatment programmes. Tertiary prevention, long the neglected stepchild, needs massive investment in rehabilitation, caregiver support, and community-based care models that preserve dignity and function.

Training must be exponentially increased. The current global output of neurologists, perhaps 6,000 per year, is laughably insufficient for a burden affecting three billion lives. Telemedicine, artificial intelligence triage, and task-sharing with trained nurses and community health workers can bridge gaps while new specialists are educated. Research must shift from boutique molecular therapies for the wealthy to affordable, scalable interventions for the masses. And society must finally abandon the stigma that surrounds brain disorders, recognising that a tremor, a seizure, or a forgotten name is no more a moral failing than a cardiac arrhythmia.

The rise of neurological disorders is the defining public-health challenge of the twenty-first century, not because it is the loudest, but because it is the most intimate. It strikes at memory, personality, agency, at everything we mean when we say "I". If we fail to respond with the urgency this demands, we will preside over a world in which longer lives are increasingly lived in confusion, dependence, and isolation. But if we choose differently, if we treat the brain with the same fierce protectiveness we have shown the heart and the immune system, we can still secure a future in which humanity's most extraordinary organ remains capable of wonder, connection, and joy for all the years we are granted. The epidemic is silent, but our answer need not be.

America first in Global health: Strategy, Selectivity, and Contradictions

By: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

The beginning of 2025 and Donald Trump's second term as US President brought abrupt changes to the global health landscape, most notably the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and steps to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO). In September this year, the administration released the America First Global Health Strategy (AFGHS), a document providing insight into the US's approach to global health. Recent initiatives signal a recalibration of US engagement toward an interest-driven, commercially-aligned approach that leverages technological innovation, public-private partnerships, and diplomacy to advance US economic priorities.

Commercial Diplomacy and Tech-Driven Health Security

A core pillar of the AFGHS is the emphasis on a commercial diplomacy agenda, which aligns health security with the advancement of US economic interests. Along with the suspension of foreign aid to multilateral health initiatives and the withdrawal from the WHO, it marks a shift toward a more transactional era in global health—one in which public-private partnerships underpin economic development, and American innovation is increasingly deployed to achieve foreign policy objectives. Co-financing commitments with partner governments and milestone-based payments underpin these public-private sector partnerships.

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In line with this approach, the US intends to use autonomous logistics, robotics, and AI to advance health goals. One of the US's first major global health funding initiatives since Trump took office in January 2025 was the announcement of a US\$150 million grant over three years to Zipline International Inc., an American autonomous delivery system company, to finance healthcare operations in five African countries (Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Cote d'Ivoire). Zipline currently operates in these five countries and was instrumental in maintaining Ghana's supply chain in the aftermath of USAID disruptions. The multimillion-dollar US State Department commitment aims to set up new Zipline hubs or permanent drone delivery infrastructure to deliver medical commodities. The collaboration is expected to increase the number of hospitals and healthcare facilities that Zipline serves by threefold and will provide greater access to blood, vaccines, medications, and other medical supplies.

The WHO and the World Economic Forum have highlighted the benefits of drones in healthcare. The delivery of medical supplies by drones creates an alternative health-system supply chain that can be extremely useful during emergencies, support patients in remote regions lacking in transport infrastructure, dramatically shorten delivery times, reduce costs, and potentially lower the environmental impact of healthcare deliveries—especially when powered by electric motors. In this case, the new Zipline partnership in Africa is poised to act as a viable alternative to Chinese-backed debt-financed infrastructure exports.

There are, however, concerns about the true impact of drone delivery and its potential to exacerbate existing fragilities in African healthcare systems. Over-reliance on drones could undermine local workforce participation, exacerbate brain drain, reduce the quality of care in underserved regions, and overlook community-defined needs that require the presence of healthcare workers. Thus, while drones hold the potential to transform healthcare systems and last-mile delivery, it is necessary to ensure that they serve the best interests of partner countries and create resilient health systems, rather than merely advancing the economic priorities of partners.

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Recalibration through PEPFAR and the Global Fund

The revamped health security agenda also reflects an effort to recalibrate US engagement in line with strategic interests. Notably, the US leveraged phar-

maceutical tariffs under national security measures to pressure countries and to incentivise domestic manufacturing, and has more recently begun leveraging existing global health platforms to advance US innovations. Considering the latter, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is increasingly being positioned as an instrument to promote US-developed health technologies. This is evident in the administration's evolving response to tackling HIV/AIDS, where the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria has been framed as a 'critical partner' and a channel for deploying American health commodities. A new partnership between PEPFAR (run by the US Department of State), the Global Fund, and Gilead Sciences—announced in September 2025—aims to deliver at least two million doses of Gilead's new HIV drug, lenacapavir, at cost to ten high-burden countries, with the first doses already reaching Eswatini and Zambia.

Further, Gilead granted royalty-free voluntary licenses to six generic drug manufacturers to enable the production and sale of affordable generic versions of the drug to 120 Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICS), including African countries. Collectively, these manoeuvres are intended to stimulate early demand for an American innovation but also to reinforce African manufacturing ecosystems that could integrate into US-led supply chains.

Interestingly, US realignment has not amounted to a complete retreat from multilateral global health platforms; instead, it is indicative of an interest-driven engagement strategy. This is underscored by Washington's US\$4.6 billion pledge to the Global Fund in early November—a figure lower than the \$6 billion pledge made by President Joe Biden in 2022 but nonetheless significant. Reaffirmation of the 1:2 matching requirement attached to the pledge positions the US to shape health finance-sharing dynamics at a time when other donors, such as the European Commission and Japan, have yet to announce their commitments. This also comes at a time when several other European countries, including the UK, are scaling back their commitments, thereby cementing the US influence on the Global Fund's architecture.

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Political Tensions Shaping Health Access

South Africa
Strained political ties between the US and South Africa have increasingly spilled over into the health domain, highlighting how foreign policy issues shape health decision-making. The suspension of PEPFAR funding as soon as Trump assumed office in January 2025 occurred against a backdrop of tensions linked to allegations of discriminatory treatment of Afrikaners by the South African government and imposition of tariffs on South African exports. Although the country—with the world's largest HIV burden—welcomed the US decision in October to allocate US\$115 million for six months under a PEPFAR Bridge Plan, it remains excluded from receiving lenacapavir doses under PEPFAR-The Global Fund-Gilead initiative. Jeremy Lewin, US Under Secretary for Foreign Assistance, Humanitarian Affairs, and Religious Freedom, stated that the US-funded doses of the American-made drug will not be supplied to South Africa and called on the country to fund its own doses. This signals a shift in which access to American health innovations is increasingly mediated by political considerations. With the US boycotting the Johannesburg-hosted G20 in November and uncertainty surrounding South Africa's invitation to the 2026 summit in Washington, concerns have grown over whether South Africa may face further exclusion from future US HIV grants.

Latin America

This selective exclusion extends beyond South Africa and reveals a broader incoherence in the AFGHS. While South Africa will not receive lenacapavir doses from the PEPFAR-The Global Fund-Gilead initiative, it will benefit from the voluntary licensing agreement Gilead has agreed to, while most of Latin America lacks access to this mechanism. Gilead agreed to grant licenses to six manufacturers, including 3 Indian companies, to enable the production and sale of affordable generic versions of the drug in 120 LMICS, including South Africa. However, the denial of a Phase III clinical trial waiver by India's Central Drug Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to Hetero Lab Ltd (an Indian generic drug manufacturer) will contribute to a delay in the availability of the generic version. This means that while South Africa will eventually access the lower-cost generic version of



lenacapavir, Latin American countries remain excluded from the initial US allocation and possibly from a clear supply of generics.

This exclusion of Latin American countries is striking, given that four of them—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru—took part in lenacapavir's clinical trials. Structural barriers now impede these countries from accessing the drug affordably, despite having contributed to its development.

This exclusion of Latin American countries is striking, given that four of them—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru—took part in lenacapavir's clinical trials. Structural barriers now impede these countries from accessing the drug affordably, despite having contributed to its development. Further, licensing restrictions prevent generic drug manufacturers from exporting the drug outside of the 120 authorised countries, exacerbating the situation. Reportedly, Gilead is exploring alternative pricing methods such as tiered pricing for Latin America, but it could be argued that the exclusion of the region is indicative of a return to the longstanding US pattern of neglecting regional partners' health needs.

The incoherence of AFGHS is highlighted by the geopolitical framing of the approach. It positions global health as a tool to counter China's influence. Yet Latin America—a region where China has considerably expanded its

health diplomacy efforts—remains largely excluded from the US's approach to addressing HIV. By excluding Latin America from voluntary licensing, the strategy exposes a core contradiction: it claims to counter China, yet its uneven implementation leaves key regions where China's influence is expanding unaddressed.

Conclusion

The AFGHS, along with the suspension of funding for critical global health activities, thus reflect a shift in the US approach to global health from developmental assistance objectives to a strategy where political, economic, and technological considerations are intertwined. Drone delivery initiatives highlight the potential for US and African partners to utilise cutting-edge technologies to improve healthcare; yet they also underscore the risks of bypassing opportunities to create resilient health systems. Selective distribution of lenacapavir illustrates how access to US-based innovations is increasingly mediated by political alignment, benefiting some countries while excluding others. Ultimately, the approach demonstrates how innovation, commercial diplomacy, and strategic multilateralism are being harnessed to serve national interests, even as the promise of equitable, globally coordinated health security remains contested. (Courtesy: ORF)

25 killed in massive blaze at nightclub in Goa

VIOLATION OF SAFETY NORMS SUSPECTED

PANAJI, Dec 7: Weekend revelry turned into a horrific tragedy as a massive fire tore through a nightclub in North Goa after midnight on Sunday, claiming 25 lives and leaving six persons injured.

Most of the deaths were caused by suffocation, as the victims got trapped on the ground floor of 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub at Arpora, 25 km from Panaji, a fire official said.

The construction was unauthorised but the demolition notice served to the club had been stayed by a higher authority, claimed a village official, as Chief Minister Pramod Sawant vowed action against officials who allowed it to operate despite the violation of safety norms.

The deceased included four tourists and 14 staff members, while the identity of the remaining seven was yet to be established, the police said. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, among others, expressed grief over the loss of lives.

A preliminary inquiry indicated that the fire started on the first floor, and due to congestion and small doors, customers could not move out. "Some of them rushed to the ground floor and got trapped there," CM Sawant said.

"We will take action against the club management and also against the officials who allowed it to operate despite flouting safety



norms," Sawant said. A First Information Report (FIR) was registered against the owner and general manager of the nightclub and they would be arrested, he added. "This is an unfortunate incident during the peak tourist season in the coastal state," the CM said, adding, "We will conduct a detailed inquiry into the incident by a magistrate and stringent action will be taken against the guilty."

While the state police initially said the blaze occurred due to a cylinder blast, some eyewitnesses claimed the fire started on the club's first floor where tourists were dancing. At least 100 persons were on the dance floor when the fire broke out, and in an attempt to escape, some of them ran downstairs to the kitchen where they got trapped along with the staff, Fatima Shaikh, a tourist from Hyderabad, told PTI.

"There was a sudden commotion as the flames started erupting. We

rushed out of the club only to see that the entire structure was up in flames," she said.

The nightclub was jam-packed as it was the weekend, she said. In no time, the entire club was engulfed in flames. "There was a temporary construction made up of palm leaves which easily caught fire," said Shaikh.

The nightclub is situated in the backwaters of the Arpora river and has a narrow entry and exit. There was no access for the fire brigades to the club because of the narrow lanes and their tankers had to be parked about 400 metres away from the spot. A senior officer from the Fire and Emergency Services told PTI that the narrow access made it difficult to reach the spot, which in turn made controlling the blaze a challenging task.

Most of the deaths were caused by suffocation as the victims remained trapped on the ground floor, he said.

Arpora-Nagoa panchayat sarparch Roshan Redkar said the club was run by Saurav Luthra, who had a dispute with his partner.

"There was a dispute between them and they had filed a complaint against each other with the panchayat. We had inspected the premises and found that they did not have the permission to construct the club," he said.

The panchayat had issued a demolition notice, which was stayed by the officials of the Directorate of Panchayats, Redkar said.

Distraught relatives and friends of the victims gathered outside the morgue of the Goa Medical College and Hospital, anxiously awaiting information about their loved ones. Some of them, hailing from a village in Jharkhand, said they would not accept the bodies and demanded that the nightclub owner arrange for the mortal remains to be transported back home.

Four persons from their village worked as helpers and cooks at the nightclub, they said.

Another group of five persons from Assam was also seen sitting outside the morgue. While they refused to talk to the media, one of them claimed that some of the fire victims were their friends.

A senior police official said that it will take a day to identify all the bodies and conduct the post-mortem, only after which the mortal remains will be handed over to their relatives. (PTI)

We could have done much more had we wanted: Rajnath Singh on Op Sindoor

LEH, Dec 7: Indian armed forces "could have done much more" during Operation Sindoor but deliberately opted for a "restrained" response and did what was necessary, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday.

Singh, who inaugurated a record 125 infrastructure projects by Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in different parts of the country, stressed that better connectivity, especially in border areas, made the successful military operation possible.

"Our continuous endeavour has been to strengthen our communication and connectivity with all border areas, including Ladakh. We are fully committed to the overall development of each border area," Singh said. The defence minister highlighted the growth in India's defence manufacturing sector, noting that production has risen from ₹ 46,000 crore in 2014 to a record ₹ 1.51 lakh crore, and the country that was import-dependent has emerged as a producer-exporter. "Just a few months ago, we witnessed how, in response to the heinous terrorist attack in Pahalgam, our armed forces executed Operation Sindoor, and the world knows what they did to the terrorists. "Of course, we could have done much more had we wanted, but our forces demonstrated not only valour but also restraint, doing only what was necessary," Singh said.

Stressing that such a massive operation was feasible due to strong connectivity, Singh said, "Our armed forces were able to deliver logistics right on time. Connectivity with the border areas was also maintained, giving Operation Sindoor its historic success."

"During Operation Sindoor, the coordination we witnessed among our armed forces, the civil administration, and the citizens of the border areas was incredible. I express my gratitude to every citizen of Ladakh as well as the border areas for extending their support to our armed forces," the defence minister said.

Operation Sindoor was launched by the Indian armed forces on May 7, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), to



avenge the April 22 Pahalgam attack in Kashmir that claimed 26 lives, mostly tourists.

The defence minister added that improved connectivity in the border areas is transforming security in multiple ways and enabling troops to operate more effectively in difficult terrains.

"Today, our soldiers stand strong in difficult terrains because they have access to roads, real-time communication systems, satellite support, surveillance networks, and logistics connectivity," Singh said.

He stressed that improved connectivity is not only strengthening security and infrastructure but also driving economic growth.

Citing the 8.2 per cent GDP expansion in the second quarter of 2025-26, Singh said stronger communication and connectivity networks have been a key enabler, supported by the government's pro-growth policies and nationwide reforms. He said India once lacked a robust system to manufacture arms and equipment domestically, but has witnessed a paradigm shift due to sustained efforts over the last decade.

"Due to our hard work in the last 10 years, our defence production, which was approximately ₹ 46,000 crore in 2014, has now grown to a record ₹ 1.51 lakh crore. "Our defence exports, which were less than ₹ 1,000 crore 10 years ago, have now reached nearly ₹ 24,000 crore," Singh said. (PTI)

Congress tried to end legacy of Patel, Ambedkar, Bose: BJP

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: The BJP on Sunday said that Jawaharlal Nehru's "reality" will come out in the open during the upcoming debate on Vande Mataram's anniversary in the Lok Sabha, as it played Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over her allegation that the ruling dispensation's main objective is to vilify the country's first prime minister.

The Congress tried to "end" the legacy of leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Subhash Chandra Bose just to keep Nehru's legacy alive, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra charged and asked the Congress parliamentary party chairperson to stop promoting the Nehru-Gandhi family.

"So far as the question of finishing Nehru's legacy is concerned, who best will finish his legacy other than the present clan of the so-called Gandhis who are out on bail in the National Herald case," the BJP MP from Puri Lok Sabha constituency told reporters here, in an apparent reference to Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha. Without naming Gandhis, Patra said that an FIR has recently been filed against them for allegedly "capturing" National Herald, which was started by Nehru.

"If they are not tarnishing the legacy of Nehru, then who else is trying to do so," Patra said, adding, "When there will be a debate on Vande Mataram in Parliament tomorrow, I feel that the reality of Nehru ji will be revealed to everyone; he will again be exposed."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will initiate the debate on the 150th anniversary of the national song, Vande Mataram, in the Lok Sabha on Monday, while Home Minister Amit Shah will begin the discussion in the Rajya Sabha on December 9. The Lok Sabha has listed 'Discussion on the 150th anniversary of national song Vande Mataram' on Monday and allocated 10 hours for the debate.

On Sonia Gandhi's accusations that a systematic attempt is being made to demolish Nehru's multifaceted legacy and rewrite history, Patra hit back, saying the BJP is only trying to ensure that due recognition is given to leaders. "The BJP is not trying to rewrite history. The BJP is trying to rectify the history and give due recognition to the people who really contributed towards the independence of this country and to the various other facets of this country," he said. "Nehru would have neither become the first prime minister of the country nor have any legacy if the voting system within the Congress had been followed in a democratic manner. Sardar Patel was sidelined," Patra charged. Reacting sharply to the Congress leader's allegation that those targeting Nehru belong to an ideology that had no role whatsoever in the country's freedom movement and the making of the Constitution, the BJP said the remark was coming from a person who did not even belong to the country. "Sonia Gandhiji, you shouldn't have raised this question... It's because the country will ask a counter question as to what role Sonia Gandhi, who was known as Antonia Maino, and her family played in India's freedom struggle," he said. (PTI)

NDA will win big in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu: Shah

AHMEDABAD, Dec 7: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the NDA will score a big victory in the upcoming elections to West Bengal and Tamil Nadu with the support of the people who have rejected the Congress and its allies in every corner of the country.

He announced that after the 2029 World Police and Fire Games and 2030 Commonwealth Games, Ahmedabad will also host the 2036 Olympics.

Shah addressed a programme of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation after inaugurating and laying the foundation stones for various projects, including three sports complexes, costing Rs 1,500 crore.

Shah said the BJP and its alliance partners have continued their winning streak by recording a two-thirds majority in the recent assembly elections in Bihar, and will record a big victory in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where elections are due next year.

"From the 2014 Lok Sabha election till 2025...this has been a time of continuous victories for the BJP. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, our leader Narendra Bhai became the Prime Minister for the third consecutive time and set a record after many decades," Shah said, adding that the Congress has been wiped out in Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi, and finally in Bihar. He took potshots at the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, over his allegations regarding the voters' list and EVMs.

Even though the BJP and NDA allies formed a government in Bihar with a two-thirds majority, Rahul Gandhi keeps faulting the EVMs and the voter list, "when the fact is that the people of the country are not accepting the Congress and its alliance partners," he said.

"From this stage today, I want to tell Mamata Banerjee and Stalinji (chief ministers of West Bengal

and Tamil Nadu, respectively) to be prepared. After Bihar, it's the NDA's turn in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu," he said. Shah said the people of India have resolved to ensure all-around development of the country in every sector and make India a great nation under the leadership of Narendra Bhai. On the contrary, the opposition parties have no leaders or a policy, and they are not accepted in any corner of the country, he said. "Let the results come, they (TMC and DMK) will be wiped out in Bengal and Tamil Nadu," Shah added.

Shah said after completing the construction of Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya and hoisting a saffron flag (atop its spire), work will soon begin for the construction of a temple dedicated to Sita Maiya in Sita-marhi, Bihar. "Narendra Bhai performed the Bhoomi Pujan (groundbreaking ceremony) of Ram Temple in Ayodhya in 2019, and the consecration ceremony in 2024. In 2025, he completed the entire task by hoisting the saffron flag on the Ayodhya temple. Jai Shriram. The Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is complete," he said.

Shah said he and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar had performed the groundbreaking ceremony for a temple dedicated to Sita Mata four months ago at her birthplace. That temple will be built at the spot by 2026, he added.

Shah said India has achieved great fame and prestige under PM Modi's leadership, leading to worldwide recognition for Indian civilisation, culture, and Sanatan Dharma. He appealed to the people of Ahmedabad to be prepared to host the 2036 Olympics. "Considering the sports facilities, coaching arrangements, infrastructure, the enthusiasm for sports among the city's youth, and accommodation facilities, the 2036 Commonwealth Games will be held in Ahmedabad." (PTI)

Cong's Tewari introduces bill in LS to free MPs from 'whip tyranny'

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: Congress MP Manish Tewari has introduced a bill in Lok Sabha that seeks to allow parliamentarians to take an independent line in voting on bills and motions other than those affecting the government's stability in a bid to free them from "whip-driven tyranny" and promote "good lawmaking".

Tewari, who introduced the private member's bill on Friday last to amend the Anti-Defection Law, said his proposed legislation seeks to flag who has primacy in a democracy - the elector who stands in the sun for hours to elect his or her representative or the political party to whose whip the representative becomes the helot of. The bill, introduced by Tewari for the third time in Lok Sabha after 2010 and 2021, seeks to give parliamentarians the freedom to toe an independent line in voting on bills and motions other than a confidence motion, no-confidence motion, adjournment motion, money bills and financial matters that could affect the stability of a government.

"This bill seeks to return conscience, constituency and common sense to the echelons of the legislature so that an elected representative actually functions as the representative of the people who elected him and not as an instrument of a whip issued by his party, transforming lawmakers into mere robotomised numbers and dogmatic ciphers responding to a division bell," Tewari told PTI.

The statement of objects and reasons of the bill state that it proposes to amend the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution with a view to provide for the following -? "a member shall incur loss of his membership only when he votes or abstains from voting in the House with regard to a confidence motion, no-confidence motion, adjournment motion, money bill or financial matters, contrary to any direction issued in this behalf by the party to which he belongs to, and in no other case." "The Chairman or the Speaker of a House shall make an announcement in the House regarding any direction issued by a political party in respect of the aforesaid motions, bill or financial matters, as soon as possible, after such direction has been communicated to him by that political party," the statement of objects and reasons of the bill said.

"While making such an announcement, the Chairman or the Speaker of House shall also specifically inform the members that the defiance of the direction issued by a political party by any member shall result in automatic cessation of his membership; and a member shall have the right to appeal against cessation of his membership to the Chairman or the Speaker, as the case may be, within a period of fifteen days from the date of such cessation and the appeal shall be disposed

of within a period of sixty days from the date of its receipt by the Chairman or the Speaker of a House," it said. Speaking about the bill, Tewari said it seeks to achieve twin objectives -? the stability of the government is not impacted and parliamentarians and legislators exercise legislative choice.

"What is happening is when Parliament assemblies at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, for government business, there is at times not even a quorum in the House. And in fact, there is an unspoken agreement between the treasury benches and the opposition not to raise the quorum issue so that if at all the House is functioning and it is not disrupted, it can continue," the Congress MP from Chandigarh said. The reason for this is that parliamentarians do not see a role for themselves in lawmaking which is one of their essential functions, he said. "So the law is made by some joint secretary in some ministry. It is brought to Parliament, a minister will read out a prepared statement explaining what it is. Then it's put to a pro forma discussion and then as a consequence of a whip-driven tyranny, those on the Treasury benches invariably vote for it and those on the opposition benches vote against it.

"So good lawmaking where members of Parliament would actually spend time looking at best practices around the world, researching legal precedent and then contributing to the proceedings, that has all become history," Tewari said. Asked whether the bill aims to remove the tyranny of the whip and promote good lawmaking, Tewari said "absolutely".

"It is important to contextualise the bill. From 1950 to 1985, Members of Parliament and members of the state legislatures were subjected to whips by their respective political parties but the whips carried no coercive consequences," he said.

"In 1967, the ugly spectre of Aaya Ram Gya Ram started when legislators were crossing the floor with impunity with one legislator in Haryana crossing the floor eight times in one day. The spectre of defections became the bane of Indian democracy. Subsequently, almost 18 years later, then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi brought the anti-defection law as the 10th Schedule to the Constitution of India," he said. "It has been 30 years, the anti-defection law, however well intended it may be, has not been able to check the menace of defection. If defections were a retail activity in the 1960s, they became a wholesale activity by the 1990s after the introduction of the anti-defection law and subsequently by the year 2000s, especially after 2014 it has become a mega mall activity where entire parties are bought and sold wholesale, lock, stock and barrel," Tewari said. (PTI)

Delhi Police nabs mastermind of pan-India forex fraud syndicate

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: The Delhi Police has arrested an alleged mastermind of a forex scam syndicate that duped traders, professionals and travel companies across multiple states, an official said on Sunday.

According to the police, the accused, Krishna Kumar Sharma (31), was wanted in a cheating case registered in Kolkata, where he had allegedly manipulated a victim on the pretext of a forex trade deal and escaped with USD 15,000 and 1,000 Euros, valued at around ₹ 14.5 lakh. "Sharma operated a highly organised cheating syndicate that lured victims with promises of lucrative forex trade, and occasionally by posing as a film industry professional. He allegedly projected himself as a film producer and arranged meetings in five-star hotels to gain the confidence of businessmen." Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Harsh Indora said in a statement.

He said members of the gang -- including Sharma's nephew Mayank, and hired associates such as bouncers and makeup artists -- staged elaborate setups to convince victims that large-scale entertainment deals were underway. "Victims were asked to hand over dollars or euros inside hotel rooms, after which the gang fled through alternate exits. The syndicate used multiple phones, frequently changed SIM cards, travelled by air immediately after committing frauds, and carried items like chilli spray and chloroform during operations," the DCP added.

An arrest warrant had been issued against Sharma by a Kolkata court on December 6, police said. Acting on inputs, on December 6, a team traced the accused to west Delhi's Uttam Nagar area and apprehended him after surveillance-based tracking, they added. (PTI)

India's rich civilisational heritage is rooted in spirituality, meditation: VP Radhakrishnan

GURUGRAM, Dec 7: Vice-President C P Radhakrishnan on Sunday emphasised India's rich civilisational heritage rooted in spirituality, meditation and inner awakening, and recalled the contributions of sages, whose 'tapasya' and meditative practices have shaped the country's timeless wisdom.

Radhakrishnan made these remarks at the launch of the silver jubilee year celebrations of the 'Om Shanti Retreat Centre (OSRC) of the Brahma Kumaris in Gurugram. Addressing the gathering, the Vice-President expressed happiness at joining the celebrations of the Centre, which was founded 24 years ago with the spiritual vision of the Brahma Kumaris and has now entered its 25th year of service. He appreciated the diversity of professionals - scientists, doctors, administrators, politicians - who are drawn to the Centre's message of peace and meditation.

Traditions such as 'Rajyoga' and 'Vipassana', he said, highlight that true strength and clarity emerge from within.



Radhakrishnan lauded the Brahma Kumaris for carrying forward this spiritual legacy and guiding millions in India and abroad towards peace and purity of mind.

He commended the Brahma Kumaris for emerging as the world's largest women-led spiritual organisation. Radhakrishnan emphasised India's rich civilisational heritage rooted in spirituality, meditation, and inner awakening.

He noted that in the 'Amrit Kaal', Prime Minister Narendra

Modi has envisioned a Viksit Bharat@2047, where economic growth is complemented by inner stability, happiness, and peace. Meditation, he said, must be embraced as an essential life skill in today's fast-paced world.

The Vice-President also appreciated the Om Shanti Retreat Centre's strong commitment to environmental sustainability and alignment with Mission LIFE - an initiative encouraging individuals to adopt pro-planet lifestyles.

He praised the Centre's green initiatives, including a 1 MW hybrid solar power plant, rainwater harvesting systems, biogas and sewage treatment plants, green kitchens, free sapling nurseries, and large-scale tree plantation under the Kalp Taru project.

He also appreciated the Brahma Kumaris' contribution to the 'Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan' and other social initiatives promoting dignity for senior citizens and the practice of Karma Yoga in all fields.

Referring to the recent inauguration of the Brahma Kumaris' annual campaign 'Rajyoga Meditation for World Unity and Trust' by President Droupadi Murmu in Lucknow, Radhakrishnan expressed confidence that the Silver Jubilee year will open new avenues of service, deeper societal partnerships, and amplified spiritual outreach.

Rao Narbir Singh, Minister of Environment & Forest and Industry & Commerce, Government of Haryana, was also present on the occasion. (PTI)

Multi-state cyber syndicate with Chinese links busted: Police

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: The Delhi Police has busted a multi-state cyber syndicate with suspected Chinese links that allegedly cheated a senior citizen of over ₹ 33 lakh through an online investment scam, an official said on Sunday.

Police said a 61-year-old man has filed a complaint stating that he had been duped in a fraudulent digital investment scheme.

"Technical analysis revealed that the money had been routed through multiple layers of beneficiary accounts, eventually landing in the bank accounts of a fake private limited company," a police officer said. The officer further said two people linked to the fictitious firm were identified as Shivam Singh from Uttar Pradesh's Faizabad and Lakshay, a resident of Delhi. "Lakshay was arrested on November 19. During interrogation, he admitted to opening a firm account on the instructions of co-accused Shubham and others. He told police he created bank accounts, procured SIM cards, and handed over bank kits for a monthly payment of ₹ 20,000," the officer said.

Police said a team carried out extensive raids in Delhi-NCR over several weeks to trace Shubham,



who kept switching SIM cards to avoid detection. He was finally arrested in Tilak Nagar on Saturday.

"The team recovered a laptop, two mobile phones, five cheque-books, and six debit cards from his possession. During questioning, Shubham disclosed the syndicate's deeper financial network, which included multiple shell companies," the officer said.

"He further claimed that he received USD\$ and sold it to a Chinese handler, creating a repeated laundering cycle," the officer added. USD\$ is a type of cryptocurrency, which is supposed to maintain a stable value pegged 1:1 to the US dollar.

Police said Shubham destroyed cheque books and broke the SIM card registered in the company's name after learning about Lakshay's arrest. Further investigation is underway. (PTI)

'Any kind of threat or intimidation to individual or party will not be tolerated'

CM Saha emphasises freedom of movement for all political parties in the state

AGARTALA, Dec 7: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha stated that any kind of threat or intimidation to an individual or political party that prevents them from visiting a particular place in the state will not be tolerated.

Every individual or political party has the right to visit or join a programme in any part of the state, he said.

"I heard threats were given not to hold any programme of the BJP. The CM, Tribal Welfare minister and BJP leaders will not be allowed to enter Barkathal area to participate in any programme. I want to say this area is nobody's personal property," Saha said on Saturday while addressing a party programme at Barkathal.

In the programme, Saha welcomed 107 families who joined the BJP in the presence of Tribal Welfare minister Bikash Debbarma and party general secretary Bipin



Debbarm.

Barkathal falls under Simna Assembly constituency, which is held by Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government in the state.

Without naming its ally (TMP), Saha said every individual and political party has the right to visit or

country's unity," he said.

Claiming that the BJP is the best party in the country, he said the party has no conflict with regional parties.

"They will do whatever they want to do. But politics that spreads confusion or division in various ways and provokes communal sentiments will never be fruitful," he said.

Saha said some people were inclined towards militancy, especially from the Janajati (tribal) section.

"Because they could not understand who their real guardian was. Some people misled them for their personal interests. Today, around 11-12 agreements have been signed in the North East because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, bringing peace. But still, efforts are being made to weaken the country," he said. (PTI)

Minister Dukam inspects Unity Mall project in Itanagar

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 7: The Minister for Commerce and Industries, IPR Nyato Dukam, inspected the under-construction Unity Mall project at Hollongi near Hollongi Airport. He expressed satisfaction with the project's progress and stated it is expected to be completed by May 2027.

Speaking to the media, the Minister highlighted the mall's strategic location and its potential benefits for local people, particularly in promoting local products. The three-story mall will feature 32 shops and a conference hall on the ground floor, 32 shops and a virtual room on the first floor and a 100-seat theatre, two food courts with six open kiosks each, a child-care room, indoor games area and other facilities including automated escalators, five staircases, four passage lifts and two service lifts on the second floor.

Additional amenities include a children's play area, artisan spaces, an open-air theatre and a swimming pool, designed to create a family-friendly shopping experience. The Minister described the project as one of the Prime Minister's dream initiatives and confirmed close monitoring to ensure high standards.

During the visit, Nyato Dukam also inspected the adjoining site



proposed for a government-sponsored 5-star hotel, initiated by the Arunachal Pradesh Industrial Development & Finance Corporation (APIDFCL). He advised the department to examine the feasibility of a convention centre at the site for official meetings and large events. Work on the hotel is expected to commence soon.

The Minister was accompanied by APIDFCL Chairman Nani Lajie, Secretary Industries Hage Tari, UD Chief Engineer Taring Darang, Executive Engineer Gyamar Tachung and other officials. The executing agency, Ganpati, presented a detailed plan outlining proposed timelines. The Minister instructed all officials to ensure timely completion while maintaining quality standards and adherence to Government of India guidelines.

The Unity Mall project covers an area of 20,235 sq m, with a sanctioned amount of ₹ 188 crore and an actual construction cost of ₹ 175.28 crore.

Chum Darang appointed child safety ambassador for East Siang Police's project Muskaan

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Dec 7: East Siang Police is proud to announce that Chum Darang, renowned actor, model, entrepreneur and one of the most admired young achievers from Arunachal Pradesh has formally joined Project Muskaan as the Child Safety Ambassador. Her induction marks a significant step in strengthening the district's commitment to child protection and community awareness.

Launched on 11 November 2025, Project Muskaan is a dedicated child safety initiative aimed at empowering school children through sensitisation on Good Touch-Bad Touch, provisions of the POCSO and JJ Acts, bullying prevention and online/cyber safety. Trained police personnel conduct weekly school visits and spread awareness on emergency reporting mechanisms. Police Complaint Boxes have also been installed in schools to ensure a confidential and accessible channel for students to seek help. As on date, the initiative has already covered 69 schools, reaching over 8,300 students and 55 schools have been equipped with Police Complaint Boxes. Regular feedback and training sessions for the police team continue to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

Chum Darang's association brings a powerful and relatable voice to Project Muskaan. As a proud daughter of Arunachal Pradesh with national recognition, she deeply resonates with children and youth across the district. Her strong public connect, particularly among school-going children and teenagers is expected to significantly amplify the outreach of the initiative. Her involvement will help encourage more reporting of concerns, strengthen awareness on child rights and inspire children to speak up with confidence. By engaging with schools, parents and the community, she will reinforce the core message that child safety is a shared responsibility. East Siang Police warmly welcome Chum Darang's commitment to supporting child safety efforts and is confident that her role as Ambassador will further enhance community participation and contribute to building a safer, more empowered environment for every child.

The program was attended by East Siang SP Pankaj Lamba, IPS, CO 5th IRBn Smty Garima, IPS, SDPO Pasighat Dr Akanksha, IPS, DySP (HQ) Ayup Boko, OC WPS Amum Panyang and other Police Personnel.

Weavers' service centre to be set up in Meghalaya: Giriraj Singh

NONGPOH, Dec 7: Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh announced that a weavers' service centre (WSC) will be set up in Meghalaya once the state government allots land, noting that the Northeast currently has only one such facility, located in Guwahati.

Speaking after inaugurating the Integrated Textile & Tourism Centre (ITTC) at Nongpoh in Ri-Bhoi district and launching 'EKTA' Meghalaya (Exhibition cum Knowledge Sharing for Textiles Advantage) on Saturday, Singh said the proposed WSC would offer design, technical and market support to weavers across the region.

He said the ITTC would function as an integrated platform for training, design development, silk processing, product diversification and textile tourism, helping artisans access national and global opportunities.

The minister said the Centre was implementing schemes to modernise weaving technologies, strengthen handloom clusters and promote natural fibres globally. Calling the Northeast the "pride of India's textile heritage", Singh said the Union government was committed to strengthening every segment of the textile value chain in the region.

Singh also announced steps to enhance farmers' income by expanding Muga sericulture.



"We discussed moving from two Muga crops to three so farmers can double their income. With best practices, one acre can yield ₹ 4-5 lakh," he said, adding that the Central Silk Board and the Meghalaya sericulture department would jointly take the initiative forward.

He noted that India is the only country producing all major varieties of silk - Muga, Tasar, Mulberry and Eri and said scaling up Muga and Eri production in Meghalaya and the Northeast could help India emerge as a global leader as other nations turn to synthetics. Union minister Pabitra Margherita highlighted the strong presence of Northeast artisans on global platforms, recalling how a weaver from a remote Meghalaya village showcased their fabric at 'BharatTex', one of the world's

largest textile events.

He said 52 per cent of India's handlooms were located in the region and announced that all textile ministers would meet in Guwahati next month to discuss a Northeast-focused textile agenda.

Meghalaya Textiles Minister Metbah Lyngdoh described the ITTC as a transformative project that would empower artisans, revive silk heritage and position Nongpoh as a textile-tourism hub. The centre, to be developed under the North East Regional Textile Promotion Scheme, has been conceived as an artisan hub, living textile museum and innovation space, Lyngdoh said. State Principal Secretary (Textiles) Frederick Kharkongor added that the facility symbolised Meghalaya's "textile renaissance". (PTI)

Ten militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 7: Security forces have arrested 10 militants belonging to different proscribed outfits for their alleged involvement in extortion in Manipur, a police statement said on Sunday.

The arrests were made in Thoubal, Kakching and Imphal West districts over the last couple of days. An active cadre of the proscribed United National Liberation Front (Koireng) outfit was arrested from Minuthong in Imphal West district on Friday.

The insurgent, identified as Hijam Marjit Singh (51) was involved in extorting truck drivers plying the Imphal-Dimapur Road. Another cadre of the outfit was also arrested from Laiphrakpam Mamang in Thoubal district the same day.

Security forces arrested two cadres of the banned KCP (Apunba) outfit from Yairipok Wangkhem area in Thoubal district on Friday. They were identified as Konsam Anao Singh (26) and Khoirem Langamba Meitei (27). An SMG carbine with two empty magazines were seized from their possession, the statement added.

Police arrested two active cadres of the banned KCP (MFL) outfit from Sekmajin Khoidum in Kakching district on Friday.

One cadre of PREPAK was arrested from Tera Urak check-point on Saturday, while another cadre of PREPAK (PRO) was arrested from Nagamapal Kangjabi Leirak in Imphal West district on Saturday.

Police arrested an active cadre of KCP (Apunba) from Lambokhong-nangkhong in Imphal West district on Saturday, while one cadre of KCP (Taibanganba) was arrested from Kakching Lamkhai in Kakching district on Thursday.

One active cadre of the proscribed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup outfit was arrested from Kairembikhok in Thoubal district on Saturday. (PTI)

Parnaik contributes to Armed Forces Flag Day fund

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Dec 7: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik (Retd.), paid tribute to the Armed Forces by adorning the Armed Forces Flag and making a generous personal contribution to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund (AFFDF). The Arunachal Pradesh Rajya Sainik Board (RSB), led by its Director-cum-Secretary, Air Commodore RD Musabi (Retd.), as part of the Armed Forces Flag Day celebration, collected contributions for the Fund at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar, on Sunday.

The Governor said that Armed Forces Flag Day serves as a powerful reminder of every citizen's duty to stand with the men and women who safeguard the nation's sovereignty. He emphasised that the welfare of soldiers, veterans and their families is a responsibility of the government and every citizen, a shared national commitment.

Nagaland Bio-Resource Mission dispatches first Zanthoxylum consignment to Dabur

KOHIMA, Dec 7: The Nagaland Bio-Resource Mission flagged off its first consignment of Zanthoxylum (Michinga/Tomar) seeds to Dabur India Limited (North East Unit), Tezpur, Assam, at a ceremony held at the SIRD Office Complex in Kohima today.

The seeds will be transported from Kohima to Dabur's North East Unit in Tezpur, Assam, marking a milestone in the commercialization of Nagaland's bio-resources.

Speaking at the event, Nagaland Chief Secretary Sentiyanger Imchen remarked that unlike many government initiatives, the programme is "a programme of substance where one can see something tangible and concrete." He highlighted that Nagaland has tremendous potential in medicinal plants and herbs and the Nagaland Bio-Resource Mission was formed to optimise and realise this economic value. Over the past decade, the mission has catalogued medicinal and aromatic plants across the state, which he said was a critical step towards commercialisation.

Commending the team for taking the initiative forward through the MoU signed with Dabur India under a buy-back arrangement, he noted that Zanthoxylum is widely grown and consumed across Nagaland, with both leaves and seeds used locally. Since the crop is already partially commercialised within the state, he said it has strong potential for scaled commercial trade.

Stressing the urgent need to increase production, Imchen stated that although Dabur had requested 10 tonnes, Nagaland could supply only 1.5 tonnes as the first consignment. Calling it "a lesson for all of us," he said the state must produce in larger volumes to attract buyers. "Nagaland grows many crops, but we are not able to produce sufficient quantities for people from outside to come and buy from us," he added.

The Chief Secretary encouraged entrepreneurs and progressive farmers to adopt scientific cultivation, ensure quality and produce sufficient quantities to meet market demands. He expressed appreciation to Dabur India for partnering with the mission and said he hoped the initiative would lead to "bigger things in the fu-



ture," including commercialisation of other plants and herbs from Nagaland.

He urged farmers, entrepreneurs and the Bio-Resource Mission to remain committed, ensure quality produce and continue taking progressive steps towards building a sustainable bio-resource economy for the state.

Head, Central Procurement and Planning Division (CPPD), Dabur India Limited, New Delhi, Narayanan Renganathan in his message shared that Dabur was established in 1884 is a 140-year-old company that began as an Ayurvedic enterprise and continues to depend heavily on medicinal herbs as its core resource. "The company's bread and butter are basically medicinal herbs," he said, adding that Dabur has grown into one of India's largest healthcare brands "mainly because of the contributions of farmers who have supplied medicinal herbs to us for the last 140 years."

He acknowledged that medicinal herb cultivation and marketing have remained largely unorganised across India for decades. However, he appreciated the recent efforts from state governments to streamline the sector. "In the last few years, we have seen that governments have taken a lot of effort in promoting medicinal herb cultivation and incorporating best practices," he noted. On Dabur's part, he shared that the company has been providing quality planting materials, farmer training and agricultural support to improve cultivation standards.

Citing an example, he said Dabur is already working closely with farmers in Arunachal Pradesh, where 10 metric tonnes of produce are being supplied to the company. He expressed optimism that

Nagaland, too, could scale up its volume. "Today we are flagging off with one truck. Soon, I wish to see one truck leaving every month, followed by one truck every week," he said. He assured farmers that Dabur would support them with planting material, training and marketing arrangements to help increase production.

Renganathan shared that the potential collaboration between Dabur and Nagaland need not be limited to medicinal herbs. He highlighted opportunities in spices, stating that Dabur consumes large quantities of spices for both its healthcare products and through Badshah Masala, a spice brand owned by the company. He also pointed to opportunities in pineapple processing, noting that although the Northeast is famous for pineapple, "there is no major processing industry here and so we are buying pineapple pulp from other places." He suggested that Dabur would be willing to partner in such initiatives if local supply and processing facilities can be developed.

Team Leader Bio-Resource Mission, Dr Kruolalie Tsürho also outlined the journey that led to Nagaland's bio-resource commercialization efforts through the Nagaland Bio-Resource Mission.

Following the flagged off program a Stakeholder Conclave was held at the SIRD Conference Hall, Kohima, where Dabur India Limited officials interacted with government departments, farmer groups and mission partners. The meeting focused on quality standards, supply-chain needs, pricing and long-term procurement plans for Zanthoxylum and other medicinal plants.

The initiative is expected to raise farmers' income and promote commercial cultivation of bio-resources across rural Nagaland, positioning the state as a potential supplier of premium herbal raw materials. With the first consignment dispatched, the Nagaland Bio-Resource Mission aims to build a sustainable value chain for indigenous species and open new livelihood opportunities. Earlier, the Chief Secretary flagged off the consignment in the presence of senior officials from Dabur India Limited, New Delhi, representatives from the state government, entrepreneurs and farmers. (NNN)

GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF JOINT DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES,
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT
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No. KA/Esstt/H/FW/Post/Advt./2025-26/1806 Dated, Diphu the 6th Dec/ 2025

Viva-Voce Interview for the post of Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical)

It is hereby informed to all concerned candidates that the written examination result of different category of Grade-III (Technical and Non-Technical) posts under the Joint Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong which was conducted on 23-11-2025 and 24-11-2025 is hereby declared. The Roll No. of eligible candidates of Grade-III (Technical & Non-Technical) for Viva-Voce Interview are given below:-

Sl. No.	Name of post	Roll Nos.
1	Health Educator	02, 05, 16, 18, 19, 22, 27, 34, 35, 40, 58, 59, 63, 64, 88, 112, 128, 133, 152, 153, 162, 180, 183, 192
2	Pharmacist	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23
3	A.N.M.	02, 04, 05, 06, 07
4	Surveillance Worker	02, 10, 12, 27, 33, 38, 40, 47, 51, 57, 63, 68, 82, 83, 87, 116, 169, 172, 179, 182, 190, 199, 257, 266, 267, 268, 277, 334, 357, 364, 397, 433, 443, 460, 489, 490, 492, 498, 500, 503, 505, 506, 508, 509, 512, 513, 515.
5	Vaccinator	06, 09, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32, 34, 35, 37, 44, 50, 53, 56, 59, 63, 76, 79, 90, 106, 139, 163, 168, 173, 179, 184, 187, 221, 266, 275, 277, 280, 281, 306, 329, 367, 396, 397, 398, 419, 431, 444, 452, 494, 505, 508, 513, 515, 516.
6	Dresser	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12

All the candidates of above-mentioned Roll No. are directed to appear for Viva-Voce Interview on 15-12-2025 at 10:00 am at the office of the Joint Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

No separate calling letter will be sent to candidates. Candidates are directed to bring all original testimonials/certificates etc. while appearing the interview.

Sd/-
Jt. Director of Health Services,
Karbi Anglong District, Diphu.
Dated, Diphu the 6th Dec /2025

Memo No. KA/Jt.DHS/Esstt/Apptt/2025-26/ 1806-A

Ashes: Aussies wicket England in 2nd test

Steve Smith's brilliance propels Australia to a 2-0 Ashes lead

BRISBANE, Dec 7: Steve Smith took a brilliant reflex catch to swing momentum just before Ben Stokes' defiant half-century ended in a rush of England wickets Sunday, then he hit the winning runs in the second cricket test to give Australia a 2-0 Ashes lead. Day 4 was a tale of two captains.

Set a target of 65 for victory after England was bowled out for 241 in the second innings, Australia raced to an eight-wicket win in 10 overs either side of a 20-minute interval as serious storms brewed to the southwest.

Jofra Archer was bowling around 150 kph (93 mph) under the lights and it only fired up Smith.

There were some theatrics involving the Australia captain and England's strike pace bowler, with Smith telling Archer to bowl faster after ducking a bouncer. He then ramped him for a boundary and hit the next ball for a six to bring up 1,000 test runs at the Gabba.

With Australia at 63-2 and needing just two runs to win, Smith hit a six to finish it and finished unbeaten on 23 from nine deliveries. Jake Weatherald was not out on 17.

Gus Atkinson took the wickets of Travis Head (22) and Marnus Labuschagne (3) as Australia chased quick runs.

Tactical issues England has been criticized for its bowling attack failing to hit the right lengths consistently, for its dropped catches and for its top-order again throwing away wickets chasing fast and furious runs.

But at least there was some encourage-



ment for a few hours on a sunny Sunday afternoon at the Gabba, where Stokes reverted to some old-school test cricket and gave England a lead, albeit a small one.

Bazball shelved England skipper Stokes curbed his attacking instincts, dispensing with Bazball and pragmatically setting about reviving England's Ashes prospects.

England had resumed Sunday at 134-6, and took an hour and 36 minutes — 18.2 overs — to erase the first-innings deficit.

The Australian attack bowled a tight line and length and mixed it up with some short-

pitch deliveries in an attempt to entice the usually aggressive England batters to have a go.

Stokes and Will Jacks (41) resisted the temptation for the entire first session, knowing that a wicket would expose the tailenders. It was a completely different approach to England's usual attack-at-all-costs mentality that has attracted wide criticism in the first two Ashes tests so far.

The seventh-wicket pair put on a 96-run stand to get England to the brink of the night session, but that ended when Smith — Aus-

tralia's stand-in captain — took a stunning one-hander diving to his left at slip off Michael Neser's bowling to dismiss Jacks.

That was the momentum changer. The slide then happened quickly, with England losing four wickets for 17 runs to be all out for 241 in its second innings and Neser finishing with a five-wicket haul.

Stokes took a single to reach his 50 from 148 balls, the second-slowest half-century of his career. It was only four balls behind the 152 he took to make 50 at Headingley in 2019, where he scored an unbeaten 135 to guide England to a stunning, unexpected, one-wicket Ashes victory.

This time, he didn't go on. The 34-year-old was caught behind by wicketkeeper Alex Carey standing up to the wickets to Neser.

Stokes twirled his bat in the air in disbelief and smacked his helmet as he strode back to the pavilion. At that stage, England was 227-8. Brendan Doggett dismissed Atkinson to make it 231-9, with Smith taking a regulation catch this time. Neser (5-42) and Smith combined to remove Brydon Carse (7) to end the innings.

Australia will see the series-opening test on Day 2 of the scheduled five. At least the second test went late into Day 4.

The series continues The third test starts Dec. 17 at the Adelaide Oval with England needing a win to have any chance of reclaiming the Ashes. The fourth test starts Boxing Day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Sydney will host the fifth test from Jan. 4. (AP)

GUWAHATI MASTERS

Saraswat clinches maiden super 100 title, Tanvi finishes runner-up



GUWAHATI, Dec 7: India's Sarskar Saraswat clinched his maiden Super 100 title after eking out a three-game victory over compatriot Mithun Manjunath in the men's singles final of the Guwahati Masters here on Sunday.

The 19-year-old from Jodhpur showcased grit and firepower while unleashing a barrage of smashes to outwit former national champion Manjunath 21-11, 17-21, 21-13 in an all-Indian final that lasted 50 minutes.

However, Tanvi Sharma, a world junior championships silver medalist, registered a runner-up finish in women's singles after losing 18-21 18-21 to Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese Taipei in the finals.

The 16-year-old from Punjab had reached the semifinals at Syed Modi International Super 300 last week. She had reached the Odisha Masters final last year and finished runner-up at this year's US Open Super 300 and the World Junior Championships as well.

Indian men's doubles pair of Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K also finished second best after losing 13-21 18-21 to Malaysia's sixth seed Kang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai in a lop-sided final.

Saraswat, who trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, has been making rapid strides on the domestic circuit. He won his maiden senior national doubles title alongside Arsh Mohammed in Bengaluru last year and had earlier claimed a junior singles crown.

The duo also finished runners-up in the under-19 event at the 31st Smit Krishna Khaitan Memorial Badminton Tournament in September last year.

Playing with his right leg heavily taped, Saraswat stayed marginally ahead at the outset before Manjunath clawed back to 7-7 in the opening game. While the rallies lacked prolonged exchanges, both players capitalised on each other's errors.

Saraswat carried a slim 11-9 lead into the interval before stretching it to 14-10 with a burst of attacking shots. Manjunath struggled to read his opponent's cross-court and down-the-line smashes as Saraswat closed to nine game points and secured out the opener comfortably.

The second game saw Saraswat continue on the offensive, racing to an 8-2 lead with his steep smashes leaving Manjunath under pressure. However, the Karnataka shuttler

staged a strong comeback, reeling off five consecutive points to level at 7-8 and edging ahead 11-10 at the interval.

Momentum then swung decisively as Manjunath overturned a deficit to grab an 18-16 advantage before Saraswat's errors handed him three game points, which he converted to force a decider.

In the third game, Saraswat came out firing, storming to a 7-0 lead with aggressive intent. Manjunath managed to close the gap briefly, but Saraswat maintained control to take an 11-5 lead at the interval.

After the restart, his ability to get under the shuttle and unleash full-blooded smashes proved decisive as he stretched the lead to 14-6 and earned eight match points.

Saraswat sealed the contest on his second opportunity with a deep return.

Saraswat was introduced to the sport by his father Raj, a former national-level singles and doubles player.

After beginning his training at the Drona Sports Academy, Saraswat went on to win the under-13 national doubles title with Tushar Suveer and later partnered Bhuvan Singh to claim the under-15 national doubles crown in Bhubaneswar in 2019.

Tanvi vs Tun

Tanvi and Tung engaged in some lively rallies, with the Indian mixing her strokes well to take an 11-8 lead at the mid-game interval. However, the Taiwanese shuttler gradually clawed her way back, drawing level at 16-16 before edging ahead 18-16.

Tanvi then struck two wayward smashes, allowing Tung to pocket the opening game.

After the change of ends, the players were locked at 5-5 and 6-6 before Tanvi once again led 11-8 at the interval, helped by a spate of unforced errors from her opponent. But Tanvi faltered soon after, committing a series of mistakes, including four shots into the net, as Tung levelled the game at 13-13.

Though Tanvi produced some impressive cross-court smashes and drops, she failed to maintain consistency and was undone by further unforced errors, enabling Tung to move ahead 17-16.

Two more miscues handed the Taiwanese shuttler three match points. Tanvi saved one with a sharp cross-court return before another shot strayed wide of the net, sealing her runner-up finish. (PTI)

Messi bests Müller, leads Inter Miami to first MLS Cup title

FORT LAUDERDALE, Dec 7: Thomas Müller has often enjoyed the upper hand in his longtime rivalry with Lionel Messi.

The German star has come out on top in seven of 10 head-to-head matchups between the two, and his teams have twice eliminated Messi and Argentina in the World Cup.

But on Saturday, in the latest marquee showdown between the two stars, it was Messi's turn.

The Argentine super star capped his third Major League Soccer season with the 47th trophy of his career, guiding Inter Miami to a 3-1 win over Müller's Vancouver Whitecaps in the MLS Cup final.

"Three years ago, I decided to come to MLS, and today we are MLS champions," Messi said in a quote distributed by MLS. "We reached the semifinals of the (CONCACAF) Champions Cup. Last year we went out early in the league and were eliminated in the first round. This year, winning MLS was one of our main objectives."

Messi set up the go-ahead goal — a feed to Rodrigo De Paul in the 72nd minute — then added another assist in stoppage time to deliver Inter Miami its first championship in franchise history.

"The team made a huge effort — it was a very long year, with many matches — and we were up to the task all season," Messi said. "This is the moment I had been waiting for, and that we, as a team, were waiting for. It's very beautiful for all of us. They deserved it." Both Messi and Müller had already secured their soccer legacies long before Saturday's match. Each is a World Cup and Champions League winner. And both are Club World Cup winners.

They arrived in MLS with similar goals: to add a league title to their already overflowing resumes. And even with little left to

prove in their careers, it was evident how much the chance to lift the MLS Cup mattered to both veterans.

Müller, who led Germany past Messi and Argentina in the 2014 World Cup final and 2010 World Cup quarterfinal, slammed his hand against the turf in frustration at one point in the match, which Vancouver trailed 1-0 after an early own goal before tying it in the 60th. During the ensuing trophy ceremony, Müller smiled, clapped and gave a thumbs up as Messi was crowned the match's most valuable player.

"When you reach out for something, it hurts even more when you don't get it," said Vancouver coach Jesper Sørensen. "I told (the team) we've never been dreamers. I think Thomas said it when he came in. We're hard workers. We worked hard today. We had the game at 1-1 where we wanted it. ... Then we made a mistake and the ball dropped for Messi. And he played a very, very good pass for Rodrigo."

For Messi, the match ended with his teammates jumping into his arms. Jordi Alba, who is retiring along with Sergio Busquets, burst into tears and fell to the ground, as the reality of going out as a champion began to sink in.

"Today something very beautiful ends for them, something to which they dedicated their whole lives," Messi said. "Now a new life begins for them. I wish them the very best, because they are two friends I care for deeply. I'm happy they can leave with this title." Messi, his new medal dangling from his neck, embraced Inter Miami co-owners Jorge Mas and David Beckham, who brought in the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner three years ago when Inter Miami was near the bottom of the league and faced a steep ascent to the top. (AP)

Experience of Rohit, Kohli important in dressing room, but youngsters were also incredible: Gambhir



VISAKHAPATNAM, Dec 7: At this moment, the Indian think tank is doing a tough balancing act of building the team around a new set of players without completely cutting ties with the old guard.

In that context, head coach Gautam Gambhir, who oversees this process, was a delighted man to see both the parties chipping in with handy contributions.

Giving heft to the senior side, Virat Kohli emerged player of the series in the ODIs against South Africa, scoring two hundreds and a fifty — a quick ride back to his incredible peaks of 2015 onwards.

Rohit Sharma helped himself to a couple of fifties to underline his fine touch.

Gambhir hoped the two stalwarts will continue to churn out such performances, which will keep the ODI outfit in good shape.

"Look, they're quality players. I've said it many times as well that they're world-class players. They are quality players in this format and their experience is really important in the dressing room," said Gambhir at the press meet after India beat SA by nine wickets to bag the one-day series 2-1.

"They're doing what they do. They've been doing it for such a long time for Indian cricket. Hopefully, they can continue doing the same, which is always going to be important come the white ball format and

the 50-over format," he added.

The rest given to seniors Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj and the injury-enforced absence of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya gave India a chance to test the skillsets of some young tyros.

Gambhir was particularly delighted with the growth of Harshit Rana as a bowling all-rounder.

"That's one of the reasons why we are trying to probably develop someone like Harshit, who can actually bat at No. 8 and contribute with a bat.

"That's how we need to find the balance, because come South Africa in two years' time (2027 ODI WC), we would be needing three proper seamers as well. And if he can continue to develop as a bowling all-rounder, it's going to give us a massive boost," he said.

Similarly, Gambhir was also impressed by the outings of seamers Arshdeep Singh and Prasad Krishna in the series.

"With Jaspreet Bumrah coming back and what we saw of Arshdeep, Prasad and Harshit in this series was incredible because all these three guys do not have a lot of experience, especially in 50-over format. They've hardly played, what, less than 15 ODIs. But they've done a fabulous job," he said. (PTI)

Gary Kirsten appointed consultant for Namibia men's team

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: World Cup winning former India head coach Gary Kirsten has been appointed consultant for Namibia's men's national teams and will work alongside head coach Craig Williams in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup.

The global showpiece is scheduled to be held in India and Sri Lanka in February-March 2026.

"It is indeed a privilege to work with Cricket Namibia. I have been thoroughly impressed with the dedication and determination to create a high-performance cricket environment," Kirsten said in a Cricket Namibia statement.

"Their new state-of-the-art cricket stadium is a testament to their commitment to making sure their national teams are competing with the best cricket countries in the world.

"Their senior men's national team is performing well, and I look forward to adding value to their preparation for the T20 World Cup in February next year."

A former South Africa opener, Kirsten took to coaching after retiring in 2004 and was appointed India's head coach in 2007. Under his tenure, India famously won the 2011 ODI World Cup.

He later served as head coach of South Africa and has worked with several teams in T20 franchise leagues around the world. Most recently, Kirsten had a brief stint as head coach of Pakistan's men's team in 2024.

"Kirsten's appointment as consultant reflects Cricket Namibia's commitment to strengthening its high-performance environment and supporting the existing coaching structure," a statement from the board said.

"His blend of international playing experience, coaching success, and passion for player development brings valuable insight and added depth to the Eagles [men's national team] setup."

Namibia have qualified for each of the last three T20 World Cups in 2021, 2022 and 2024 and are also in contention for the upcoming edition. They will be one of the three host nations for the 2026 tournament along with South Africa and Zimbabwe. (PTI)

Batting order overrated in white ball cricket: Gambhir hints at keeping chop and change policy

Gambhir acknowledges dew playing a massive role in shaping outcome of all three ODIs in series



VISAKHAPATNAM, Dec 7: Gautam Gambhir's penchant for shuffling cricketers has often come under sharp scrutiny, but the head coach insisted that "batting order is overrated" in white ball cricket, strongly hinting of him sticking to his trusted ways.

Forced by the combination, Rituraj Gaikwad, a genuine opener, had to bat at No. 4 in the just-concluded ODI series, while all-rounder Washington Sundar has been a perennial floater in the line-up.

But Gambhir had his reasons.

"I think in a one-day format, you should know the template that you want to play with. I've al-

ways believed that in white-ball cricket, batting orders are very overrated, except the opening combination," said Gambhir in the post-match press conference here after India sealed a 2-1 ODI series win over the Proteas.

"In Test cricket, obviously, you've got to have a fixed batting order, but it (batting order) is very, very overrated (in white ball formats)," he added.

To further drive in his point, he gave the example of Washington who has been wearing different hats in each match.

"See, you're talking about someone who's got 100 at Manchester, a 50 at Oval who averages,

what, 40-plus in Tests. Sometimes, you've got to look at balance as well. I know it's tough on someone like Washi, but then I think he's done an incredible job, batting at No. 3, No.5, No. 8.

"That's the kind of character he is, and that's the kind of character we want in that dressing room, who are willing to do everything for the team with a smile on his face, which me as a batter knows how tough it is," said Gambhir.

"I'm sure he's going to continue doing that and we're going to keep developing him because he's got a massive future ahead for Indian cricket," he added.

Gambhir acknowledged that dew played a massive role in shaping the outcome of all three ODIs in this series, but he was hardly surprised. "We know that during this time of the year, toss can play a massive role because when you're bowling first or when you're bowling second, there's a lot of difference. Our bowlers felt that in the first two games.

"We saw what our batters did when we were batting second. So yes, there is no doubt that there is a lot of difference. But we still had to play good cricket today," he said.

However, Gambhir felt that dew might not impact matches during the upcoming five-match T20I series. "Look, it probably won't affect T20s much because both teams will get dew, as in one-day cricket, the team that bowls first doesn't get dew at all. The team that bowls second gets a total of 50 overs of dew.

"But in T20, when the match starts at 7 o'clock, the dew is the same for the team. Maybe the team that bowls second will get a little more dew, but both teams will get it," he added. (PTI)