

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Very disappointed: US Treasury Secretary on India-EU trade deal
- Trump facing growing cultural revolt against immigration crackdown
- Accidental death report registered in plane crash that killed Ajit Pawar, 4 others in Baramati
- 18,000 job fairs across country in past year

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Assam poll dates to be announced any moment: CM ● 37,000 women self-help group members receive ₹ 10,000 each in Teok

Himanta dares Gaurav to drag him to court

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday intensified his political offensive against Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that the opposition leader and his British wife are "Pakistani agents" and openly daring Gogoi to initiate legal action, even as the BJP government showcased its flagship women-centric welfare programme in Teok Assembly constituency ahead of the Assembly elections.

"If Gaurav Gogoi has the courage, let him file a case against me," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of an official programme here, signalling an aggressive political posture as the election season draws closer.

Dismissing opposition demands for President's Rule, the chief minister said elections are due shortly and asserted that Assam's future would be decided through the democratic process, not constitutional intervention.

The remarks came amid continued



BJP attacks on Gogoi over his wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged links with Pakistan.

Sarma claimed that Gogoi and his wife were acting as "Pakistani agents" and reiterated allegations that the Congress MP had "direct links" with the neighbouring country.

Referring to the Special Investiga-

tion Team probe into alleged interference by Pakistani national Ali Tauqueer Sheikh, the chief minister said the state cabinet would take a formal decision on the future course of action on the SIT report on February 7.

Sarma claimed that Colburn was examined by SIT investigators along with 22-25 others and alleged that she

had travelled 19 times between India and Pakistan.

He further alleged that Gogoi had visited Pakistan at the invitation of its spy agency ISI, undergone training there and worked closely with the Pakistani establishment.

The chief minister also alleged that Colburn was collecting sensitive government documents, including intelligence reports, for what he described as a Pakistani climate lobby.

Responding to Gogoi's statement that he was not scared by the allegations, Sarma remarked, "Then it is good for him."

Escalating his political rhetoric, Sarma said, "In today's history, the entire Congress is Badan Barphukan, who invited outsiders and made them settle here. We will have to fight and will continue to fight," invoking the historical figure often blamed for paving the way for foreign rule in Assam. The sharp political attack coincided with a large cheque distribution programme (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt wants to protect Assam's future: CM

'Those attacking me on 'Miya' comment should read SC order'

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that those attacking him for his remarks on 'Miyas', referred disparagingly to illegal Bangladeshi Muslims, should read the Supreme Court's order mentioning the "silent and invidious demographic invasion" of the state.

The CM recently said that 'Miyas' were being 'harassed' during the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in the state, as they cannot be allowed to vote in Assam, and claimed that no Assamese -- Hindus or Muslims -- were facing any problem in the exercise. Opposition parties criticised him for this comment.

"Those who are attacking me for my remarks on 'Miya' -- a word used in Assam in the context of Bangladeshi Muslim illegal migration -- should pause and read what the Supreme Court of India itself has said about Assam," Sarma said in a post on X.

He quoted from the apex court's judgment while scrapping the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 (IMDT Act) in 2005:

"The silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geostrategically vital districts of lower Assam... The influx of illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim-majority region..."

"It will then only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made... Loss of lower Assam will sever the entire land mass of the North East from the rest of India and the rich natural resources of that region will be lost to the Nation."

The CM claimed that the highest constitutional court of the country used words like "demographic invasion" and warned of the possible loss of territory and national unity, acknowledging that reality is neither hatred nor communalism, nor is it an attack on any community.

"It is a recognition of a grave and long-standing problem that Assam has lived with for decades," Sarma said, stressing that this is not "my language, not my imagination, and not political exaggeration". Sarma asserted that the government's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam assembly's vote-on-account session to start from Feb 16



GUWAHATI, Jan 29: The last session of the current Assam assembly will begin from February 16 to table the vote-on-account budget of the state government before the elections, an official notification said on Thursday.

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya in an order said the House will assemble at 9:30 am on February 16 for the session.

A senior official of the Assam assembly told PTI that the session will continue for four days.

"A vote-on-account budget will be tabled during these four days. The detailed programme has not been finalised yet, as the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) has not met so far," he said.

The elections to 126 assembly constituencies are likely to take place in March-April this year.

At present, the ruling BJP's strength in the assembly is 64, while its allies AGP has nine MLAs, UPPL has seven and BPF has three members.

In the opposition camp, the Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India emerging as ray of hope for world: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that the country was emerging as a "ray of hope" for the world and pointed to the free trade pact with the European Union, saying it for an "ambitious India" and manufacturers should seize this opportunity to enhance capacities.

Addressing the media at the beginning of the Budget session of Parliament, Modi said India was moving rapidly on the Reform Express and thanked parliamentarians for contributing their positive energies to the unveiling of reforms.

Modi said even his critics acknowledge the government's focus on last-mile delivery and this tradition will continue with the next generation reforms.

India's democracy and demography, he said, offer great hope for the world.

"In this temple of democracy, India has the opportunity to send a message of strength, commitment to democracy, and respect for decisions taken through democratic processes -- messages welcomed and accepted globally," Modi said.

He asserted that the present time is not for disruption but for solutions, not for obstacles but for resolution.

The prime minister said the Budget session marked the culmination of the first quarter of the 21st century and the beginning of the

next quarter.

"The year has begun on a very positive note, with a confident India emerging as a ray of hope and a centre of attraction for the world," he said.

Modi said the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union at the start of this quarter reflected the bright future of India's youth and the promising directions ahead.

"This agreement is free trade for an ambitious India, for aspirational youth, and for an Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India)," he said.

The prime minister expressed firm belief that India's manufacturers will seize this opportunity to enhance their capacities.

Modi said the "mother of all deals" with the European Union has opened up a vast market and Indian goods will reach there at lower costs.

He asked industry leaders and manufacturers to guard against complacency and instead focus on quality.

Entering this open market with the best quality products will not only earn profits from buyers across 27 EU countries but also win their hearts, creating a long-lasting impact for decades, the prime minister said.

He noted that companies' brands, aligned with the nation's brand, will establish (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Miyas coming before 1951 can work in Assam: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: Noting that the government cannot stop the 'Miyas' coming before 1951 from working in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he has instructed all PWD contractors to engage at least 50 per cent indigenous youths in future projects.

He also claimed that "Bangladeshi Miyas" have started coming in the last 20-30 years after seeing the developmental works in Assam and other areas.

'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. In recent

years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance.

"If any Miya came before 1951, we cannot stop him from working here. We are also logical people. But in the last 20-30 years, Miyas have been trying to enter Assam after seeing developmental works here. If we stop them, they enter from Kolkata and Bengal," Sarma told reporters here.

If the people and government can protect the economy, the 'Miyas' do not get any chance here, he asserted. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NSCN-RI cadre surrenders in Tirap dist

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Jan 29: An insurgent belonging to the NSCN (Reformation) surrendered before security forces in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday following a coordinated operation by the Assam Rifles and the state police.

According to officials, the Khonsa Battalion of the Assam Rifles, operating under the aegis of the Inspector General Assam Rifles (North), acted on credible intelligence inputs from the 3 Corps Intelligence Branch about the presence of an active insurgent in the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Maharashtra bids a tearful adieu to Ajit Pawar

BARAMATI, Jan 29: Chants of "Ajit Dada Amar Rahe" (Ajit Dada is immortal) rent the college ground on Thursday as Maharashtra bid a final and tearful farewell to Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

The 66-year-old NCP chief, popularly known as 'Dada' (elder brother) in Baramati, was cremated with full state honours at the Vidya Pratishthan college ground, a day after he along with four others died when the chartered plane carrying them crashed on Wednesday. The college has been founded by the Pawar family.

As thousands gathered to pay their last respects, Pawar's sons, Parth and Jay, lit the funeral pyre in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president Nitin Nabin, and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Sharad Pawar, the patriarch and uncle of the departed deputy chief



minister, sat quietly watching a legacy he helped build become a memory.

Thousands of mourners gathered for Ajit Pawar's last rites chanted "Ajit Dada amar rahe", when his mortal remains, draped in the national flag, were brought from his village Katewadi to the Vidya Pratishthan ground, located 100 km

from Pune.

Ajit Pawar's cousin Supriya Sule, the NCP (SP) Lok Sabha member from Baramati, stood with his wife Sunetra Pawar, who is a Rajya Sabha member, to console her as she paid tributes to her late husband.

NCP working president and former Union minister Praful Patel

was also present.

Announcements over loudspeakers urged people to maintain silence and discipline, and to pay their respects to the late leader from their seats, calling it the greatest tribute to Ajit Pawar, known for his strict sense of discipline.

Shah, Gadkari, Nabin, Fadnavis, Union minister Ramdas Athawale, Goa CM Pramod Sawant, Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, state assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar, former Union minister Sushilkumar Shinde, and Andhra Pradesh minister Nara Lokesh were among the leaders who placed floral wreaths on Pawar's mortal remains.

Ajit Pawar's younger brother Shrinivas Pawar, sisters and other family members, including cousin Abhijit Pawar, also paid tributes to their late brother.

Former CM Ashok Chavan, state Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Usually, all types of fuels emit smoke when it is burnt'

Guwahati Refinery solely supplied smokeless fuel to Indian Army during Ops Sindoor: Official

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: The Guwahati Refinery, owned by Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), on Thursday said it exclusively supplied 19 thousand metric tonnes (TMT) of smokeless fuel to Indian armed forces during Operation Sindoor.

In an interaction with senior journalists, Guwahati Refinery (GR) executive director Sunil Kanti said the unit is one of the very few in the country which can produce Low Sulphur Low Aromatics SKO (LSLA SKO), and it was the sole unit to provide the specialised fuel to the army during Operation Sindoor.

"The Indian Army had requested us sometime back to produce a special fuel, which would not emit smoke. They wanted it to keep our



soldiers warm in extreme cold conditions. Usually, all types of fuels emit smoke when it is burnt," he said.

Kanti said that the research and development wing of Guwahati Refinery then developed LSLA SKO for the armed forces stationed in

high-altitude locations.

"During Operation Sindoor, only our refinery produced and supplied 19 TMT of LSLA SKO within record time. The product was transported to Misamari, Siliguri and Agra for further transportation to Army bases in cold border areas," he added.

From Misamari, the LSLA was sent to Arunachal Pradesh, while the product supplied to Siliguri was further transported to Sikkim, the EDcum-Refinery Head said.

"The LSLA we had sent to Agra was given to the Indian Army stationed in Ladakh region. This is a matter of pride that Guwahati Refinery played an important role during the country's defence mechanism in Operation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

APL, Deendayal Port Authority sign MoU for E-Methanol plant, strengthen green shipping push

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Jan 29: Assam Petro-Chemicals Limited (APL), a Government of Assam undertaking, on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Deendayal Port Authority, Kandla, Gujarat, for setting up an E-Methanol plant, marking a major step towards green energy transition and port-linked industrial development.

The MoU was signed in the presence of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal at a formal ceremony held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Dibrugarh.

The proposed project will focus on the production of green methanol, a low-carbon fuel that is increasingly being seen as a viable alternative for maritime shipping as well as various industrial applications.

Officials said the initiative aligns with India's national commitment to decarbonisation, adoption of clean fuels and promotion of sustainable, port-led development.

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal highlighted the growing importance of green methanol in the global shipping sector, stating that such initiatives would play a critical role in helping Indian ports transition towards cleaner and more environmentally sustainable operations.

Describing the agreement as a "strategic milestone", chief minister Sarma said the partnership would strengthen Assam's petrochemical ecosystem and position the state as an emerging player in India's green fuel economy.

He added that the collaboration reflects Assam's intent to integrate industrial growth with the national clean energy agenda.

The partnership between APL and the Deendayal Port Authority is expected to facilitate technology exchange, provide port-based logistics support and pave the way for long-term industrial collaboration.

Officials noted that the project is also likely to generate employment opportunities and spur the growth of ancillary industries in Assam.

The ceremony was attended by Assam Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah, Power, Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Minister Prasanta Phukan, Member of Parliament Rameswar Teji, Naharkatia MLA Taranga Gogoi, and other senior officials and dignitaries.

Chairman of APL Bikul Chandra Deka said the MoU reflects the company's commitment to innovation, sustainability and value addition, while contributing meaningfully to Assam's industrial and economic development.

Indian IT's future to labour dynamics, Eco Survey cautions on uncertainties as AI structures evolve

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: The Economic Survey has flagged "looming uncertainties" and "asymmetries" in the evolving AI landscape, drawing attention to issues from concentration of market power in hands of few large global frontier model builders, to labour dynamics, and all the way to questions around future of the Indian IT sector.

While India enters the AI era with notable strengths, access to cutting-edge compute infrastructure is limited and financial resources for large-scale model training remains scarce compared to global leaders, making pursuit of foundational models as the centrepiece of AI strategy "challenging", the Survey said.

Instead, it advocated a bottom-up approach to AI development saying it aligns more closely with economic realities. Value creation in AI need not be concentrated in a small number of frontier models or firms, it said speaking out in favour of application-specific, small models that are tailored to defined uses and sectoral needs.

Amid evolution of global AI structures, the survey highlighted a dangerous concentration of power where control over critical inputs - data, compute, and foundational models - is held by a few global entities.

On labour market implication, it said while the emerging evidence has provided some reassurance in the near term for economies such as India, there is no room for complacency, especially from a policymaker's perspective.

"All in all, caution is still warranted as India attempts to solve the puzzle of AI and labour. This represents one of the most considerable looming uncertainties about the technology," the Survey said.

Uncertainty also extends into the evolving structures of the global AI ecosystem, it noted.

Control over critical inputs is increasingly concentrated, the Survey said noting this raises concerns about market power, technological dependence, and the resilience of supply chains.

"It also raises a substantial question about the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center) with other officials holding copies of the Economic Survey 2025-26.

future of India's IT sector, as firms that once relied on India's comparative advantage to handle a bulk of their work may no longer need to do so."

This risks "hollowing out" India's core value proposition if adaptation lags.

"If the country is to sustain its competitive edge in IT, a comprehensive evolution is necessary, one that takes full advantage of the potential embedded in AI development and deployment," it said.

Another source of uncertainty pertains to defining a regulatory approach to AI, it said, and added countries diverge in how they design their institutions to address AI-related challenges, reflecting differing priorities.

For advanced economies, their decisions will determine how AI can be leveraged to enhance productivity in the face of labour shortages and an ageing population.

"For India, the challenge is to govern AI in a manner that is sensitive to its economic realities. The choices that India's own institutions make will play a central role in determining not only the pace of AI diffusion but also how its economic value is distributed across sectors and among people," it said.

The Survey highlighted the strategic necessity of India's own AI solution and proposed practical steps that can be taken to evolve the ecosystem. This includes AI model and application development, human capital, and how governance needs to evolve, including a framework for incentivising data localisation.

It mentioned the global AI divide, defined by sharp distinction between frontier model development and application-led development.

The capability to design and train large foundational models remains highly concentrated in the hands of a few large firms, it said adding that these firms exercise significant control over the market and exert high demand pressures on the resources necessary for AI, allowing them to erect high barriers to entry.

Add to this, the export restrictions imposed on the most advanced processors required for scaling up frontier model development, and the task ahead of India becomes extremely challenging.

"This creates a fundamental asymmetry: most countries may end up participating in AI primarily as users, while a few will shape the technology's trajectory, standards, cultural leanings, and pricing. Attempting to close this gap would involve prohibitive fiscal costs towards what is increasingly becoming an unsustainable approach to AI development," it said.

The trade-off, therefore, is between using scarce resources to chase frontier-scale models or deploying those resources more effectively towards domain-specific AI systems aligned with domestic economic priorities.

For India, the policy challenge, is not whether to adopt AI, but how to pace its diffusion so that labour augmentation can be facilitated.

"Rapid, uncalibrated deployment of AI may boost output but risks displacing segments of the workforce faster than the economy can reabsorb them. Conversely, delaying adoption to protect jobs may risk locking firms into a low productivity equilibrium," it said.

Another asymmetry lies in the ownership and governance of AI models.

India's challenge is to strike a balance between openness and stewardship, leveraging shared innovation while ensuring that the economic value created from domestic data and intellectual property accrues within India rather than being captured abroad. (PTI)

Gold investment surges to record high in 2025 amid global uncertainty

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: Global gold demand touched an all-time high in 2025 as geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainty pushed investors towards safe-haven assets, according to the World Gold Council's Full-Year 2025 Gold Demand Trends report.

The report shows that total gold demand rose to a record 5,002 tonnes last year, with a strong fourth quarter sealing what the Council described as a stellar year for the precious metal.

In value terms, annual gold demand climbed to an unprecedented USD 555 billion, driven largely by a surge in investment flows.

Global investment demand emerged as the primary driver, reaching a landmark 2,175 tonnes. Investors across markets turned to gold for diversification and stability, resulting in net inflows of 801 tonnes into gold-backed exchange-traded funds over the year.

Physical investment also remained strong, with global bar and coin demand amounting to 1,374 tonnes, valued at around USD 154 billion.

China and India played a dominant role in this segment, together accounting for more than half of global bar and coin demand.

China recorded a year-on-year increase of 28 per cent, while India saw demand rise by 17 per cent, reflecting strong investor appetite in the world's two largest consumer markets. Central banks continued to be significant buyers of gold in 2025, adding 863 tonnes to official reserves.

Although this was lower than the more than 1,000 tonnes accumulated annually over the previous three years, the official sector remained a key pillar of global demand. In contrast, jewellery demand softened in volume terms, declining 18 per cent compared to 2024 amid a sharp rise in prices.

However, the total value of jewellery demand increased by 18 per cent year-on-year to USD 172 billion, underlining gold's enduring appeal among consumers despite elevated price levels.

On the supply side, total gold supply also reached a record level.

Mine production rose to 3,672 tonnes, while recycling increased by a modest 3 per cent, remaining relatively subdued even as prices hit new highs.

Commenting on the trends, Louise Street, Senior Markets Analyst at the World Gold Council, said 2025 was marked by surging demand and rapidly rising prices as economic and geopolitical risks became a persistent feature of the global landscape. She noted that while investment demand led the rally, jewellery consumers showed resilience, and central banks remained committed to strengthening their reserves.

Street added that with instability showing little sign of easing in 2026, the momentum seen last year is likely to continue.

She pointed out that gold has already crossed USD 5,000 per ounce in the first month of the new year, reinforcing its status as a safe-haven asset in uncertain times.

India-EU FTA to anchor India as long-term semiconductor, electronics partner: IESA

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: The proposed India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will act as a major structural catalyst for India's electronics and semiconductor ecosystem, positioning the country as a trusted, scalable and geopolitically neutral global partner, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) President Ashok Chandak said.

Chandak said the FTA goes beyond viewing India as a short-term alternative in global supply chains and instead establishes it as a long-term anchor for electronics and semiconductor manufacturing. He noted that the agreement's provision to eliminate or significantly reduce duties on high-end European machinery and upstream components could substantially lower project costs for semiconductor fabs and OSAT units, as such inputs typically account for over 70 per cent of fabrication capital expenditure.

He said this cost advantage would directly enhance the global competitiveness of India's semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem. With India's electronics exports to the EU already estimated at around USD 12 billion, Chandak said preferential access to the EU's nearly USD 750-billion electronics market would provide

a strong growth runway aligned with India's ambition to significantly scale up electronics exports.

"As ECMS and OSAT projects scale up, they will create a far more conducive environment for high-value electronics and semiconductor exports from India," Chandak said, adding that the FTA would help bridge the gap between policy intent and sustained global leadership.

Beyond tariff reductions, he highlighted that harmonisation of quality standards and mutual recognition of certifications under the FTA would shorten qualification cycles and ensure India-made products meet European benchmarks from the outset.

This, he said, would enable Indian manufacturers to integrate faster into global value chains.

Chandak also said the agreement is expected to facilitate deeper cooperation between India and the EU in strategic areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence and clean technologies, further strengthening India's technological capabilities.

Describing the India-EU FTA as a transformative milestone, Chandak said it would fundamentally recalibrate India's electronics and semiconductor growth trajectory, supporting the country's goal of crossing USD 400 billion in electronics manufacturing by 2030.

Contd. from Page 1...

Himanta dares Gaurav

held at the playground of the Chatai Science and Technology Institute in Jorhat district, organised by the Pan-chayat and Rural Development Department through the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission.

At the event, Sarma distributed ₹10,000 cheques to 37,000 women self-help group members under the state's women entrepreneurship scheme. Addressing the gathering, the chief minister said the scheme reflects the BJP government's political and governance vision of empowering women as agents of social change.

He said the initiative aims to cover 30 lakh women across Assam and has already been implemented in 100 Assembly constituencies, with the remaining 26 to be completed by February.

"This is not a promise for the future but work already done," Sarma said, projecting the programme as proof of delivery ahead of the polls. Linking welfare measures with governance outcomes, Sarma said crimes against women have declined over the past five years as more women have become economically independent.

"When women step out and become financially independent, social change is inevitable," he said.

Referring to the Orunodoi scheme, he said direct benefit transfers into women's bank accounts have altered family power structures and ensured dignity for women, adding that "a society that does not respect its mothers and women can never progress." Sarma said the entrepreneurship scheme is designed to create 'Lakshmi Baiden' and not merely distribute ₹10,000. He claimed that 1,671 women from the Teok constituency have already crossed the ₹1 lakh annual income mark. Explaining the phased model, he said beneficiaries who use the initial amount productively receive an additional ₹25,000, followed by ₹50,000 in the next phase, taking total support up to ₹85,000.

He added that there has been no misuse of funds and credited women beneficiaries for their discipline and commitment. On the election outlook, the chief minister said Assembly elections in Assam are always competitive and unpredictable. "The people will decide through their votes. No one, not even God, can predict election results in advance," he remarked, adding that the government prefers elections to be held before Bohag Bihu and the poll schedule could be announced at any time. The programme was attended by Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, former MLA Rana Goswami, chairperson Lakshmi Khargaria, BJP Jorhat district president Shantanu Pujari, Deputy Commissioner Jay Shivani and other party leaders, underlining the BJP's effort to combine welfare outreach with a sharpened political campaign. (With inputs from PTI)

Govt wants to

efforts are on to protect Assam's identity, security and future, as the Supreme Court cautioned the nation to do. "Ignoring that warning would be the real injustice to Assam and to India," the CM added in the X post.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Golaghat, he said those who have come from Bangladesh call themselves 'Miya', and "I have not given them this name".

"If we say 'Miya, Miya', they can also call us 'Assamese, Assamese'; and what is the problem with that?" he said. Asked whether calling the Bengali-speaking Muslims 'Miyas' as 'undemocratic', Sarma said, "How can that be when the Supreme Court has said that an 'invasion' is taking place in Assam"?.. The only difference is that they (SC) have mentioned the word 'Muslim', and I use 'Miya' so that the Assamese Muslims do not take offence," he said. It is the Supreme Court that has presented data to show the increase of Muslim population in several districts of the state, he added.

"People wrongly think that it is Himanta Biswa Sarma who says this, but whatever I mention is on the basis of the judgement. If I am saying anything wrong, then prove me wrong," he added.

Former Congress chief ministers like Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnu Ram Medhi were more outspoken on this issue, he claimed, "Had I said even 5 per cent of what they had said, then there would be chaos".

The Congress should then say that their former chief ministers were wrong, Sarma added.

"Districts which had earlier 10 per cent Muslim population now have 60 per cent, and I have not created these data", he said. If people go to Dhurbri, Barpeta, Morigaon, Nagaon and other districts, they will realise what is happening and "there is no point in attacking me", the CM added.

Sarma on Tuesday claimed that curtailing the names of 'Miya' voters from the electoral rolls was only a preliminary step, and when the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is conducted in the state later, four to five lakh votes of Muslims from Bangladesh will be cancelled. He had said that there is no problem for Assamese people due to the SR, but the Miyas are facing hardship as they do not belong here, and notices are being sent to them to "keep them under pressure or else they will walk over our heads. The Congress can "accuse me as much as they want, but my job is to trouble the Miyas so that they cannot vote in Assam", he had said.

The opposition parties in the state have alleged that the SR exercise is being used to harass genuine citizens, mostly religious minorities, by 'BJP agents', with Form 7 especially being used to complain against bona fide voters. The Election Commission had directed the conduct of SR in Assam to prepare an error-free electoral roll. The Integrated Draft Roll was published on December 27, while the filing of claims and objections continued till January 22. The final electoral roll will be published on February 10.

The EC had ordered SR of electoral rolls in Assam as a Supreme Court-supervised exercise to verify citizenship, which is yet to be concluded. The state has separate provisions with regard to citizenship under the Citizenship Act. (PTI)

NSCN-R cadre surrenders

Khonsa area. The battalion launched an operation in close coordination with the Arunachal Pradesh Police, activating ground-level sources to track the individual.

Officials said that sustained engagement, counselling and motivation efforts eventually persuaded the insurgent to lay down arms. He was subsequently handed over to Khonsa police station for further legal formalities. The surrendered cadre has been identified as SS SGT Khunpong Wangsa, 30, a resident of Lower Kolam village in Tirap district. The Assam Rifles said the surrender reflects its continued commitment to restoring peace in insurgency-affected areas through people-centric counter-insurgency measures and close coordination with the state police and civil administration. Security forces have stepped up counter-insurgency operations across Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh in recent months following reports of increased insurgent activity in the region.

Miyas coming before

"Two months ago, I had a meeting with PWD contractors. They used to bring Bangladeshi youths from Malda, Siliguri and Jalpaiguri (in West Bengal) to engage them here as labourers. I told them that we have youths in tea gardens, adivasi people and indigenous Assamese community. A change in mentality is needed," Sarma said.

He was interacting with journalists after reviewing the progress of Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge over Brahmaputra, scheduled to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14.

"All the technical work in this bridge has been done by only Assamese youths, but there may be others in labour work. Slowly, our youths will learn. I have already told PWD contractors that 50 per cent of the labourers should be from indigenous people from next projects," the CM said. He said people had a concept that if Bangladeshi workers do not work, big-ticket construction projects cannot be implemented.

"In this big bridge, many local youths have worked. We will have to bring in Assamese youths towards work culture. In Bogibhel bridge (on Brahmaputra in Dibrugarh), 100 per cent workers were from the Mising community. In between, the atmosphere changed. However, we are trying to change that mentality slowly," Sarma said on Wednesday. Citing examples, he said that presently, many Assamese youths are working at the upcoming Jagiroad Semiconductor plant in Morigaon district. "Even our drivers are not Assamese people... Along with infrastructure, I have a dream to strengthen the Assamese community's economic backbone," said Sarma. (PTI)

Assam assembly's

strength is 26, AIUDF has 15 members and the CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator, too. (PTI)

India emerging as

new prestige. India and the European Union on Tuesday announced the conclusion of negotiations for the FTA, described as "mother of all deals", under which 93 per cent of Indian shipments will enjoy duty-free access to the 27-nation bloc, while import of luxury cars and wines from the EU will become less expensive.

The deal, concluded after negotiations spanning about two decades, will create a market of about 2 billion people across the world's fourth-largest economy, India, and the second-largest economic bloc, the EU.

The prime minister said the focus of his government has always been human-centric and for all-round development of the country. He said while India will compete with technology, absorb it, and accept its strengths, the government will never compromise on human-centric systems.

Referring to President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday, he said it was an expression of confidence of 140 crore citizens and outlined aspirations of the youth.

He also noted that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is going to table her ninth consecutive budget on Sunday and that she is the only woman finance minister in the country to achieve such a significant feat.

"This is a very glorious chapter of Indian democracy," the prime minister said. (PTI)

Maharashtra bids a

president Harshwardhan Sapkal, party leader Manikrao Thakare and actor Riteish Deshmukh also paid homage. Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) head and former CM Uddhav Thackeray and MNS chief Raj Thackeray offered floral tributes at Ajit Pawar's residence in Katewadi.

On Thursday morning, the mortal remains of Ajit Pawar were taken from the Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Hospital in Baramati, where they were kept overnight, to his village. Pawar and four other persons on board the aircraft were killed after it crashed barely 200 metres from the edge of the tabletop airstrip.

Police have registered an accidental death report (ADR) case in connection with the plane crash, an official said. The government on Wednesday released a statement detailing the sequence of events that led to the crash and Ajit Pawar's death. The aircraft was cleared for landing after a go-around due to poor visibility, but having finally received a clearance, it did not give any read-back to the ATC, and moments later burst into flames near the edge of the airstrip. The Civil Aviation Ministry on Thursday said the 'black box' (comprising the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder) of the Learjet aircraft has been recovered. (PTI)

Guwahati Refinery solely

Sindoor," he added. The LSLA contains approximately 1 parts per million (ppm) of sulphur against a permissible limit of 10 ppm, 2-3 per cent aromatics against 4 per cent upper limit and 30 mm smoke point.

The Guwahati Refinery is the country's first public sector unit, inaugurated in January 1962 with a capacity of 0.75 million metric tonne per annum (MMTPA). The capacity was enhanced to 1.2 MMTPA in 2023. Currently, the crude requirement of the refinery is distributed between those from Assam and imported ones. Assam crude constitutes around 40 per cent of GR's input, while 60 per cent are imported, Kanti said.

"Earlier, we used to get fully Assam crude. But after Numaligarh Refinery came into existence, our share reduced and there is no fixed amount. Assam crude's first priority is Digboi and Numaligarh refineries. So, we are dependent on imported crude, coming from Paradip via Barunei," he added.

The senior official also said that GR is constructing a Catalytic Reforming unit (CRU), which is expected to be commissioned by May this year. "We at present do not have the facility to produce reformate, which is a low-sulphur and high-octane-number gasoline blend component from Naphtha. This stream is required for the production of gasoline and is currently imported from other refineries," he added. (PTI)

North-East FoodTech 2026 opens in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 29: The fifth edition of North-East FoodTech 2026, the region's flagship B2B exhibition for the food, bakery and hospitality industry, opened at the Maniram Dewan Trade Centre here on Thursday, bringing together national technology providers and regional enterprises on a common business platform.

The four-day exhibition was inaugurated by Sunil Deka, Chairman of the Assam Trade Promotion Organisation, in the presence of industry stakeholders, exhibitors, hospitality professionals and representatives of trade bodies.

The event is expected to host more than 80 companies from across India and attract around 7,000 business visitors from the North-East, Eastern India and neighbouring regions.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Deka said platforms such as North-East FoodTech play a crucial role in strengthening the regional economy.

He said the food and hospitality sector has significant potential for employment generation, entrepreneurship and value addition in the North-East, and exhibitions of this nature help bridge the gap between local enterprises and national technology providers.

According to him, such interactions are vital for integrating the region more closely with India's larger food industry ecosystem.

The exhibition showcases a wide range of technologies and solutions, including food processing and packaging machinery, bakery and confectionery equipment, commercial kitchen systems, refrigeration and cold-chain infrastructure, ingredients and food safety technologies.

Hotel and Restaurant Association of Assam president Sunil Sarraf said the exhibition has become an important resource for hospitality and food service operators in the region.

He said access to modern technology and industry expertise is essential for businesses in Assam and the North-East to remain competitive, and North-East FoodTech has consistently helped bring such solutions closer to regional players.

HRAA secretary Migom Sarma said the exhibition also



Chairman of the Assam Trade Promotion Organisation, Sunil Deka, (center) cutting the ribbon to inaugurate the North-East FoodTech 2026 exhibition.

contributes to skill development and business modernisation, particularly for small and medium enterprises.

He noted that technical sessions, demonstrations and conclaves held alongside the exhibition provide valuable learning and networking opportunities for hospitality and bakery entrepreneurs looking to upgrade their operations.

Chief Convener of North-East FoodTech, Zakir Hossain, said the exhibition reflects the growing maturity of the region's food and hospitality ecosystem.

He said the platform was conceived to connect the North-East with the best food processing, bakery and hospitality technologies available nationally, and the growing response from exhibitors and buyers indicates the region's readiness for modernisation, investment and scale.

He added that the exhibition focuses not only on showcasing products but also on strengthening value chains and positioning the North-East as a serious growth market for the food industry.

A key highlight of this edition is the N-E Bakery Conclave 2026, to be held during the exhibition, featuring expert sessions on modern bakery practices, plant operations, quality standards, branding and scalability.

The event will also include culinary showcases, live baking demonstrations and competitions, with a focus on professional skills and regional flavours.

With strong participation from industry and buyers, North-East FoodTech 2026 is expected to further reinforce Guwahati's emergence as a hub for food processing, bakery and hospitality-related business activities in the region.

NAME CORRECTION

My name has been misspelt in HSLC Certificate, Registration card and in Admit Card as: AFJOL HUSSAIN, and Mothers Name as MANUWARA BEGUM. The correct spelling is, AFJAL HUSSAIN, Mothers Name MONOWARA BEGUM and my Registration No is 20TR 024031817911 and Admit Card No: UIB 10269718. I'm resident of, c/o Monowara Begum Vill-Padumpukhuri, P.O.- Kapashbari P.S.- Murajhar, Dist: Hojai (Assam)

LOST

I, Gloria Terangpi daughter of Bidya Terang mother's name Promila Kramsapi, resident of Taralango, Diphu through a police report would like to mention that, I have lost my original AHSEC Registration Card bearing Registration No. 199776-2024-25 the 20th Nov 2025 in an around Diphu Market, student of Diphu Govt. Boys Higher Secondary School, studying in Commerce.

AFFIDAVIT

I Ruksana Begum, S/W/D of Abdul Gani, Vill-Kathalpur, P.S-Hojai, Pin-782445, Dist-Hojai (Assam) That my actual and correct name is Ruksana Begum. That, in my parental land jamabandi copy under Hojai District, Lanka Mouza and Kapilpar Kismat bearing periodic Patta No.147 and Dag No.173 & 492, wherein my name has been inadvertently recorded as Rukmoni Begum instead of my actual and correct name Ruksana Begum. That, Ruksana Begum and Rukmoni Begum are same and one person.

Himanta Biswa Sarma launches multiple development projects, addresses public meeting CM distributes MMUA cheques in Demow



HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Jan 29: Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday distributed cheques of Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) worth ₹ 10,000 each among women beneficiaries at Bakchu Kochi Gaon Borbil Playground under Khelua Gaon Panchayat in Demow Constituency. The programme began with a welcome address by Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of Demow Constituency.

During the event, the Chief Minister virtually laid the foundation stones of several development projects, including the Demow Co-District Commissioner Office, improvement and upgradation of Sepon-Sunpura Road under Assam Mala 3.0, approach road from NH-37 to Sivasagar Medical College under SOPD-G and con-

struction and upgradation of Bhekuri Chapori Road-cum-Embankment along with the embankment from Sesa Tiniali to Laibeel. Addressing the public gathering, Dr Sarma spoke at length about the aims and objectives of the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan and said that Wednesday marked their 95th such meeting. He informed that a total of 31,291 beneficiaries have been identified under MMUA in Demow Constituency alone. He added that through the MMUA scheme, around 32 lakh women across Assam will be benefited.

Highlighting other welfare initiatives for women, the Chief Minister said that under the Orunodoi scheme, about 40 lakh women have already been benefited. He also mentioned the Nijut Moina scheme, under which nearly four

lakh girl students receive monthly financial assistance from the government for their education.

The Chief Minister appealed to the public to ensure the victory of sitting MLA Sushanta Borgohain in the upcoming elections. Criticising the Congress, Dr Sarma said that during its regime, welfare schemes were limited to distribution of lungis, dhotis, thread (suta), blankets (kombol) and mosquito nets (aathua), which he termed as "pancha amrit".

The programme was attended by State Education Minister and Guardian Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu, Kushal Dowari, former Thowra MLA, Topon Gogoi, former Jorhat MP, Mridul Yadav, District Commissioner of Sivasagar, Lukumoni Borah, Co-District Commissioner, along with several other dignitaries.

Later, while speaking to the media, the Chief Minister commented on the issue of SR, stating that filing complaints under the SR process is a national duty. He said that everyone in Assam is aware of the entry of Bangladeshi Miya immigrants into the state. He questioned that if no complaints are filed under the SR, it would imply that there are no foreign nationals in Assam.

Dr Sarma said that BJP workers have filed complaints against those they suspect to be foreigners so that the government and the Election Commission can examine them. He added that if no complaints are filed today and tomorrow someone claims the presence of foreigners in Assam, there would be no answer. Therefore, filing complaints under SR is a national responsibility and not limited to BJP alone, but also to other political parties and organisations.

He expressed concern that no complaints were filed by other parties, which would suggest that there are no foreigners in Assam. He asserted that BJP does not only speak but acts and that by filing over five lakh complaints, BJP workers have shown their commitment to opposing illegal foreigners. Otherwise, he said, everyone would have been legitimised. He concluded by stating that BJP has demonstrated that the Assamese people have not surrendered and that the party's karyakartas have proved that resolve.

Governor visits Rajbari under 'Governor in the Village' programme

Laxman Prasad Acharya interacts with villagers, honours local heritage protector

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 29: Assam Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya made a historic first visit to Rajbari village in Hojai on Wednesday as part of the "Governor in the Village" programme. The event was held at Tombapu-Jini Middle English School, near the historic Rajbari archaeological site, where the Governor interacted with over 1,000 villagers.

Villagers shared how government schemes such as Kisan Samman Nidhi, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and initiatives for women entrepreneurs have positively impacted their lives. Speaking to the gathering, Governor Acharya said, "Two days ago we celebrated Republic Day. Freedom fighters like Khudiram Bose, Chandrashekhar Azad and Assam's Kanaklata Barua gave their lives for us. They wanted us to have homes, schools, roads, electricity, clean water, hospitals and water for farms. Now, thanks to our Prime Minister, we have



these." He added, "Assam is growing fast in society, culture, roads and education. Let's all work together to make our village, society and country better."

During the visit, the Governor honoured H Krishna Kumar Singha at his residence with a special award under the "Our Soil-Our Heroes" initiative for his efforts in protecting the historic Rajbari site.

The programme was attended by Hojai MLA Ramkrishna Ghosh, District Commissioner Bidyut

Bikash Bhagwati, SP VV Rakesh Reddy, ADC Bonny Imam Shadab and other senior officials. Earlier in the day, the Governor participated as Chancellor in the third convocation of Rabindranath Tagore University. The event at Singha at his residence with a special award under the "Our Soil-Our Heroes" initiative for his efforts in protecting the historic Rajbari site. The programme was attended by Hojai MLA Ramkrishna Ghosh, District Commissioner Bidyut

Two arrested in cybercrime crackdown linked to Nagaon

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 29: In a significant development, the Goa Police's cybercrime unit arrested two individuals allegedly involved in cybercrime activities targeting Nagaon. The arrests were made during a five-day operation led by senior officers from the Goa Police.

The suspects have been identified as Yasmina Ahmed from Simaluguri and Achchadul Islam from Itapara. The operation was carried out with the assistance of the Nagaon Police. Reports indicate that the duo is believed to be involved in a scam amounting to ₹ 1.5 crore. The Goa Police have produced the accused in court and plan to take them to Goa for further investigation.

Jorhat police seize drugs in railway station raid

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 29: The police crackdown on drugs in Jorhat continued on Thursday with a successful raid at Jorhat Railway Station. The operation, led by the Deputy Superintendent of Police, resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of suspected drugs.

According to sources, an elderly man, Mannu Rai from Dimapur, had brought the consignment on the Janashatabdi Express, intending to sell it to a local individual, Balin Das of Jorhat.

Acting on a tip-off, the police intercepted the duo and recovered 13.49 grams of suspected drugs. Both Rai and Das were taken into custody for further investigation.

Farmers' Fair concludes in Kheroni, boosts local agriculture



HT Correspondent
KHERONI, Jan 29: The two-day Farmers' Fair and Exhibition concluded successfully in Kheroni on Thursday, aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and fostering self-reliance among local farmers.

Organised by the Department of Agriculture, West Karbi Anglong, under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), the fair provided a platform for awareness, technical training and expert consultation for the region's farming community. The event began on Wednesday with a ceremonial lamp lighting and inauguration by Bedanga Kashyap Das, Additional District Commissioner of West Karbi Anglong and Ramson Rongpi, Chairman of the Village Development Committee (Bitung-Rengthama MAC Constituency).

NFR upgrades medical infrastructure, promotes preventive healthcare

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 29: In a significant step towards strengthening healthcare delivery for railway employees and the general public, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has undertaken a series of proactive initiatives to upgrade medical infrastructure and promote preventive healthcare across its jurisdiction.

As part of these efforts, advanced medical equipment, including a steam sterilizer autoclave machine and a state-of-the-art Lasotronix Laser Diode System have been installed at the Central Hospital, Maligaon. These modern systems are expected to significantly enhance infection control measures, improve surgical precision and ensure safer, faster and more effective treatment, thereby elevating the overall standard of patient care.

Further strengthening hospital facilities, the newly renovated Male Surgical Ward at Central Hospital, Maligaon was inaugurated recently by Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager, NFR in the presence of senior railway officials. The upgraded ward features improved infrastructure and patient-centric

amenities, ensuring greater comfort and enhanced quality of care for beneficiaries.

Reinforcing its focus on preventive healthcare and community wellbeing, NFR also organised 126 multipurpose health check-up camps across its divisions. These camps provided comprehensive medical consultations, health screenings and awareness programmes, benefiting railway employees, their families and local communities, while promoting early diagnosis and healthy lifestyles.

Adding to these achievements, the Alipurduar Division earned the prestigious distinction of receiving 10 'Eat Right' Station and Campus Certificates from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). This recognition highlights the division's strong commitment to food safety, hygiene and nutritional excellence at railway stations and campuses.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect Northeast Frontier Railway's holistic and people-centric approach towards healthcare excellence, employee welfare and public service, reaffirming its commitment to safe, reliable and compassionate railway operations.

Protests over SIR continue in state

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Jan 29: Protests over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections continue in Sivasagar. Opposition parties in several states, including Assam have expressed strong objections to the process. In Sivasagar, Rajior Dal activists have been protesting the SIR for the past few weeks, alleging that it targets indigenous Assamese people. Today, a group of youths led by Parajyoti Das and Jintu Mech submitted a memorandum demanding the immediate rollback of the SIR process, alleging harassment of local residents in the name of identifying Bangladeshi infiltrators. The protesters claimed that the names of over a hundred local Muslims had been deleted, while names of Hindi-speaking migrants from other states were being added.

Jintu Mech of Asom Yuva Chatra Sanmilan said that while poll revision is acceptable, it should not discriminate against any particular community. He accused the Election Office of being politicised under BJP influence, warning that the rights of Muslims could be threatened in the future. Parajyoti Das of SC Students' Union alleged that the SIR process was prepared jointly by BJP and RSS and



called it undemocratic. He urged the Election Commission to remain impartial. The memorandum was submitted to the Returning Officer of Sivasagar, to be forwarded to the Election Commission of India.

Responding to the allegations, District Election Officer Aditi Neog told the Assam Tribune that electoral rolls have undergone 13 intensive revisions since 1952 under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the SIR 2025 was announced by the Chief Election Commissioner on October 27. She described the process as a normal constitutional obligation to ensure no genuine voter is deprived of their rights and said it is free from political bias. Refuting claims of discrimination, Neog stated

that there has been no inclusion of non-Assamese voters or deletion of Muslim names from the rolls. She said Booth Level Officers (BLOs) have been working extensively to prepare an error-free voter list, visiting households multiple times if necessary. She added that if the allegations were true, actual voters, not youths from political groups would have approached the Election Office.

Our Nagaon Correspondent adds: The Nagaon district committee of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) staged a protest rally in Nagaon town on Thursday against the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of the voter list.

The rally began at Nehrubhuli Field and concluded at the District Commissioner's office, where the party submitted a memorandum demanding the arrest of alleged fake complainants who, they claimed were conspiring to remove genuine Indian citizens from the electoral rolls.

Protesters raised slogans including "Arrest fake complainants," "Stop conspiracy to remove names from voter list," and "Election Commission should not be a puppet of BJP." AIUDF alleged that a section of complainants were attempting to target legitimate voters and called for strict action against them.

Hagrama Mohilary distributes MMUA cheques in Kokrajhar

Nearly 47,000 women SHG members benefit in Baokhungri and Parbatjhora LACs

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 29: In a major push towards women-led entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, a ceremonial distribution of cheques under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) was held on Thursday across two Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Kokrajhar district—No 4 Baokhungri and No 5 Parbatjhora. A total of 46,779 eligible women Self Help Group (SHG) members received financial assistance under the scheme.

At Puran Bazar Field under No 4 Baokhungri LAC, 24,984 women SHG members from 3,104 SHGs were benefited. This included 24,865 members covered under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) from Kokrajhar, Chapar, Salmara, Bilsapara, Dotma, Kachugaon, Gossaigaon and Debitola blocks, along with 119 SHG members covered under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) under Kokrajhar Municipality. Meanwhile, 21,795 eligible women SHG members received cheques at



Ghoramara Field under No 5 Parbatjhora LAC.

Addressing the gathering, BTC Chief and chief guest Hagrama Mohilary appreciated the initiative of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, stating that the scheme reflects the Chief Minister's vision of inclusive development across all communities. He said MMUA ensures that women from every section of society, irrespective of community or background are equally empowered and uplifted.

Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, Public Health Engineering Department, Assam in his address described MMUA as the first step towards the Chief Minister's vision of making every SHG member a "Lakhpati Baideu". He urged the beneficiaries to utilise the initial assistance of ₹ 10,000 judiciously, as successful utilisation would make them eligible for enhanced assistance of ₹ 25,000 in the next phase, followed by ₹ 50,000 in Phase-III based on performance. He informed that the



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 29: Her Majesty Gyalum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wanchuck, Queen Mother of the Kingdom of Bhutan, has been selected for the prestigious Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award 2025. The announcement was made by Dr Bishnu Prasad Brahma, Power of Attorney of the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT).

The award, instituted in memory of visionary leader Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, recognises individuals who have rendered exemplary service to humanity, transcending boundaries of region, nation and identity. The 2025 award carries a cash prize of ₹ 2,00,000, along with a citation and a memento.

The award presentation ceremony is scheduled for February 3, 2026, at the Jhwla Nileswar Brahma Auditorium, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar. Assam Governor His Excellency Laxman Prasad Acharya will grace the occasion as the Chief Guest, while Sjt Hagrama Mohilary, Chief of the Bodoland Territorial Council

(BTC) will attend as Special Guest.

Her Majesty Gyalum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wanchuck is internationally revered for her compassionate leadership and lifelong humanitarian work. As the founding president of the Tarayana Foundation, she has championed holistic rural development, focusing on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, education, healthcare and cultural preservation in Bhutan's remotest regions. She is also a distinguished author and patron of the arts, contributing significantly to Bhutan's cultural and literary landscape.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.
-e. e. cummings

Sad demise of Ajit Pawar

NCP leader Ajit Pawar's sad demise in a plane crash on Wednesday, January 28 has created such a vacuum in Maharashtra politics that no single politician could fill in the near future. A prospect of political reconfiguration that was already indicated by the election of municipal corporations held on January 15 and its outcome, will soon be taking place, since nature abhors a vacuum, as the ancient principle suggests. Maharashtra will be undergoing a politics of new alliances, identities, and regional bargaining phase. During the recent Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election in Mumbai, the richest corporation in India, it has already been seen that NCP (Ajit Pawar) had contested on its own breaking the Mahayuti rank, and joined hands with NCP (Sharad Pawar) in Pune. The political drift was obvious. It had softened the respective stance of both the splinter groups of the former NCP. Now after death of Ajit Pawar, several scenarios have emerged regarding the fate of the NCP (Ajit Pawar), one of them is that many of the leaders from his party may return to the NCP (Sharad Pawar) camp, and it is one of the possibilities that we can see a united NCP again, which was broken by Ajit Pawar in 2023. He then broke from his uncle's NCP and joined a new governing coalition of BJP-Shiv Sena (Shinde) and became deputy chief minister of the state.

Since NCP (Sharad Pawar) naturally retains moral authority, national stature, and soft power, many of the NCP (Ajit Pawar) camp will be attracted towards it in the absence of a leader having strong administrative grip on the party. Ajit Pawar himself joined hands with NCP (Sharad Pawar) in Pune in the municipal corporation elections, therefore doing the same thing by other party member is not ruled out. Nevertheless, if NCP (Ajit Pawar) survives as a political party, it will survive as only a coalition broker party, or a platform for regional leaders, without a strong leader like Ajit Pawar. The party will be considerably weakened and there will be poaching activity from other political parties like BJP and Shiv Sena (Shinde). Still, many would like merger of the both NCP factions to become a united NCP again. All these means the NCP (Ajit Pawar) rank and file are going to be like feeder poor for parties and alliances, or a week political party if it survives, or both.

Pawar's politics in Maharashtra is at a crossroad. Sharad Pawar is still most respectable among the their supporters, but then there are three younger leaders - Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule, Ajit Pawar's wife, or his sons Parth Pawar and Jay Pawar. Who will now run NCP (Ajit Pawar) and how - is buried in the future, along with the political reconfiguration of the Maharashtra politics.

Ajit Pawar's legacy: Power, controversy, and an era that ended too soon

This news is not merely about the passing away of an individual; it marks the sudden halt of an entire era in Maharashtra's politics. When the confirmation came on the morning of January 28, 2026, that Deputy Chief Minister Ajantrao Pawar had lost his life in a tragic plane crash in Baramati, the moment plunged not only the Pawar family but the whole of Maharashtra—and indeed the nation—into deep shock and mourning. A leader regarded as a symbol of authority, experience, and decisive governance departed abruptly, leaving behind a vast vacuum in power, administration, and political equilibrium. A promising political journey that shaped Maharashtra's destiny and influenced national thought came to an untimely standstill. His death is not only an irreparable loss for Maharashtra but a profound blow to nationalist political thought and to the Nationalist Congress Party's ideological foundations. The cooperative movement, too, has suffered a severe setback with his passing.

Ajit Pawar's life was not a smooth tale of royal political inheritance. Born on July 22, 1959, in the Deoli Pravara region of Ahmednagar district, he experienced life through struggle and hardship. His father, Anantrao Pawar, was associated with the film industry and worked at Rajkamal Studios, yet the family's circumstances remained modest. His formal education was limited to the secondary level, but the school of life taught him lessons that even prestigious academic institutions often fail to impart. Perhaps this is why Ajit Pawar's politics did not emerge from textbooks but from the soil itself—rooted in farmers' suffering, the strength of cooperative institutions, and a deep understanding of the rural economy.



standing of the rural economy.

His entry into politics was not from a grand stage but from the laboratory of the cooperative movement. In 1982, at just twenty years of age, he contested an election for a sugar cooperative. This was a period when cooperative institutions formed the backbone of political power in Maharashtra. Ajantrao Pawar quickly grasped that to command rural Maharashtra, one had to connect it with banks, sugar mills, irrigation, and electricity. This insight later became the defining strength of his political identity.

The year 1991 proved decisive in his political career. Becoming President of the Pune District Central Cooperative Bank, he demonstrated exceptional competence in financial administration and organizational leadership. Remaining in this position for sixteen years spoke volumes about his credibility and grip over the system. In the same year, he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Baramati, a testament to his rising stature, yet he re-

linquished the seat for his uncle, Sharad Pawar. This decision reflected not only familial loyalty but remarkable political foresight. His subsequent entry into the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and his repeated victories from Baramati established a mass base that very few could challenge.

Ajit Pawar's greatest strength in the corridors of power was his firm administrative command. Handling complex and sensitive departments such as agriculture, horticulture, power, and water resources, he experienced both development and controversy firsthand. As Water Resources Minister, his name became closely associated with the Krishna Valley and Konkan irrigation projects. While these initiatives brought water and hope to farmers, they also burdened him with criticism and allegations. Yet he remained among those leaders remembered not for files, but for decisions. His journey as Deputy Chief Minister is a unique chapter in Maharashtra's political history. Reaching

this position six times was not a coincidence, but the outcome of power balance, coalition politics, and organizational strength. He was often seen as the government's crisis-manager. His mastery over budgets, financial management, and legislative strategy was such that even political opponents could not ignore his experience. He was labeled ambitious, sometimes harsh and blunt, but the truth is that he viewed governance through the prism of decisions, not emotions.

Controversies were an inseparable part of his political life—from irrigation allegations to sharp public remarks. His statement, "If there is no water in the dam, should we fill it by urinating?" drew intense criticism. He apologized, offered clarifications, and gradually rose above these storms to return to the pinnacle of power. This resilience was testimony to his political vitality; criticism and allegations could slow him down, but never stop him. Speculation surrounding his relationship with Sharad Pawar was constant—differences, distances, and rumors of separate political paths. Yet Ajantrao Pawar consistently described himself as Sharad Pawar's follower. The title "Dada" bestowed upon him was not merely familial; it evolved into a political brand that inspired trust and leadership among his supporters. He was an organizer and an administrator, a strategist and a grassroots leader—giving true substance and vitality to the honorific "Dada." His untimely demise is a cruel irony. A leader who soared for decades in the realm of power saw his life's journey end in a plane crash. It is said that until shortly before the accident, he remained fully active—engaged in planning, meetings, and political calculations. This

sudden death underlines the uncertainty inherent in both power and life.

Ajit Pawar's personality and legacy emerge in multiple forms—as a successful politician, social architect, champion of rural upliftment, stalwart of the cooperative movement, and a capable administrator. His life did not flow in a single direction; it touched diverse paths and dimensions. It is difficult to imagine any significant sphere remaining untouched by his influence. The windows of his life were always open to offering society and the nation a new perspective. Beneath his apparent simplicity lay a daring, instinctive personality deeply invested in political responsibility.

Ajit Pawar may no longer be among us, but through the strength of his combative political life, he will continue to shimmer like a star in the sky of Indian politics and nationalist thought. As Maharashtra and the nation mourn his passing, Ajantrao Pawar cannot be assessed solely on scales of praise or criticism. He was surrounded by controversies, yet not defined by them. His politics was tough, but enriched by depth of experience. He believed more in influence than in popularity. Perhaps this is why his departure has left behind a silence in Maharashtra's politics that words struggle to capture. His life teaches that politics is not driven by slogans and speeches alone, but by decisions, risks, and responsibility. His passing is both a warning and a remembrance—power is transient, but experience and impact endure. Known as "Dada" in Maharashtra's political landscape, Ajantrao Pawar has now become part of history, yet his shadow will continue to shape the state's politics for years to come. (The author is a journalist & a columnist)

The threat of Mia population explosion & infiltrators in Assam

By: Diganta Barooah

It is a natural process for a country's population to grow over time. However, if the population grows at an excessive rate, it only hampers the development of the country's economy, education, health, transportation and other sectors.

The people of a country are considered as a human resource as long as every citizen contributes to the overall development of the country and makes it a developed country. The same is true of a state. In the context of our Assam, the increasing population of Assam has only deteriorated the overall quality of life. As of 2011-12, 31.98% of the population in Assam lives below the poverty line as against the all-India rate of 21.92%. This means that one-third of the people of Assam are deprived of essential facilities including health, education, transportation, drinking water and sanitation. The population of Assam was only 80.29 lakh in 1951 and this population has increased to about 36.4 million today. The density of population per square km has increased accordingly. According to 2011 data, our country has a population of 382 people per square kilometre; there are 398 people living per square km in our state. So it can be said that there is a kind of population explosion in Assam.

The rapidly growing Muslim population is the main reason for the population growth in Assam. The Muslim population in Assam was only 9.22% in 1901 and it gradually increased to 38% in 2021. During this period, the Hindu population declined from 90.20% to about 57%. The population of Muslims is increasing at a high rate. The main reason is the infiltration of people from our neighboring country Bangladesh. They do not practise birth control and think children are a gift from Allah. In addition, child marriage and polygamy are widespread among them. In fact, the population explosion in Assam is caused by these immigrants.

According to the 2011 data released by the Department of Economics and Statistics of the Government of Assam, nine districts of Assam have become Muslim majority. These districts are Dhubri (79.67%), Goalpara (57.52%), Barpeta (70.74%), Nagaon (55.36%), Morigaon (52.56%), Karimganj (56.36%), Hailakandi (60.31%), Darang (64.34%) and Bongaigaon (50.22%). In 2015, the two newly created districts, South Shalmar-Mankachar and Hojai, had a Muslim population of 95.19% and 53.65% respectively as it has been published in a report.

There are currently 11 Muslim-populated districts in Assam. The population growth rate of these districts is always higher than the overall growth rate of the state, especially compared to other districts. The high population growth rates of these Muslim-dominated districts in both the 1991-2001 and 2001-2011 decades again prove that the population growth rate of Muslims in Assam is higher than that of Hindus. This will become even clearer if a census is conducted in Assam on the basis of religion and district basis.

The population of Islamic immigrants is increasing rapidly while the population of Hindus is declining. The current Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma, believes that by 2041, the number of Hindus and Mus-



In the context of our Assam, the increasing population of Assam has only deteriorated the overall quality of life. As of 2011-12, 31.98% of the population in Assam lives below the poverty line as against the all-India rate of 21.92%. This means that one-third of the people of Assam are deprived of essential facilities including health, education, transportation, drinking water and sanitation.

lims in Assam will be equal and in a few years Assam will become an Islamic state and the second Bangladesh.

It can be seen that the majority of people involved in murder, violence, theft, robbery, rapes, looting etc. are Muslims of Bangladeshi origin whom we commonly call 'Mia'. Some of these people even identify themselves as Hindus and marry Hindu girls and eventually commit torture. This is known as 'Love Jihad'.

What is most frightening is that many of these 'Mias' are linked to various militant groups in Pakistan and Bangladesh such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (Let), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Al-Qaeda (AQ). They have always threatened the security and integrity of the country.

There is no point in confusing or politicizing whose fault it is that Bangladeshis have settled in Assam. Therefore, it is necessary to think about protecting the indigenous people of Assam from this issue of infiltration of the Mias from Bangladesh and to safeguard the existence of the traditional Assamese society in the present situation from the population explosion of the illiterate Muslims.

A series of strict measures and constitutional measures must be taken to ensure the sovereignty and security of the indigenous people of

Assam. If others cannot, it is the first and foremost responsibility of the State and Central Governments to deport the most recently arrived foreigners. There is no need to talk about the Assam Accord or any other agreement.

Secondly, at any cost immigration must be stopped. The government must seal the interstate border in Assam. Provision of Passports across the Indian border (Inner Line Permit) must be regulated and finally like the infiltration of a single Pakistani is not allowed across the Indo-Pakistan border, likewise the India-Bangladesh border should be sealed so that no infiltration happen in future. Such arrangements should be made so that Indian Army personnel guard the Indo-Bangladesh borders day and night.

Thirdly, National Population Policy 2000 must be implemented strictly and compulsorily in those Districts of Assam where Muslims are in majority. It should be made compulsory that no one can have more than two children. Punishment should be taken against those who give birth to more than two children. In addition, such people should be deprived of government facilities, jobs, participation in elections, etc.

In addition to stopping child marriage and polygamy, the age of marriage for girls should be raised to 21 years.

It should also be made compulsory that those who are able to write and speak Assamese are only eligible for all posts at any level in Government Services in Assam so that only native Assamese people can be recruited in government jobs.

Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to protect the nation, land, foundation, language and culture of the indigenous Assamese people. We must also abandon laziness, build a work culture and be tough against the immigrants.

Finally it is the responsibility of the indigenous Assamese people, various political parties, organizations and the government to work together and take realistic action in the interest of saving the indigenous people of our state Assam from the threat of population explosion of Mia community in Assam and this is the call of the present time. (The author is the Assistant Development Officer Transformation and Development Department Government of Assam)

The untimely demise of leaders in plane crashes: Coincidence, selection bias, or a deep systemic weakness?

By: Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

India's political journey has repeatedly been marred by aerial accidents. The Baramati plane crash of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajantrao Pawar once again shocked the entire nation. The loss of five lives has created a political vacuum that cannot be filled by mere condolences. This is not the first case—examples like Sanjay Gandhi (1980), Madhavrao Scindia (2001), and Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (2009) demonstrate that the untimely deaths of high-ranking leaders repeatedly raise the same question: Are plane crashes mere coincidence, the result of a conspiracy, or a structural weakness in our political travel culture and aviation system?

In Indian politics, air travel is no longer a convenience, but a lifeline. On average, a candidate attends 120-150 meetings during an election cycle; 40-50 flights a week are not uncommon. In a large and politically active state like Maharashtra, constant travel between Baramati, Mumbai, and Delhi is a necessity. Chartered planes and helicopters have become the preferred choice for politicians.

But these options are also the most risky. Statistics show that the accident rate for private and chartered aircraft is several times higher than that of commercial airlines. The reasons are obvious—limited pilot experience, the use of older aircraft, excessive dependence on weather, temporary helipads, and relatively lax DGCA oversight.

Whether it's Ajantrao Pawar's accident, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's helicopter crash, or Madhavrao Scindia's chartered plane—preliminary and final investigations repeatedly point to pilot error, technical failure, or adverse weather. It's also clear that politicians avoid trains or commercial flights because they don't match the pace of election campaigning.

This risk multiplies during election season. Hundreds of helicopters and chartered aircraft were hired during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. In many cases, maintenance certificates, pilot rest norms, and helipad standards were ig-

nored. The so-called "political packages" offered by political parties—low prices, outdated models—further increase the risk.

A major question is: are only politicians really killed in plane crashes? The answer is no. Hundreds of small plane and helicopter accidents occur in India every year, killing civilians as well. But the media's focus remains on high-profile figures. This is selection bias—what is visible appears to be the truth.

This trend is evident globally. Air crashes involving John F. Kennedy Jr. in the United States, President Lech Kaczynski of Poland in Europe, and heads of state in Africa and Russia—everywhere, conspiracy theories come first, facts second. International aviation statistics show that most accidents in general aviation are the result of human error and system failures. Unfortunately, media sensationalism transforms these accidents into "political conspiracies." This not only hampers the investigation process but also deepens distrust in democratic institutions.

The problem is fundamentally systemic. The DGCA has limited resources to monitor chartered flights. Election Commission guidelines exist, but enforcement is weak. Pilot training, weather forecasting systems, and temporary helipads—all three—need serious improvements.

It's time to break the tradition of mourning and forgetting. To achieve this, concrete and practical steps are essential. First, a dedicated air wing should be developed for politicians, similar to the Indian Air Force's VVIP fleet, equipped with modern helicopters, advanced GPS-radar systems, and highly trained pilots. Second, strict national standards should be set for chartered aircraft and helicopters used during election season, and their real-time digital tracking should be made mandatory, ensuring no security compromises. Third, to minimize excessive travel by politicians, virtual rallies, digital communications, and technology-based campaigning should be encouraged, reducing the burden of unnecessary flights.

Fourth, a zero-tolerance policy should be adopted for pilot training, pre-flight technical inspections, and aircraft maintenance, and strict penalties should be imposed on private companies violating these rules. Finally, clear guidelines for responsible reporting should be established for the media to curb the tendency to turn every plane crash into a conspiracy.

The untimely death of leaders isn't just a personal tragedy—it also undermines the balance of power, policy continuity, and democratic trust. Ajantrao Pawar, YSR, or Sanjay Gandhi—every tragedy serves as a warning. Plane crashes aren't conspiracies, but the result of negligence, pressure, and weak governance. If reforms aren't made today, tomorrow will only bring a repeat of the tragedy.

Democracy's pilots need safe skies—this isn't just an emotional slogan, but a concrete demand of the times. Recurrent plane and helicopter accidents have made it clear that the problem isn't limited to a single leader, a single party, or a single state, but rather lies within a deep structural weakness in our political travel culture and aviation system. When representatives of democracy are forced to travel by unsafe means, the consequences are felt not just by a single family or party, but by the entire governance system.

The untimely death of leaders creates a power vacuum, instability in policy, and a breakdown in public trust. Furthermore, rumors of conspiracy theories further weaken democratic institutions. Therefore, instead of expressing condolences and moving on after every tragedy, concrete reforms must be combined with political will. Laxity in safety standards, poor monitoring, and hasty flights can prove fatal for any democracy.

If India truly wants to progress towards a strong and stable democracy, it must prioritize the safety of its representatives. Reforms today will prevent a repeat of tragedy tomorrow. Safe skies are essential not just for leaders, but for the continued flight of democracy. (The author is a poet and social thinker)

Pakistan and Bangladesh in T20 World Cup turmoil

By: Satyabrata Borah

The build-up to the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup has turned unexpectedly tense due to serious issues surrounding the participation of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Instead of excitement and preparation, the conversation has been dominated by uncertainty, political sensitivities, security concerns, administrative decisions, and the wider question of how international cricket should respond when sport and geopolitics collide. The situation has highlighted deep structural challenges within global cricket governance and has placed the International Cricket Council under intense scrutiny.

The tournament, scheduled to be hosted jointly by India and Sri Lanka, was meant to symbolize cooperation and unity in world cricket. However, Bangladesh's participation became controversial when concerns were raised over playing matches in India. Officials from the Bangladesh Cricket Board expressed unease regarding player safety, political climate, and diplomatic discomfort. While no direct threat was officially identified, the board argued that perception, player confidence, and long-term relations mattered just as much as technical security assessments. Bangladesh therefore requested that their matches be shifted entirely to Sri Lanka, the co-host nation.

This request placed the ICC in a difficult position. From an administrative standpoint, the tournament schedule had already been finalized, venues booked, broadcasters contracted, and logistical planning completed. Allowing one team to relocate all its matches could set a precedent that other teams might later invoke, potentially destabilizing future ICC events. After internal reviews and security evaluations, the ICC rejected Bangladesh's request and insisted that the team must play according to the original schedule if it wished to participate.

The rejection triggered a crisis within Bangladeshi cricket. The Bangladesh Cricket Board faced intense internal debate, public pressure, and political attention. Some officials argued that participation under unwilling circumstances would affect player morale and national dignity. Others believed withdrawal would be disastrous for Bangladesh cricket, both competitively and financially.

Ultimately, the board made the painful decision not to participate in the tournament under the existing conditions, effectively withdrawing from the upcoming T20 World Cup.

This marked a historic and troubling moment. Bangladesh had qualified for every edition of the T20 World Cup since the tournament's inception. Their absence not only disappointed fans but also raised uncomfortable questions about fairness, consistency, and the ICC's flexibility when dealing with member nations' concerns. Critics argued that similar accommodations had been made in the past for other teams under different circumstances, while supporters of the ICC insisted that rules must apply equally to all.



Bangladesh's withdrawal immediately had a serious effect across the cricketing world, particularly in Pakistan. The Pakistan Cricket Board publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the ICC's handling of the situation. Pakistani officials framed Bangladesh's exclusion as a governance failure and warned that ignoring the concerns of full member nations could erode trust in the global system. The PCB chairman openly questioned whether Pakistan should continue unquestioned participation if member boards felt unheard.

These statements sparked speculation that Pakistan might boycott the tournament in solidarity with Bangladesh or as a protest against

what it perceived as inconsistent ICC decision-making. While Pakistan had already begun preparations and named a probable squad, uncertainty quickly grew. Officials suggested that the final decision would involve not only the cricket board but also the national government, adding a political layer to the crisis.

The potential withdrawal of Pakistan would have enormous consequences. Pakistan is one of the most followed teams in world cricket, and its participation is central to the commercial and competitive value of ICC tournaments. Matches involving Pakistan, especially against India, draw massive global audiences and generate significant revenue. Any disruption to Pakistan's participation would

ment integrity and contractual commitments. On the other, it faced criticism for appearing inflexible and insensitive to member concerns. Reports emerged that contingency plans were being quietly discussed, including keeping Bangladesh on standby should Pakistan withdraw, though no official confirmation was made. Such possibilities highlighted how fragile the tournament structure had become.

The controversy also placed the host nations under indirect pressure. India, as the primary host, maintained that it could guarantee full security and fair treatment to all teams. Sri Lanka, the co-host, remained largely silent but was seen as a potential neutral alternative had Bangladesh's request been accepted.

larily difficult for players. Professional cricketers train for years for the opportunity to represent their country at a World Cup. Decisions made in boardrooms can instantly remove that opportunity, regardless of form or effort. Bangladeshi players now face a long period without the exposure and experience that a T20 World Cup provides, while Pakistani players wait anxiously for clarity on whether they will compete at all.

Fans have been deeply affected also. In Bangladesh, disappointment has turned into frustration and anger, with many feeling their team has been unfairly pushed aside. In Pakistan, supporters are torn between national pride and the desire to see their team compete on the biggest stage. Globally, cricket followers worry about what such disputes mean for the future of international tournaments.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup is one of the pillars of international cricket, both financially and culturally. Disruptions of this scale threaten the sport's stability and reputation. If major teams withdraw or are excluded, questions will inevitably arise about governance reform, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and the balance of power within the ICC.

Bangladesh must assess how to rebuild trust and ensure future participation does not face similar obstacles. Pakistan must decide whether protest or participation best serves its cricketing future. The ICC must reflect on whether its current structures are capable of handling the realities of modern international sport, where security, politics, and perception matter as much as schedules and rankings.

The controversy surrounding Pakistan and Bangladesh's participation is about more than one tournament. It is about whose voices are heard, how concerns are addressed, and whether international cricket can truly claim to operate on principles of fairness and unity. The outcome of this crisis will shape not only the upcoming T20 World Cup but also the future relationship between cricket's governing body and its member nations.

What should have been a celebration of global cricket has become a test of governance, diplomacy, and trust. Whether the sport emerges stronger or more divided will depend on how these challenges are resolved in the days ahead.

Energy efficiency in India: Progress made, challenges ahead



By: Radhakrishnan Dutta

Energy efficiency lies at the core of India's goal of net-zero emissions by 2070. Subsection 7.3 of UN's SDG goals stresses on energy efficiency for a sustainable future. In the NDCs India submitted to the UNFCCC in 2015, achieving 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel sources before 2030 was a key target. This underlines the importance of energy efficiency in battling climate change both nationally and globally.

Current State of Energy Utilisation in India: As the SDG target year of 2030 approaches, India still largely relies on conventional energy sources. Data from the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation highlights the steady growth of energy consumption since FY 2014-15. Total final consumption of energy surged by 38% between FY 2014-15 and FY 2023-24. Per capita energy consumption rose to 18,410 Mega Joules/ Person from 14,682 Mega Joules/ Person back in 2014-15. These data show the growth in energy demand in India over the past decade. While it indicates an uptick in economic activities, GHG-emitting resources like coal still remain the largest source for energy production. MoSPI's data show that coal provided nearly four-fifth of India's primary energy supply in 2023-24. Overall energy intensity of the economy, which refers to the amount of energy needed to generate one rupee of GDP, marginally reduced to 0.2180 Mega Joule per INR in 2023-24 from 0.2192 per INR in FY 2022-23.

In the same period, the steady growth in renewable and non-fossil fuel-based energy sector presents an encouraging trend. In 2023, India achieved the NDC goal of 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from renewable sources by generating 186.46 GW of energy from such sources. The BEE report "India Energy Scenario: For the Year 2023-24", shows the rise of renewable energy capacity from 76 GW in 2013-14 to 191 GW in 2023-24.

Policies and Regulations on Energy Efficiency: The Energy Conservation Act, 2001 governs India's energy efficiency roadmap. Following the act, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) was formed to regulate this sector. Over the past two decades, the BEE has implemented several initiatives, including the Perform, Achieve, Trade scheme (PAT) for energy-intensive industries, the Standards and Labelling programme for household appliances (S&L), and the Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Code (ECSBC) for commercial buildings. The 2022 amendment in the act expanded the building code to offices and residential buildings, empowered the central government to efficiently regulate energy-intensive industries, and created a national carbon trading market.

The PAT scheme assigns energy efficiency targets to energy-intensive industries such as thermal power, steel etc. Reports show that this measure across thirteen sectors have saved 25.77 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MTOE) in the year 2022-23. Similarly, the energy conservation and sustainable building code (ECSBC), prescribes minimum energy efficiency standards for commercial buildings with a connected load of 100 KW and above or contract demand of 120 KVA and above. It recommended comprehensive energy efficiency standards covering the entire building construction process. The amendment of 2022 in the EC Act paved the way for a national carbon market that incentivised emission reduction in nine key industrial sectors.

BEE's report entitled "Impact of Energy Efficiency for the year 2022-23" suggests that these energy efficiency measures resulted in the overall energy savings of 50.81 MTOE or 6.62% of the total primary energy supply in 2022-23. Among these measures, the Standards and Labelling (S&L) program on household appliances and the UJALA scheme have made significant contributions. In the same year, the S & L program led to electricity savings of 81.64 BU and GHG reduction of 58.01 million tonnes. The UJALA resulted in electricity savings of 176.19 BU and GHG reduction of 125.09 million tonnes in 2022-23. The success of these two programs holds a valuable lesson: they are simplistic in approach and directly engage with ground-level consumers.

The Way Forward:

The India residential energy survey by Agrawal et al. (2020) reported a disparity in awareness about the appliance labelling program: with only 19.1% of rural households were aware of the BEE's star labelling on appliances, compared to 37.8% in urban areas. In the same survey, 40% of consumers marked appliance cost as the decisive factor in purchasing decision of appliances. These findings point to a dual challenge: expanding public awareness, especially in rural and marginalised communities, and ensuring the availability of affordable energy-efficient appliances. Inclusion of energy efficiency in school curriculum, awareness campaigns on energy conservation targeting rural, marginalised sections, and incentives for energy conservation practices at the micro levels are of utmost necessity to inculcate a culture of energy efficiency in society. At the same time, industry-oriented measures and regulations require proper compliance, inspection and a fast adoption mechanism nationwide. A sustainable roadmap of energy efficiency ultimately depends on the synergy between society and industry.

Trade momentum to slow as Asia-Pacific adjusts to shifting global landscape

By: Pujia Das

Asia and the Pacific remained a key engine of global trade and investment in 2025, even as overall momentum eased amid mounting geopolitical strains and policy uncertainty. According to the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Briefs 2025 / 26 released by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), tariff anticipation and digital investment triggered a short-term boost in trade last year, while companies moved to rebalance and diversify supply chains.

Merchandise trade gets temporary lift
Global merchandise export volumes rose 2.8 per cent in 2025, supported by firm demand and the front-loading of shipments ahead of expected tariff hikes. Exports from Asia and the Pacific also expanded, with regional growth at 3.3 per cent — above the global average. But declining prices and intense competition curbed financial returns.

Performance varied widely across sub-regions. Electronics-driven exports powered growth in East and South-East Asia, while South and South-West Asia saw exports contract by about 2 per cent. Although intra-regional trade remained a stabilising force, supply chain strategies increasingly prioritised risk diversification over cost efficiency. Firms accelerated reshoring and nearshoring toward the United States and the European Union, while also broadening production locations.

ESCAP projects regional trade growth to slow sharply to around 0.6 per cent in 2026, reflecting escalating geopolitical tensions and tighter trade policies.

Digital services lead as traditional sectors soften

Commercial services trade continued to outperform goods trade in 2025, though growth trailed the global rebound. Services exports from Asia and the Pacific rose 5.4 per cent, despite subdued sentiment in major economies such as Japan and China. Companies increasingly diversified operations into South-East Asia and India to reduce supply chain risks.

All subregions recorded services export growth. East and North-East Asia led with 7 per cent growth, while the Pacific posted more modest gains of about 1 per cent.

Modern services drove expansion, with telecom, information and communication technology and computer services up 13 per cent, and business and financial services growing 11 per cent. Travel and transport improved but lost momentum, while construction services plunged 11 per cent amid a property sector downturn.

Intra-regional services trade strength-

ened further, accounting for roughly 21 per cent of exports, largely supported by South-East Asian flows to East Asia. Services export growth is forecast to remain resilient in 2026 at 4.4 per cent, underpinned by digital sectors.

Region dominates trade agreements
Asia and the Pacific accounted for 61 per cent of all active preferential trade agreements globally, with 258 agreements in force. In 2025 alone, 12 new deals were signed, alongside continued expansion of frameworks such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations arrangements, as well as deeper engagement with partners in Europe and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Sustainability and supply chain resilience provisions featured in 158 agreements. The region also remained a leader in digital trade rule-making, participating in 12 of the world's 16 Digital Trade Agreements. Issue-specific arrangements and mini-FTAs continued to grow, aimed at targeted cooperation and de-risking.

ESCAP highlighted the need to harmonise fragmented trade rules, ensure inclusion of less developed economies, and reinforce regional cooperation to support the global rules-based system.

FDI turns more selective
Foreign direct investment (FDI) trends showed a shift in character. Greenfield FDI announcements in capital terms fell 21 per cent to \$253 billion, but the number of projects approached record highs, suggesting declining capital intensity and scale, rather than reduced interest in operating in the region. South-East Asia remained the leading destination, attracting \$74.4 billion.

India emerged as the largest single recipient of greenfield FDI with \$50 billion in commitments, followed by Australia at \$30 billion and the Republic of Korea at \$25 billion. The Republic of Korea recorded the sharpest increase, with investment pledges surging 303 per cent.

In Asia and the Pacific, services accounted for more than 60 per cent of FDI projects, led by ICT and renewable energy. Manufacturing investment shifted toward metals, partly driven by demand linked to renewable energy and advanced technologies, while investment in the primary sector continued to decline.

Market proximity was the key driver behind 52 per cent of project announcements and broader trends indicate a move away from low-cost efficiency toward innovation-seeking investment strategies. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

therefore affect broadcasters, sponsors, host nations, and the ICC's financial model.

Inside Pakistan, opinion was sharply divided. Some former players and analysts supported a strong stand, arguing that silence would allow unfair governance to continue. Others warned that withdrawing from a global event would isolate Pakistan further and harm its players, who rely on ICC tournaments for exposure, experience, and career growth. They argued that protest should occur through diplomacy, not absence.

The ICC found itself managing an increasingly complex situation. On one hand, it needed to uphold tourna-

The episode revived long-standing debates about whether politically sensitive tournaments should always involve neutral-venue options as standard policy.

The situation exposed deeper issues in modern cricket. The sport increasingly operates within a world where political tensions, diplomatic relationships, and public sentiment influence decision-making. Cricket boards must balance national interests with international commitments, and governing bodies must manage not just sport but perception, trust, and credibility. The Pakistan and Bangladesh situation illustrates how easily these balances can collapse. The uncertainty has been particu-

Xi's anti-graft drive reaches the PLA's top ranks

By: Kalpit A Mankarik

Chinese President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign has targeted senior military officials of the Central Military Commission (CMC), Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli. The former is the vice-chair of the CMC, and also has a seat on the Politburo, while the latter is chief of its Joint Staff Department. In October 2025, then CMC vice-chair He Weidong and CMC member Miao Hua were axed from the body over graft probes.

Chinese media have reported that an investigation has been opened into their "corrupt practices". It has been said that these two have been undermining and "seriously trampling upon" the CMC Chairman Responsibility System, fuelling "political and corruption issues" that affect the Party's absolute leadership over the military and endangering the Party's ruling foundation. They also stand accused of damaging the military's political construction and combat capability construction. The litany of allegations gives the impression that they have been undermining Xi within the military ranks. The Wall Street Journal has reported that Zhang is said to have betrayed China's nuclear secrets to the United States.

2026 began with the annual gathering of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), an important event in China's political calendar, that furnishes a progress report of Xi Jinping's anti-graft campaign, and also charts its future course. The anti-graft investigation authority pledged to look into corruption in sectors such as finance, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), energy, education, academic societies and associations, development zones, and bidding and tendering. Many party officials are also on the radar for accepting gifts and cash, and undertaking foreign travel under the pretext of "study tours" or "personnel-training exercises."

"Vanity-type" projects, "irregular" construction of government buildings and facilities will also be under the lens. Investigations will also include misconduct such as foot-dragging, bureaucratic in-

ertia, and the phenomenon of 'fān shāobǐng' 翻烧饼, implying making policy U-turn for monetary gains. Priority will also be accorded to cases of collusion between the government and big businesses, officials providing protection and patronage to private enterprises, and business houses meddling in politics, seeking favourable policies. Investigators will also seek to burrow into concealed forms of turpitude like 'proxy holdings', and the phenomenon of xuán zhuǎn mén 旋关门, or the 'revolving door between government and business'.

This conclave has been followed by a state-sponsored blitzkrieg on the fate and modus operandi of high-profile 'tigers' hunted down in Xi's anti-corruption campaign. A state documentary was released featuring former Agriculture Minister Tang Renjian, who received a suspended death sentence in September 2025 for pocketing more than 268 million yuan (US\$38 million) in bribes over a period of nearly two decades. The disgraced politician confesses on air to using a 'white-glove' proxy businessperson, in this case an antique dealer based in Beijing, to pursue illicit deals. Businesspeople seeking favours were expected to contact the dealer to buy items at inflated prices. However, in this case, the figurines were not antiques, but replicas. Tang is also said to have helped his family members open a members-only club close to the ministry's headquarters. Top corporate executives were expected to buy a membership that varied from 100,000 yuan (US\$14,300) to 500,000 yuan (US\$71,680). Tang reportedly organised meetings at the club, where business executives covered expensive luncheons, including wine bottles costing more than 10,000 yuan.

Another documentary highlighted the case of former banker and Communist Party chief of Hubei province Jiang Chaoliang, who was sacked following public outrage over mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic that originated in Hubei's capital Wuhan. Jiang was a high-flying executive in China's financial sector, and was Chairperson and Party Secretary of the Bank of Communica-

tions, Vice-Chair and President of China Development Bank, and Chairperson and Party Secretary of the Agricultural Bank of China. A businessman, Li Yuanguang, is said to have cultivated close relations with Jiang's family, paying for Jiang's children's education and healthcare for his parents.

Li Yuanguang's bet paid off when Jiang, as head of the Agricultural Bank of China in 2011, helped the former's company bag a large contract for the procurement of automated teller machines. In the spotlight are Jiang's Chaoliang two brothers: Jiang Binliang and Jiang Zhongliang, who acted as proxies and benefited from the slush money.

The CPC's narrative has also zeroed in on bribes channelled through cryptocurrencies that are difficult to trace. A documentary in China cites the investigation into Yao Qian, the former director of the Digital Currency Institute at the People's Bank of China, who is accused of acquiring a villa in Beijing for more than 20 million yuan (around US\$2.9 million) in the name of a family member. Investigations found that Yao had been given 2,000 ether coins by the director of an e-currency firm he had helped to list on an exchange. Yao was head of an elite team that developed the digital renminbi and also oversaw technology supervision at China's securities regulator. Thus, anti-corruption investigators are increasingly looking into newer forms of money laundering and into the financial activities of CPC officials' family members.

To conclude, there could be a temptation among China watchers to look at the current disarray within China's military ranks with a sense of Schadenfreude, yet if history is any guide, China has used internal chaos as a pretext for external belligerence to rally disparate elements in the Party-state. Two, the anti-graft body, in its drive to weed out corruption, talks about scrutiny of the bribe-giver and bribe-taker with a cross-border anti-corruption law. This development will have ominous portents for overseas businesses as it presents the possibility of Beijing extra-territorialising its law. (Courtesy: ORF)

Very disappointed: US Treasury Secretary on India-EU trade deal

NEW YORK, Jan 29: In the wake of the FTA between India and the EU, the US has described the Europeans as "very disappointing", saying they were unwilling to join Washington in putting tariffs on New Delhi for its purchases of Russian oil because of this trade deal.

"Again, they should do what's best for themselves, but I will tell you I find the Europeans very disappointing because the Europeans are on the front line of the Ukraine-Russia war," US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in an interview with CNBC's "Squawk on the Street" Wednesday.

Bessent was responding to a question on the "massive" trade deal between Europe and India and whether that threatens America, given that the countries are moving ahead with free trade without Washington.

"...India started buying sanctioned

Russian oil, and guess who was buying the refined products? The Europeans. So, the Europeans have been funding the war against themselves and like something that you couldn't have made up."

"The US sanctioned or put a 25 per cent tariff on India for buying the Russian oil. The Europeans were unwilling to join us, and it turns out that they wanted to do this trade deal. So, every time you hear a European talk about the importance of the Ukrainian people, remember that they put trade ahead of the Ukrainian people. Trade - European trade, more important than ending the war in Ukraine," Bessent said.

When asked if the Europeans need energy, Bessent said, "At a price, they want cheap energy, but we could have cheaper energy too if we were willing to buy sanctioned Russian oil."

Bessent's comments were the second



remarks in as many days by the Trump administration on the trade deal between India and the EU, dubbed as the "mother of all deals."

On Tuesday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa were leading the signing of the trade deal in New Delhi, US Trade Representative

Jamieson Greer said India came out on "top" in the trade deal.

"I've looked at some of the details of the deal so far. I think India comes out on top on this, frankly. They get more market access into Europe," Greer had said in an interview to Fox Business.

Greer was responding to a question on the trade deal signed between India and the EU.

"It sounds like they (India) have some additional immigration rights. I don't know for sure, but President (Ursula) von der Leyen of the EU has talked about mobility for Indian workers into Europe," Greer said.

"So I think on net, India is going to have a heyday with this. They have low-cost labour, and it looks like the EU is doubling down on globalisation when we're trying to fix some of the problems of globalisation here in the US," Greer

had said.

When asked if he has any impressions on the India-EU trade deal, Greer said, "I do. First of all, strategically, it's important to understand that because President Trump has prioritised domestic production and essentially started charging a fee for other countries to access our market, these countries are trying to find other outlets for their overproduction. And so the EU is turning to India to try to find a place."

"The EU is so trade dependent, they need other outlets if they can't keep sending all their stuff to the United States."

India and the European Union sealed the landmark free trade agreement--billed as the "mother of all deals"--to create a market of two billion people with Modi and the top EU leadership unveiling a transformative five-year agenda to

largely leverage trade and defence in protecting the rules-based world order.

The two sides also inked two crucial pacts -- one on security and defence collaboration and another on mobility of Indian talents to Europe -- after Prime Minister Modi hosted von der Leyen and Costa for summit talks amid frosty ties with the US.

The free trade agreement that will account for almost a quarter of the global GDP will reduce tariffs on 99 per cent of Indian exports to the EU and cut duties on over 97 per cent of the EU's exports to India, according to officials.

Indian sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather goods, handicrafts, footwear and marine products are set to gain from the FTA, while Europe is set to benefit in areas of wine, automobiles, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, among others. (PTI)

Trump facing growing cultural revolt against immigration crackdown

NEW YORK, Jan 29: No longer confined to the partisans and activists, the fierce backlash against Donald Trump's immigration crackdown has begun to break out across American culture, spanning the worlds of business, sports and entertainment.

Bruce Springsteen released a new song on Wednesday that slammed "Trump's federal thugs." OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman told employees that "what's happening with ICE is going too far." And lifestyle icon Martha Stewart lamented that "we can be attacked and even killed."

"Things must and have to change quickly and peacefully," Stewart wrote to her 2.9 million Instagram followers this week.

A little more than one year into his second term, Trump is facing a broad cultural revolt that threatens to undermine his signature domestic priority, the Republican Party's grip on power and his own political strength ahead of the midterm elections.

Trump, a former reality television star often attuned to changes in public opinion, tried to shift the conversation this week by dispatching border czar Tom Homan to Minnesota to replace Greg Bovino, a Border Patrol commander who has been a lightning rod.

But it's unclear if the move will change anything on the ground.

Thousands of federal agents remain in Minnesota, where two U.S. citizens have been killed and communities have felt besieged by Trump's crackdown. Meanwhile, operations have expanded into Maine as well.

White House is spooked

Republican strategist Doug Heye said it's



too soon to know whether Trump's attempt to control the fallout will work. He's been in communication with Republican leaders across Washington in recent days who are worried that the escalating situation could jeopardize control of Congress in this fall's midterm elections.

"It's very clear that the administration is spooked," Heye said.

And while some in the party may be concerned, Trump's MAGA base remains largely unified behind him and the immigration crackdown that he promised repeatedly on the campaign trail. They're pushing the president not to back down.

"It's time for President Trump to ramp up mass deportations even more," Laura Loomer, a Trump loyalist who has the president's ear, told The Associated Press. "And if Minnesota is any barometer, it's time for the focus to be on deporting as many Muslims as possible."

Such advice is at odds with a growing fac-

tion of prominent voices across American culture.

Who is speaking out?

Joe Rogan, a leading podcast host who endorsed Trump during his comeback campaign, said he sympathizes with concerns about immigration agents' tactics.

"Are we really going to be the Gestapo?" Rogan said. "Where's your papers? Is that what we've come to?"

Over the weekend, more than 60 corporate executives, including the leaders of Target, Best Buy and UnitedHealth released a public letter calling for de-escalation following the death of Jeffrey Pretti, a 37-year-old Veterans Affairs nurse fatally shot during a confrontation with federal agents.

The outcry intensified as the week progressed.

Apple CEO Tim Cook on Tuesday issued a memo to employees saying he was "heartbroken by the events in Minneapolis."

"I believe America is strongest when we

live up to our highest ideals, when we treat everyone with dignity and respect no matter who they are or where they're from, and when we embrace our shared humanity," Cook wrote in the memo, first reported by Bloomberg News.

Tech billionaire and venture capitalist Vinod Khosla used stronger language on social media to condemn "macho ICE vigilantes running amuck (sic) empowered by a conscious-less administration."

Jason Calacanis, a prominent tech podcaster, on Wednesday warned of dire consequences for Trump if he does not make sweeping changes among the people running the immigration crackdown.

"President Trump needs to replace them all and reverse his plummeting ratings, or the entire Trump 2.0 agenda is over," Calacanis wrote to his 1 million X followers. "America needs to put this dark and disgusting chapter behind us and unite behind a crisper immigration policy."

Actors and musicians speak up

More outrage came from the entertainment industry, which is often viewed as a liberal bastion. Springsteen dropped his new song, "The Streets of Minneapolis," on Wednesday. The famed musician referenced Pretti's death directly.

"Trump's federal thugs beat up on his face and his chest. Then we heard the gunshots. And Alex Pretti lay in the snow, dead," Springsteen sings.

The other actors and entertainers who spoke out in recent days include Natalie Portman, Elijah Wood, Olivia Rodrigo and Billie Eilish. Actor Mark Ruffalo described Pretti's death as "cold-blooded murder." (AP)

Bessent warns Carney against picking fight before US-Canada-Mexico trade talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Wednesday warned Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney that his recent public comments against US trade policy could backfire going into the formal review of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the trade deal that protects Canada from the heaviest impacts of President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Carney used a high-profile speech last week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland to condemn economic coercion by great powers on smaller countries and since then he has as much sparred with Trump and Bessent about related trade issues.

Trump on Saturday threatened to impose a 100 per cent tariff on goods imported from Canada over a trade deal Carney is pursuing with Beijing.

"I would not pick a fight going into USMCA to score some cheap political points -- either you're working for your own political career or you're working for the Canadian people," Bessent said during a CNBC interview.

"I've seen what happens when a technocrat tries to pivot and become a politician," Bessent added, in a reference to Carney's background as a central banker. "It never really works out well."

Trump and Carney spoke on Monday, after which Bessent told Fox News that the prime minister "was very aggressively walking back some of the unfortunate remarks he made at Davos."

Carney had a different characterisation the next day.

"To be absolutely clear, and I said this to the president, I meant what I said in Davos," Carney told reporters.

The North American trade agreement signed in 2020 during Trump's first term, but lately the Republican president has expressed indifference to it. Earlier this month, he said, "I don't really care about it."

Bessent, in his CNBC appearance, did say that in the end, "I think we will end up in a good place -- may not be a straight line." (AP)

Starmer calls for UK to have a deeper relationship with China during 'challenging times'

BELJING, Jan 29: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called Thursday for a deeper relationship with China during what he called "challenging times for the world." The UK leader told China's leader Xi Jinping that their countries need to work together on global stability, climate change and other issues.

"I have long been clear that the UK and China need a long term, consistent and comprehensive strategic partnership," he said.

Starmer, the first British prime minister to visit in eight years, was holding talks with Xi in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing as the two nations try to improve relations after several years of acrimony.

The disruption to global trade under U.S. President Donald Trump has made expanding trade and investment more imperative for many governments. Starmer is the fourth leader of a U.S. ally to visit Beijing this month, following those of South Korea, Canada and Finland. The German chancellor is expected to visit next month. (AP)

Rubio details how Trump administration will control Venezuela's oil money

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: The Trump administration soon will allow Venezuela to sell oil now subject to US sanctions, with the revenue initially dedicated to basic government services such as policing and health care and subject to Washington's oversight, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday.

The United States will retain control in the short term to ensure the oil revenue is used to stabilise Venezuela, Rubio said at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.

"The funds from that will be deposited into an account that we will have oversight over," Rubio said, adding that the US Treasury would control the process. Venezuela, he said, "will spend that money for the benefit of the Venezuelan people."

Rubio offered new insight into how the US is planning to handle the sale of tens of millions of barrels of oil from Venezuela, which has the largest proven reserves of crude in the world, and oversee

where the money flows.

After the US raid that captured then-President Nicolas Maduro this month, the US is working to influence the next steps in the South American country through its vast oil resources.

The US will not subsidise oil industry investments in Venezuela, Rubio said, and is only overseeing the sale of sanctioned petroleum as an "interim step."

"This is simply a way to divide revenue so that there isn't systemic collapse while we work through this recovery and transition," Rubio said.

Democrats and some Republicans on the committee pressed Rubio for more details about Trump's plans for Venezuela's oil. Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., asked for assurances from Rubio that the sale of Venezuelan oil will be fair and open, not rigged to benefit oil companies allied with Trump.

"You are taking their oil at gunpoint, you are holding and selling that oil ... you're deciding how

and for what purposes that money is going to be used in a country of 30 million people," Murphy said. "I think a lot of us believe that that is destined for failure."

Under Maduro, Rubio said Venezuela's oil industry benefited the country's corrupt leaders and countries such as China, which purchased Venezuelan oil at a discount. Now, Venezuela's interim leaders are assisting the US in seizing illegal oil shipments, he said.

The US will give Venezuela's current leaders instructions on how the money can and cannot be spent and conduct audits to ensure it is used as intended, Rubio said. He said Venezuela could use the money to pay for policing or to buy medicine.

The fund was initially set up in Qatar to avoid having the proceeds seized by American creditors and because of other legal complications that stem from the US not considering Maduro's government legitimate, Rubio said. (AP)

Rubio says technical talks with Denmark, Greenland officials over Arctic security begin

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: Technical talks between the US, Denmark and Greenland over hatching an Arctic security deal are now underway, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Wednesday. The foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland agreed to create a working group aimed at addressing differences with the US during a Washington meeting earlier this month with Vice President JD Vance and Rubio.

The group was created after President Donald Trump's repeated calls for the US to take over Greenland, a Danish territory, in the name of countering threats from Russia and China -- calls that Greenland, Denmark and European allies forcefully rejected.

"It begins today and it will be a regular process," Rubio said of the working group, as he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We're going to try to do it in a way that isn't like a media circus every time these conversations happen, because we think that creates more flexibility on both sides to arrive at a positive outcome."

A spokesperson for the Danish Embassy in Washington declined to comment on the start of the talks.

Trump's renewed threats in recent weeks to annex Greenland, which is a semi-autonomous territory of a NATO ally, has roiled US-European relations.

Trump this month announced he would slap new tariffs on Denmark and seven other European countries that opposed his takeover calls, only to abruptly drop his threats after a "framework" for a deal over



access to the mineral-rich island was reached, with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's help. Few details of the agreement have emerged. After stiff pushback from European allies to his Greenland rhetoric, Trump also announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last week that he would take off the table the possibility of using American military force to acquire Greenland.

The president backed off his tariff threats and softened his language after Wall Street suffered its biggest losses in months over concerns that Trump's Greenland ambitions could spur a trade war and fundamentally rupture NATO, a 32-member transatlantic military alliance that's been a linchpin of post-World War II security. (AP)

Express appreciation to the US in addressing long-standing issue of Gaza conflict: India



UNITED NATIONS, Jan 29: India voiced appreciation to the US towards addressing the "long-standing" conflict in Gaza as New Delhi noted the recent progress with regard to the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution on the issue.

These remarks were made by India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish on Wednesday.

"India takes note of recent progress with regard to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2803 to end the Gaza conflict. India also takes this opportunity to express appreciation to the United States in ad-

ressing this long-standing issue," Harish said in his remarks to the UN Security Council open debate on the Situation in the Middle East.

The UN Security Council resolution 2803, adopted in November last year, endorsed US President Donald Trump's 'Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict' of September 29 that entails that "Gaza will be a deradicalised terror-free zone that does not pose a threat to its neighbours" and will be redeveloped for the benefit of the people of Gaza.

The resolution also welcomed the establishment of a 'Board of Peace' (BoP) as a "transitional administration" with international legal personality that will set the framework, and coordinate funding for, the redevelopment of Gaza as per the Comprehensive Plan.

Harish said that the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza and the resumption of delivery of public services and humanitarian assistance is a herculean task calling for sustained support and commitment of the international community to alleviate the pain and suffering of the Palestin-

ian brothers and sisters.

"At the same time, let us be clear that terrorism has no place in civilised societies and must be condemned in all its forms and manifestations," he said.

Underlining that the scale of reconstruction required in Gaza is massive, India said UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) estimates that Gaza has 60 million tons of rubble.

"The rubble also contains harmful material. Therefore, traditional reconstruction models would have limitations in dealing with this unique situation. An innovative approach with technological rigour is required," Harish said.

India further noted that while there have been incremental improvements in the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the harsh winter and scale of destruction continue to make the task difficult.

Food and fuel shortages, lack of access to basic facilities for health and education, hygiene and sanitation, impact all sections of society, particularly women and children. India reiterated its call for safe humanitarian access.

Member states must support the yearning of the Palestinian people to lead normal lives.

Harish said that on the political front, India has always consistently supported a sovereign, independent, viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, within secure and recognised borders, which is at the heart of any lasting solution. In pursuit of its commitment, India became the first non-Arab country to recognise the state of Palestine in 1988.

"India has advocated that the means to achieve this end is through dialogue and diplomacy," he said.

Over the course of the last two years, India has supplied nearly 135 metric tons of medicines and supplies, and there are ongoing Indian projects at various stages of implementation to the tune of 40 million dollars. In cumulative terms, the extent of support to the Palestinian people currently stands at over 170 million dollars.

Harish stressed that different parts of the Middle East are marked by protracted conflicts, political divisions and humanitarian distress. (PTI)

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

No.ACEH/CS/MOS-21/67/2025-26/02 Dated: 28/01/2026

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Director cum Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from registered contractors of Class-I (A) Roads category for " Extension of Four Lane from East Division Forest Office to St. Anthony School, Diphu " under Special Development Package of Govt. of Assam, MoS-21 on EPC Mode-1. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of

Sd/-

Director cum Additional Chief Engineer,
P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No.ACEH/CS/MoS-21/67/2025-26/02-(A) Dated 28/01/2026.

Khandu calls for stronger grassroots democracy

CM urges PRI representatives to focus on inclusive planning and effective implementation

ITANAGAR, Jan 29: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday called on elected Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) representatives to strengthen grassroots democracy through inclusive planning, effective implementation of schemes and close coordination with government machinery.

Addressing elected PRI representatives during the inaugural programme of the extended four-day state-level interaction and orientation programme organised by Panchayati Raj department here, Khandu congratulated the newly elected zilla parishad chairpersons (ZPCs), zilla parishad members (ZPMs) and gram panchayat chairpersons (GPCs) for securing a public mandate in the recent panchayat elections, an official report said.

Explaining the structure of the programme, the chief minister said the first two days would involve joint training sessions for all ZPCs, ZPMs and GPCs. He said the technical sessions were designed to make the Panchayati Raj system more robust by covering government schemes, latest technologies and administrative processes.

Highlighting Arunachal Pradesh's two-tier Panchayati Raj system, he said the model was adopted to ensure efficiency and clarity of roles, given the state's unique demographic and geographical conditions. He described

Panchayati Raj as the foundation of grassroots democracy and stressed that elected representatives carry significant responsibility in reflecting public opinion and democratic values in village development planning.

Sharing data on PRI representation, Khandu said that the state has 27 ZPCs, 245 ZPMs and 2,108 GPCs, along with over 8,000 gram panchayat members. He said that due to space constraints, only 50 per cent of GPCs were invited for the present training, adding that district-wise and zonal-level programmes would be organised in the future for wider outreach.

The chief minister said the government would undertake delimitation during the next panchayat election cycle, following the upcoming census to make panchayat institutions more effective. He stated that the State Election Commission has already been empowered to carry out the exercise.

Referring to national development goals, he said India has emerged as the fourth-largest economy globally and is expected to soon become the third-largest. He said the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' can only be realised when villages are developed, underlining the central role of PRIs in rural transformation.

He highlighted key governance initiatives such as Seva Apke Dwar and Cab-



inet Apke Dwar, stating that these programmes have enabled direct delivery of services and benefits to over 15 lakh people while helping the government understand ground-level challenges.

Reaffirming the autonomy of PRIs, Khandu assured that there would be no interference by MLAs in Panchayati Raj system over the last five years, leading to increased grants as the state's economy grows. He also highlighted the

integration of digital platforms, e-governance tools, online audits, PFMS and gender inclusion frameworks to enhance transparency and efficiency.

Welcoming the replacement of MGN-REGA with the Viksit Bharat Gramin Rozgar aur Aajeevika Guarantee Mission (VBGRAM), the chief minister said the new scheme guarantees 125 days of employment and makes timely employment a constitutional right with penalties for delays. He said the scheme focuses on four priority areas - water security, rural infrastructure, livelihood enhancement and disaster mitigation - requiring need-based village planning.

He urged PRI representatives to adopt participatory and inclusive planning practices, involving all households in village meetings and prioritising the upliftment of weaker and economically vulnerable sections. He stressed the importance of convergence among schemes of various departments to maximise development outcomes.

The chief minister said the government has constructed 1,182 Panchayat Bhawan-cum-Common Service Centres across the state and completed District Panchayat Resource Centres in five districts, with three more nearing completion. He also highlighted the growing participation of women in Panchayati Raj, noting that women's representation has reached nearly 48-50 per cent, well

above the mandated reservation.

Emphasising the role of women and self-help groups in strengthening the rural economy, the chief minister said over 1.4 lakh women in Arunachal Pradesh are now engaged in SHG activities. He said the state government has consistently promoted SHGs through initiatives such as the annual Saras Mela and encouraged PRI representatives to integrate SHGs into local development planning.

He also informed that the state government has signed an MoU with the Institute of Rural Management, Gujarat to provide specialised training for Panchayati representatives and officials. Training on platforms such as e-Gram Swaraj and Audit Online would be intensified in the coming days.

Calling the five-year tenure a rare opportunity for public service, the chief minister urged elected representatives to work with urgency, vision and accountability from day one. He encouraged healthy competition among Panchayats, innovation in governance and close coordination with district officials to ensure tangible outcomes.

Khandu said strong teamwork between panchayats, district administration and the state government would be essential to transform villages and position Arunachal Pradesh as a model of grassroots governance. (PTI)

Rumd-Lwn Stone unveiled in Talo

HT Correspondent

TALO, Jan 29: Rumd-Lwn, revered as the Great Stone of Talo, stands as a powerful symbol of courage, unity and the indomitable spirit of the region's ancestors, deeply rooted in the cultural and historical landscape of Keyli Panyor district.

According to Tabia Chobin, former Deputy Director of School Education (DDSE), Lower Subansiri district and a native of Rumd-Lwn Anchal, Talo, the stone has held immense historical significance since ancient times. Traditionally, it served as a sacred gathering point where warriors assembled before departing for battle and later reunited peacefully after conflicts.

Chobin explained that as Talo gradually evolved from a single anchal segment into five distinct divisions, the name and spirit of Rumlin emerged from this very stone, symbolising growth, resilience and a shared cultural identity among the people.

Over generations, Rumd-Lwn has remained a living monument representing not only martial valour, but also harmony, unity and the continuity of indigenous traditions passed down through time.

The historic monument was formally unveiled on January 27, by Toko Heli, Gaon Burah (GB) of Rumd-Lwn, Talo, marking a significant step towards the preservation and recognition of indigenous heritage.

Foundation stone laid for government accommodation project in Namsai

CM inaugurates Type-III quarters under SASCI 2024-25



HT Correspondent

NAMSAI, Jan 29: The foundation stone for the project "Construction of Accommodation for Government Officers and Staffs at Namsai, Namsai District" was laid on Thursday by Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Pema Khandu under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) 2024-25 scheme.

The project, estimated at ₹ 1865.70 lakh with a completion timeline of 18 months is being executed by the Department of Urban Affairs, Namsai Division. It in-

volves the construction of Type-III quarters comprising two blocks with 12 units each, along with site development works, internal cement concrete roads, a paver block parking area, main entry and exit gates and a compound wall. Provision has been made for a future additional block with 12 more units.

The foundation stone-laying ceremony was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Dr Chowna Mein, Minister Kento Jini, MLAs Chau Zingnu Namchoom, Jikke Tako, Oken Tayang, Chief Secretary Manish Kumar Gupta, IAS and

other senior officers.

Addressing the media, the Chief Minister said that old government quarters across the state are being demolished and reconstructed in phases to provide modern and improved accommodation for staff. He noted that two units are being inaugurated and construction of the third unit is already underway.

The project is expected to strengthen residential infrastructure for government employees while contributing to planned urban development in Namsai district.

PM NAPS awareness workshop held at DKG College, Tawang

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Jan 29: A one-day awareness workshop on the Pradhan Mantri Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM NAPS) was successfully conducted at Dorjee Khandu Government College (DKG), Tawang, with the objective of sensitising students and stakeholders about apprenticeship opportunities and skill development initiatives.

The programme was formally launched by Deputy Commissioner, Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS. The workshop was organised by the District Skill Committee in collaboration with DKG College, Tawang and was efficiently managed and logistically supported by the Deputy Director of Industries and her staff, ensuring the smooth conduct of the event.

Key attendees included Deputy Director, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Gyati Kacho, representatives from 2Coms Consulting Pvt Ltd, Eduvantage Pvt Ltd, Yuva Shakti, Timilo Boutique and Vivanta Tawang, along with ITI students and students of DKG College Tawang.

The event featured informative presentations on PM NAPS, SAPS and other skill development schemes, highlighting their benefits and long-term career prospects through apprenticeship-based learning.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner described



the programme as highly productive and urged students to actively interact with the resource persons and make optimal use of opportunities available under various government schemes. She further informed that the government has signed Memorandums of Understanding with several countries and industries, opening up significant employment avenues and emphasised the importance of leveraging these opportunities. The DC also requested the Deputy Director of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to further improve the functional quality of the ITI at Lungla on a daily basis.

In his address, Gyati Kacho highlighted the department's initiatives for youth empowerment with special focus on NAPS and SAPS. He stated that through these

schemes, the government aims to realise the vision of Viksit Bharat and Viksit Arunachal by empowering and skilling the youth. He also delivered a detailed PowerPoint presentation on various ongoing and upcoming skill development programmes.

Consultants and representatives from partner agencies, acting as bridges between employers and job seekers, also delivered comprehensive presentations on employment schemes, industry linkages and career pathways available to youth through apprenticeship programmes. The workshop proved to be an informative and engaging platform for students and stakeholders, encouraging greater youth participation in skill development and employment-oriented training initiatives.

PPP move to revive tourism assets in Papum Pare



HT Correspondent

YUPIA, Jan 29: The Papum Pare District Tourism Promotion Council convened a meeting at the DC Conference Hall on Thursday to discuss the modalities for leasing out tourism assets under the Department of Tourism through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Chairing the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Vishakha Yadav expressed concern over the deteriorated condition of several tourism assets in the district, particularly the Tourist Lodge (Holiday Inn) at Sagalee. She emphasised that lease agreements must be framed realistically, taking into account land value and existing tourist footfall in order to attract genuine and capable bidders.

It was decided during the meeting that three major tourism assets—the Adventure Tourism Camping Site at Jote Poma, the Mini Resort and Adventure Tourism Camping Site at Huto and the Tourist Lodge (Holiday Inn) at Sagalee would be leased out through a transparent process by floating Tender/NIT.

The Deputy Commissioner stated that the PPP model would help revive these defunct assets and assured that the District Administration would extend full support to parties with the right intent and commitment. She further advised the District Tourism Officer to draft the lease agreements carefully to avoid future complications, adding that proper development of these facilities would significantly boost tourism in Papum Pare district.

ADC Sagalee, Higio Yame, briefed the council on the present condition of the Tourist Lodge at Sagalee, stating that the unused building has turned into a hub for anti-social activities. She welcomed the initiative and said reviving the asset would help restore its intended purpose.

Council members ADC Balijan Takar Rava, ADC (HQ) Tame Yajum, DACO Tana Maro Tara, DPO Chukhu Tajo and District Research Officer Amem Tayeng were also present at the meeting.

Khandu inaugurates APUFEST 2026, assures support for infrastructure and academic growth

Arunachal Pradesh University a top priority: CM

PASIGHAT, Jan 29: Chief Minister Pema Khandu reiterated that Arunachal Pradesh University (APU), the state's first state-owned university, remains a top priority for the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and assured sustained support for its infrastructure expansion, academic growth and institutional strengthening.

Inaugurating the third edition of the Arunachal Pradesh University Festival (APUFEST) 2026 at Pasighat on Thursday, the Chief Minister said that although the Arunachal University Act was passed in 2012, the institution remained dormant for several years. He stated that after the present government assumed office, the university was revived from scratch with focused planning on location, infrastructure and functionality.

Khandu said the university became operational in 2022 with the inauguration of its administrative block, followed by the appointment of its first Vice Chancellor, Prof Tomo Riba. He noted that academic sessions began the same year and that the first batch of students has already graduated, with the convocation presided over by the Governor, who is also the Chancellor of the university.

Complimenting the Vice Chancellor, Registrar Nani Darang and the entire faculty and staff, the Chief Minister said building an institution from the ground up is challenging, but the university has made significant progress within a short span of three years. He expressed satisfaction over the pace of infrastructure development and said the campus was nearing completion, which would enable the university to scale up to higher academic standards.

Referring to a memorandum submitted by the university's student fraternity and suggestions placed by the Vice Chancellor, Khandu assured that all genuine require-



ments and shortcomings would be addressed. He said the government would continue to prioritise infrastructure development and assigned personal responsibility to the Education Minister to take the university forward.

With the Chief Secretary, Education Commissioner and other senior officials present, the Chief Minister said the timing was appropriate as the state budget was approaching and assured that all identified shortfalls would be reflected in the upcoming budget provisions.

Highlighting the need for land expansion, Khandu said the university was initially planned on around 100 acres, but the available land appeared inadequate for future growth. He urged local MLAs, the district administration and community leaders to facilitate land expansion, stating that limited space would restrict infrastructure addition and academic expansion. As the first state

university, he said Arunachal University must have "unlimited scope" for growth.

The Chief Minister also called for a review and reorientation of the university's master plan in consultation with professional architectural firms with the objective of developing a campus capable of attracting foreign students. He emphasised the need to simultaneously strengthen infrastructure and faculty quality and directed the Education Commissioner to immediately assess faculty and staff shortages and move proposals for necessary additions through the Cabinet in a time-bound manner.

Speaking on broader education reforms, Khandu said the state is undergoing a major transformation in the education sector in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is to be fully implemented across all levels by 2030. He said several reforms have already been undertaken to improve education quality, including the

rationalisation and closure of unviable schools, noting that around 700 schools have been shut down due to poor planning and quality concerns.

He informed that Arunachal Pradesh University currently runs 11 academic departments and offers PhD programmes in disciplines such as Commerce, Economics, Education, Social Work and Travel Studies. He added that the government has made substantial investments in the university and would continue to do so.

Khandu further said that sports infrastructure development at the university campus would be taken up, with necessary provisions to be reflected in the upcoming budget.

Referring to the vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047", the Chief Minister said development must encompass every state, district and village and stressed that today's students would play a decisive role in achieving this goal. He urged students to actively participate in nation-building through careers in public service, entrepreneurship, agriculture and other sectors.

He noted that Arunachal Pradesh is a resource-rich state with immense potential and said youth would emerge as the driving force by 2047. He also informed that discussions are underway for student and faculty exchange programmes between educational institutions in Arunachal Pradesh and Japan.

Encouraging students to actively participate in academic, literary, cultural and sports activities during APUFEST 2026, the Chief Minister extended his best wishes for their future endeavours.

Earlier, on arrival at the university campus, Khandu inaugurated the newly constructed Academic Block 'A'. Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, Law and Justice Minister Kento Jini, several legislators, district administration officials and faculty and officials of the university were also present on the occasion.

Accidental death report registered in plane crash that killed Ajit Pawar, 4 others in Baramati

As per procedure, the ADR will be handed over to the Maharashtra Criminal Investigation Department

PUNE, Jan 28: Police registered an accidental death report (ADR) case in connection with the plane crash that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others in Baramati in Pune district on Wednesday, an official said.

Pawar (66) and four other persons on board a chartered aircraft were killed after it crashed barely 200 metres from the edge of a tabletop runway at the Baramati airport in the morning.

"We have registered an accidental death report (ADR) with the Baramati taluka police station," confirmed a

senior police officer from the Pune rural police.

As per procedure, the ADR will be handed over to the Maharashtra Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which will conduct a probe based on findings of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)'s inquiry.

The AAIB, which functions under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, has already taken over the probe into the crash.

A CID official told PTI that in case of the death of an influential public representative or figure in an acci-

dent, the probe is carried out by the CID.

"We have not yet received any orders. However, it is likely that CID will receive the orders and will likely conduct the probe into the ADR registered with local police," he explained.

Pawar, who headed the NCP, had taken off from Mumbai in the morning to address four rallies in the day in Pune district for the February 5 Zilla Parishad elections.

The others killed in the tragedy were Captain Sumit Kapoor, who had a flying experience of 15,000 hours,

co-pilot Capt. Shambhavi Pathak with 1,500 hours of flying, Personal Security Officer (PSO) Vidip Jadhav and flight attendant Pinky Mali.

The government released a statement detailing the sequence of events that led to the crash and Pawar's death.

The aircraft, a Learjet, was cleared for landing in Baramati after a go-around due to poor visibility, but having finally received a clearance, it did not give any read-back to the ATC, and moments later burst into flames on the edge of the runway. (PTI)



18,000 job fairs across country in past year

Govt says 2.22 crore people provided jobs

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: A total of 2.22 crore people across the country were provided jobs in over 18,000 job fairs during the past year, Minister of Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The minister also said that employment generation is growing and unemployment rate (3.2 per cent) is reducing in the country.

Replying to supplementaries during Question Hour, the minister informed the Upper House that the government has created a National Career Service Portal as a single platform for providing employment.

"Overall during the last one year, 18,000 job fairs were organised all over the country and in all a total of 2.22 crore people were given jobs during the period across the country," Mandaviya said.

He said that the central government has so far organised 18 job melas and provided 11.49 jobs in the government sector.

The minister said the National Career Service (NCS) portal has become robust in the last one decade and as many as 55 lakh companies are linked to it and all state government platforms are also linked.

A total of over 6 crore job-seeking youth have registered on the portal in the last 10 years, he said.

"I am happy to inform you that the NCS portal has been linked to e-migrate portal, Yuva-Bharat and Skill development platforms to create a single window for jobs," the minister said.

On the portal, as many as 53 lakh people registered in Bihar and 39.8 lakh were shortlisted and job opportunities created for them.

"In all 4.5 lakh youth participated in job fairs, of which 90,000 people were shortlisted and 43,000 people given jobs by companies of both central and state levels," he said.

In his written reply to the question, the minister said, "Job fair is one of the steps towards fulfilment of the commitment of the government to accord high-

est priority to employment generation amongst youth. Regular job fairs are being organized under various schemes by state governments/ministries/ departments."

He said job fairs are primarily intended to facilitate linkage between jobseekers and local employers, so as to address local employment requirements. Such fairs focus on employment opportunities aligned with local labour market demand.

Additionally, he said, Ministry of Labour and Employment, is running the NCS portal which is a one-stop solution for providing career related services including job search & matching, information on online & offline job fairs, career counselling, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, skill/training programmes through it.

"Till 20.01.2026, a total of 3280 job fairs have been organized in Bihar under the NCS project, in which 8,492 employers have participated. Notifying final hiring figures is not a mandatory requirement on NCS portal.

In response to another question, the minister told the House that in 2024, as per published RBI data, the Centre provided 17 crore jobs in the last decade.

The RBI data also shows that in one decade from 2004-2014 a total of 2.9 crore employment generation was done, from 44.23 crore employment in 2003-04 to 47.15 crore employment opportunities in 2013-14. The 2024 data shows 64.33 crore employment opportunities were provided.

"India's unemployment rate is 3.2 per cent, which is less than even developed countries," he informed the House.

To another supplementary on gig workers, Mandaviya said it is a new concept and several people are getting employment opportunities in the country. It is estimated that a total of around 2 crore gig workers are working and the new Labour Codes would help ensure social security and health security to them, he said. (PTI)

Infodemic corrodes institutional trust, weakens policy compliance: Ex-Union health minister

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: Former Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said an "infodemic" corrodes trust at institutional, policy, and personal levels, emphasising that misinformation diverts attention towards harmful choices, thereby weakening public health systems.

Vardhan made the remarks recently at the unveiling of a book authored by healthcare communication expert Dr Swadeep Srivastava, 'Perils of Health Infodemic', which calls for "information therapy" to save lives.

Health misinformation ranges from 1-51 per cent of vaccine-related posts, 20-30 per cent of YouTube videos on emerging infections being inaccurate, and 69 per cent of misinformation engagement driven by celebrities and politicians, warned experts at the book launch who underlined that the infodemic is eroding trust and delaying life-saving interventions.

An infodemic is too much information, including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak, according to the World Health Organization.

The experts urged the media and masses to prioritise accuracy over virality, and called for "information therapy", stating that misinformation spreads faster than disease, undermining public trust and health outcomes.

"Health is built on trust and infodemics corrode that trust at institutional, policy, and personal levels. Healthcare today is fought on two fronts: the medical and the informational," Vardhan said.

He also said that while 90 per cent of health outcomes depend on prevention, misinformation diverts attention toward reactive and often harmful choices, weakening public health systems and policy compliance.

"This book offers a roadmap to restore scientific temper and credibility in India," the former minister said.

Expanding on the role of institutions Dr Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU), said, "Infodemic is one of the biggest threats to mankind today. The media can either amplify myths or become the strongest counter-myth tool.

"We need structured health communication -- Prevent, Protect, Promote -- driven by the media, medical community and the masses," Verma said, urging doctors, too, to actively speak up and not remain "silent spectators". (PTI)



**KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
KAAC SECRETARIAT
DIPHU - 782460**



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No.KAAC/Skill Dev/KADSEE/Spl.Projects/2025-26/64,

Dated Diphu, the 29th January, 2026.

Advertisement

In partial modification to the previous Advertisement vide No..KAAC/Skill Dev/KADSEE/Spl.Projects/2025-26/63, Dated Diphu, the 22nd January, 2026, the Authority of KAAC, Diphu is pleased to schedule the last date of receive of Applications from the local eligible candidates who are resident of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council area and fulfill the eligibility criteria norms of educational qualification, age etc as mentioned below for availing free (STT) Short Term Training course under PMKVY 4.0 Scheme under The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India.

Name of Trade/Course	Eligibility
Electrician	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: Matriculation Passed Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
CCTV Installation	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: 10 +2 (Higher Secondary Passed) Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
Hardware Devices (Mobile & Accessories Repairing)	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: Matriculation Passed Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
Computer Hardware Technician	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: 10 +2 (Higher Secondary Passed) Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
Battery System Assembly Operator	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: Matriculation Passed Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
IT-ITES (Web Application Developing)	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: 10 +2 (Higher Secondary Passed) Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.
Tourism & Hospitality	Age: The candidate should not be less than 14 years and not more than 40 years as on 1 st January 2026 Minimum Qualification required: Matriculation Passed Candidate awaiting results of the qualifying examination on the closing date of application need not apply.

How to apply: Candidates will have to bring the required documents as indicated below:

- One copy of recent passport size photograph to be pasted on the space provided in the application form.
- Age-proof certificate (HSLC Admit/certificate of equivalent examination).
- Particulars of all examination passed commencing with matriculation or equivalent examination.
- A candidate can apply only for one trade.
- Tribe/Caste Certificate
- Proof of resident of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council area.

Selection Process: Selection of candidate for undergoing the training will be based on interview score and eligibility.

Important instructions to candidates:

- In case of any false declaration made by the candidate/applicant, he/she will be rejected.
- Applications received after the last date shall not be entertained.
- Only short listed candidate will be called for Inter-View through notification in the local leading news paper for which no TA/DA will be provided.
- The undersigned reserves the right to re-scheduled/ cancel the interview as well as to reject any or all applications without assigning any thereof.
- Canvassing directly or indirectly shall disqualify a candidate.
- The last date for received of Prescribed Filled-up Form is 24th February, 2026 up-to 5.00 PM (Official Hours).

Sd/-
**Joint Secretary-cum-Nodal Officer,
Skill Development Mission,
DIPHU.**

People take out rally in Aizawl demanding re investigation of woman's death

AIZAWL, Jan 29: Hundreds of people under the aegis of 'Justice for Marina' took to the streets on Thursday, demanding a deeper investigation into the death of Marina Lalchhanchhuahi (26), whose decomposed body was recovered near Mizoram University (MZU) on December 13, barely two weeks after she went missing.

Police named RL Peka (62), a retired government employee, who died last month, allegedly of suicide, as the prime accused in the heinous crime in its investigation.

The protesters claimed that the crime was committed not solely by Peka and that others were likely involved.

The group marched from Vaivakawn in the western part of Aizawl through Chanmari and the Millennium Centre before converging at Vanapa Hall near the state assembly house.

Demonstrators were heard chanting for transparency and cited serious discrepancies and suspicious circumstances surrounding the brutal death of the woman.

They also submitted a formal petition to Aizawl Superintendent of Police (SP) demanding a thorough investigation and urging the state police to uncover the 'full truth' behind the alleged brutal nature of the crime.

Speaking at the rally, social activist Khawlrinpui questioned the extreme level of violence used.

She highlighted the unrecognisable state of the victim, raising concerns about potential chemical use and the high likelihood of accomplices being involved in the killing of Marina and her unborn child.

Aizawl SP Zosangliana said that the case will be dragged on for further investigation if there is any clue for involvement of other perpetrators.

So far, the investigation found only Peka as the accused in the murder case, he said.

The highly decomposed body of Marina, a resident of Tahnrl in the western outskirts of Aizawl, was recovered near MZU football ground on December 13 following intensive search by police as-



sisted by local volunteers after she went missing from her residence on December 1.

Bone fragments and 8 teeth were also

recovered on the body due to the advanced state of decomposition.

An autopsy was conducted, and an unnatural death case was registered, they said.

The investigation revealed that Marina was pregnant and was planning to marry an elderly man believed to be a retired government servant.

On December 16, police summoned suspect RL Peka, a temporary resident of Tahnrl, for questioning.

However, the suspect had died in a hospital in Aizawl after allegedly jumping from his house around the same time.

Suspecting Peka's involvement, police inspected his house, seized his mobile phone and car.

Police found bloodstains inside his car and subsequent forensic examination confirmed that it matched Marina's blood.

CCTV footage further showed that Peka's car entered the MZU campus on December 1, the day Marina went missing, and remained there for more than 2 hours.

The investigation also revealed that his mobile phone contained a picture of a pregnancy test kit and Marina's mobile phone number saved under a pseudonym, which was the last number that dialed Marina on December 1.

On January 17, police registered a murder case under section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at Vaivakawn police station, naming Peka as the prime accused.

On Tuesday, angry mobs burned an under-construction multiple-storey building of the accused hours after police issued a statement citing they unravelled the murder case and identified the accused.

Suspecting involvement of other accomplices, residents of Tahnrl also demanded further investigation into the case.

Tahnrl unit Young Mizo Association (YMA) president RS Lalrinsanga said they have demanded that the home department further investigate the case as they suspect more accomplices, who helped Peka to commit the crime. (PTI)

CoMSO on ISIS-K threat to Garo people



SHILLONG, Jan 29: The Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisations (CoMSO) on Thursday demanded a central-level investigation into the alleged ISIS-K threat issued against the indigenous Garo people.

In a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, CoMSO chairman Roykumar Synrem demanded immediate involvement of central counter-terror and intel-

ligence agencies and a comprehensive investigation into the origin, intent and networks behind the threat, besides strengthening intelligence gathering and visible deployment of security forces in vulnerable areas to reassure the public.

He also demanded swift arrest and prosecution of all individuals involved under relevant anti-terror and national security laws,

zero tolerance for those aiding, abetting or shielding extremist activities, review of border security mechanisms, monitoring and dismantling of radical propaganda networks, and protection of indigenous land and demographic integrity.

Synrem stated that the threat, which warns the Garo people to vacate their ancestral land by 2027, is seen as a direct threat to internal security, communal harmony and indigenous rights.

The use of the name of a globally recognised terrorist organisation like ISIS-K cannot be treated lightly under any circumstance, he said.

He then said that the Garo people will not vacate their land in 2027 or at any time. Garo Hills is integral to Meghalaya and inseparable from India.

Immediate, firm and visible action is expected in the interest of national security, constitutional values and the protection of indigenous peoples, he added. (NNN)

Meghalaya CM meets PM in Delhi, highlights state's development initiatives

SHILLONG, Jan 29: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and briefed him about the northeastern state's development in various sectors. Sangma and Modi also held strategic discussions on Meghalaya's future growth, an official release said.

The CM highlighted Meghalaya's economic performance, improvements in maternal health and human development indicators, strengthening of large processing units and market linkages to double farmers income, preparations for hosting the 39th National Games in 2027, and efforts in preserving and promoting its cultural heritage, it said.

Sangma also submitted a set of documents to the PM, outlining the state's future vision and seeking continued support from the Centre.

"These included a note on Meghalaya's 'Vision 2032' for sustained economic growth, and proposals aimed at maintaining the state's development momentum in alignment with the national vision of Viksit Bharat," the release said. (PTI)

Youth are foundational contributors to 'Viksit Bharat' vision: Mizoram Gov



AIZAWL, Jan 29: Mizoram Governor Vijay Kumar Singh on Thursday hailed the youth as foundational contributors to 'Viksit Bharat', the Centre's vision to transform the nation into a fully developed, self-reliant and prosperous country by 2047 when it celebrates the 100th anniversary of Independence.

Addressing the general assembly and ruby jubilee celebration of Students' Self-Support Union (SSU) here, Singh urged students to identify and master their unique talents to contribute to the growth of Mizoram and the nation.

He identified the youth as foundational contributors to the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 and reminded

them of the significant responsibility they carry.

The governor lauded the SSU for its consistent promotion of self-reliance among the student body, noting that such dedication serves as a powerful source of inspiration for the youth.

"Those who achieve self-reliance through their own endeavours become stronger, develop greater self-discipline, and are far better equipped to confront the realities and challenges of life without faltering," he said.

Stressing that genuine progress is unattainable without a clear sense of purpose and steadfast integrity, Singh described the organisation's initiatives as an essential pillar of support for the academic community.

He encouraged SSU leaders to explore microfinancing schemes to provide more targeted support for students in need.

The governor further highlighted the union's focus on the dignity of labour, financial self-discipline, and the independence gained through personal merit.

He observed that this philosophy redefines education, moving beyond the mere acquisition of qualifications toward the moulding of responsible, well-rounded citizens.

Singh advised the students to remain resolute in their goals while prioritising compassion, respect, and community service.

"True success is measured not only by personal accomplishments but also by the manner in which we support and uplift those around us," he said.

The SSU was founded on May 27, 1985 at Hranganba College in Aizawl, according to officials. (PTI)

Lalduhoma inaugurates NCC Mizoram headquarters

AIZAWL, Jan 29: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday formally unveiled the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Mizoram group headquarters, an official statement said.

The event was attended by Mizoram Sports and Youth Services Minister Lalnginglova Hmar.

Interacting with NCC (NER) Additional Director General Major General Anurag Vij and NCC group headquarters commander Brig GS Arora after the inauguration, Lalduhoma spoke about the initiatives taken by the state government for the establishment of the NCC headquarters in Aizawl citing the government wanted it because it strongly felt the necessity to give proper guidance to youth to lead a disciplined life, the statement said.

The chief minister said that the government wanted the youth to enthusiastically join the NCC and use it effectively as a source of building their character and leadership.

"We also strongly feel the need to protect our youth from the growing drug menace. We also want our youth to widely expose their skills and talents through NCC," Lalduhoma said.

Vij informed the chief minister that they are planning to give wider opportunities to the youth of the Northeastern states to have exposure tours to ensure that they have more chances



to interact and come into contact with their fellow citizens in other parts of the country.

Although youth from the NE region are well-disciplined and talented, they remain timid when they travel to other parts of the country and come in contact with their fellow Indians, he said.

The NCC has been consistently guiding and moulding the youth to ensure that they are protected from immoral behaviour and becoming

drug users, and that they become responsible persons in society, he added.

Lalduhoma and NCC officers also discussed a site for the NCC headquarters, during which the NCC officers informed the chief minister that the organisation can construct the headquarters on its own if the government provides land, the statement said. According to officials, there are 4 units of NCC with about 8,000 cadets in Mizoram. (PTI)

CTAN demands re-examination of Nagaland Forest Guard exam

KOHIMA, Jan 29: The Combined Technical Association of Nagaland (CTAN) has formally demanded a re-examination of the Forest Guard written examination conducted on July 12 last year, alleging serious irregularities and procedural lapses.

In a representation submitted to Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Nagaland, CTAN alleged that the examination process was marred by multiple violations of standard recruitment norms.

Among the key issues raised were the conduct of the examination without OMR sheets, absence of any mention of negative marking in the notification and question paper, and the collection of question papers after the exam despite the subsequent release of the answer key, which prevented candidates from verifying their responses.

CTAN also alleged that correction pens were allowed in some examination centres while prohibited in others, creating unequal conditions for candidates. It further claimed that candidates were charged ₹300 each in the name of Medical Fitness Certificates.

CTAN, through its Convenor Meshenlo Kath and Co-Convenor Kaqhetto Kughuto, demanded that the concerned authority order a re-examination of the Forest Guard written examination "to uphold fairness, transparency, and justice" and safeguard the integrity of the recruitment process. (PTI)

'Asia's cleanest village' in Meghalaya to be closed to tourists on Sundays

SHILLONG, Jan 29: Mawlynnong in Meghalaya's East Khasi district, widely known as Asia's cleanest village, will remain closed to single-day tourists on Sundays from now on, as the local authorities decided to suspend all visitor-related activities on that day.

Noting that Sunday is a day of religious observance for most residents, the 'Dorbar' or the village council, said Mawlynnong will remain open to visitors from Monday to Saturday.

"From January 2026 onwards, Mawlynnong village would remain closed to all one-day tourists and visitors on Sundays. The place would be open on weekdays only," the Dorbar said in a statement.

All tourist-related services, including restaurants, shops, stalls and public toilets, would also be closed, it said.

"In Mawlynnong, Sunday is when almost everyone has to attend religious services in the churches for most of the day, hence they would not be able to offer or render any kind of services or hospitality to the visitors," the statement said.

The Dorbar said the restriction was also aimed at avoiding inconvenience to visitors, especially elderly tourists, and preventing dissatisfaction that could harm the village's reputation. (PTI)

Push for skill development

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 29: In a push toward regional skill development, the Union ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE) organised an awareness and registration drive for the Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS) at Jubilee Memorial College (JMC), Kokochung, on Thursday.

The MSDE initiative focuses on the Northeast region, aligning with the Prime Minister's vision of Ashta Lakshmi and Viksit Bharat, Viksit North East.

The scheme serves as a bridge between industry demand and skilled talent through hands-on experiential learning.

Addressing the gathering, Atsunba Walling, Kokochung ADC, highlighted the urgency of skill development in an era defined by automation and globalisation.

"A traditional degree alone is no longer enough," Walling stated, urging the youth to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Walling emphasised that skills are the key to self-employment rather than just a route to government jobs.

Drawing from local wisdom, he cited the Ao Naga folklore "The bamboo that bends doesn't break", encouraging students to remain flexible and resilient in the modern job market.

During the programme, Pravin Yadav, state coordinator for the National Skill Development Corporation, led a technical session on registering establishments and students on the official Apprenticeship portal, while H Alongse, joint director, directorate of employment, skill development & entrepreneurship, provided a comprehensive overview of the current employment landscape in Nagaland.

Representatives from the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), Guwahati, discussed the importance of convergence and the strategic way forward for apprenticeship in the region.

The event included a screening of PM-NAPS success stories and an interactive networking session with sector skill councils and third-party aggregators.

Visually impaired apiarist from Nagaland's Shamator scripts success story in beekeeping

HT Correspondent



DIMAPUR, Jan 29: In an inspiring tale of resilience and sheer determination, a 37-year-old visually impaired apiarist from Leankonger village in Shamator district has scripted a success story in beekeeping in Nagaland.

Tsangmong, blind since childhood due to illness, began his beekeeping journey nearly five years ago without formal training.

Inspired by information shared by fellow villagers, he taught himself apiculture through persistence and experimentation.

He was spotted during the scientific beekeeping training programmes conducted under the National Bee Board-National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBB-NBHM) and implemented by the School of Agricultural Sciences, Nagaland University, Medziphema campus, in eastern Nagaland districts, including Shamator, from January 19 to January 27.

Tsangmong has now been fondly called by the technical team of the training programme as the "Miracle Beekeeper".

Using locally available materials, he constructs semi-traditional handmade beehives and independently manages his colonies.

His first colony was formed when a natural swarm settled near his home, which he identified through sound and carefully trans-

ferred into a box.

Despite slow initial progress, his determination yielded results.

Today, he maintains four active beehive colonies and produces multiple honey harvests annually.

Remarkably, he determines the right harvesting time by lifting the boxes and judging their weight, relying on touch and experience rather than sight.

His journey powerfully reflects the inclusive potential of apiculture.

Shamator SDO (Civil) Bodi Kapfo, who joined the team in one of the training days at Leankonger village, handed over a scientific beehive box to Tsangmong, demonstrating that scientific beekeeping can empower individuals across abilities and circumstances, while strengthening rural livelihoods.

The intensive training and demonstration programmes on scientific beekeeping were conducted to strengthen farmer capacities, promote scientific apiculture practices, enhance livelihood opportunities and improve productivity in oilseed crops through organised beekeeping.

The project was led by Dr Mary N Oduyo, associate professor and principal investigator and Dr Avinash Chauhan, scientist, All India Coordinated Research Project on honey bee and pollinators, as co-principal investigator.

Women come with an expiry date in this industry: 'Kohrra 2' star Mona Singh on career risks and payoffs

I have never cared about my on-screen age, says actor Mona Singh who finds it strange that there is an expiry date attached to women while male stars continue to play romantic roles even in their sixties.

Singh is enjoying a great phase in her career with critically-acclaimed performances in Netflix shows "Kaala Paani", "The Ba**ds of Bollywood" and Prime Video show "Made in Heaven 2". She has also played prominent roles in movies such as "Munjya", "Happy Patel" and now "Border 2".

The actor, who plays the challenging role of a cop investigating a woman's murder while dealing with personal tragedy in the second season of Sudip Sharma's hit Netflix show "Kohrra", says she has always taken risks and now the time has come to celebrate.

"I have not cared about my on-screen age. I really haven't because I'm very confident and I know who I am. There's nothing to prove, which is why I keep taking risks. People often ask me, 'Why are you so old on screen?' I would say it doesn't matter. It's the character that I'm playing and it really excites me," Singh told PTI in an interview.

"People do think like that... You see, it's only in this industry that women come with an expiry date. And it is so sad. Whereas men in their 60s can still play the romantic leads, women can't. But I have never really cared about that because I didn't want to be that," she added.

Singh broke out with her role of bespectacled Jassi in her TV debut "Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin" in 2003 when she was just 22-23. She forayed into movies, playing Kareena Kapoor's elder sister

in the 2009 blockbuster "3 Idiots", which also featured Aamir Khan, R Madhvan and Sharman Joshi.

The 44-year-old actor said the feeling that 'she has arrived' came to her when Jassi became a household name but she still did not feel that she had made it.

"I don't get the feeling that I have made it. I got that feeling of 'I have arrived' at the time of 'Jassi'... The feeling that I'm at the right place is now, definitely. I've found my bearings. OTT has given me a lot and still gives. I'm very grateful for that. I'm doing just the right kinds of shows that I wanted to be a part of as an actor... I'm loving this phase."

Singh said it was an absolute honour to be part of "Kohrra 2", which premieres on Netflix on February 11, as she had been a fan of creator Sudip Sharma's work and the previous season of the show, set around two cops in the hinterlands of Punjab.

In season two, she essays the role of Dhanwant Kaur, a cop leading a murder investigation along with Barun Sobti's Garundi, who reprises his character from the previous season.

"When the time is right, you meet the right people. And I just feel very lucky and blessed to be a part of 'Kohrra 2'. I'm a big fan of 'Kohrra 1'. It just resonated instantly. I'm such a Punjabi at heart. I was wondering, 'Why am I not there in season one?'... The team is magical, so efficient, warm and loving. They take their craft so seriously and have fun in life. I had a good time," she said.

Created and written by Gunjit Chopra, Diggi Sisodia and Sudip Sharma, the second season of "Kohrra 2" brings a fresh case once again rooted in Punjab's wintry landscape. (PTI)



'Lailaaj', produced by Pankaj Tripathi and wife Mridula, heads to Bharat Rang Mahotsav



Actor Pankaj Tripathi and his wife Mridula Tripathi's maiden theatre production 'Lailaaj' will be showcased at the 25th edition of Bharat Rang Mahotsav, India's largest theatre festival.

The musical comedy play, produced under the couple's banner Roopkatha Rangmanch, will be staged at the prestigious festival hosted by the National School of Drama in the national capital.

The festival, popularly known as "Bharat Rang", kickstarted on Tuesday and will run till February 20, bringing together acclaimed theatre productions from India and abroad.

Written and directed by Faiz Mohammed Khan, 'Lailaaj' marks Tripathi's return to the stage after more than a decade. The production also features the stage debut of the couple's daughter Aashi.

The selection is a significant milestone for Roopkatha Rangmanch, as it is the first time the banner's maiden production will be presented at the prestigious theatre festival.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav holds a very special place in the world of Indian theatre, and to have 'Lailaaj' selected for its 25th edition is truly humbling.

"Theatre is where my roots lie, and NSD has always represented discipline, honesty, and deep respect for the craft. To bring our very first production under Roopkatha Rangmanch to a platform like this feels like a full-circle moment," Tripathi said in a statement.

"Lailaaj is a simple, musical, and heartfelt story, but behind it is the hard work of many people who believe in theatre as a living, breathing art form. Sharing this stage with my daughter Aashi adds an emotional layer that I will always cherish. I see this not just as a performance, but as an offering to the theatre community that shaped me," he added. Mridula Tripathi, co-producer of the play, said the intention behind starting Roopkatha Rangmanch was to tell stories with sincerity rather than chase recognition.

"For 'Lailaaj' to be selected for Bharat Rang Mahotsav, especially in its 25th year, feels incredibly validating. This play has been nurtured with love, patience, and belief in the process. Watching it travel to a platform like NSD, where some of the finest theatre work is celebrated, makes the journey even more meaningful. Seeing Aashi take her first steps on stage within this environment is deeply emotional for us as parents. We are grateful to the festival, the audience, and every artist who believes that theatre still has the power to move, heal, and connect," she added. (PTI)

Imtiaz Ali's next feature film to release in June 2026

Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali's new film with actor-musician Diljit Dosanjh has a new release date of June 12, 2026, the makers announced on Thursday.

Billed as a "charming story of love and longing", the untitled movie was earlier scheduled for a release in theatres in April this year, coinciding with the festival of Baisakhi.

The yet-untitled movie marks the second collaboration between Ali and Dosanjh after their 2024 widely-loved Netflix film "Amar Singh Chamkila".

Actors Naseeruddin Shah, Vedang Raina and Sharvari will also feature in the film, which has a contemporary and witty narrative that explores the depth of human connection. It went on floors in August 2025.

"This film has a big heart. It has a large canvas yet is very personal. It is a story of a boy and a girl, but also a country," Ali said in a statement.

The film will reunite the legendary trio of Ali, AR Rahman, and Irshad Kamil, who have given some of their most memorable soundtracks in films like "Amar Singh Chamkila", "Tamasha", and "Rockstar", among others.

It is produced by Applause Entertainment, Window Seat Films and Ali's frequent collaborator Mohit Choudhary. (PTI)

Henry Cavill unveils first look from 'Highlander' reboot



Hollywood star Henry Cavill has shared first look from his new action outing – the upcoming reboot of 'Highlander' from 'John Wick' filmmaker Chad Stahelski. Cavill shared first-look images from the project on Instagram on Wednesday, offering fans an early glimpse into his latest screen transformation.

"Happy First Look for Highlander! This has been quite the journey for me, which I'll tell you all about when the time is right, but it's a special moment to be able to share this. I hope you enjoy," the actor wrote in the post.

The photos feature Cavill as the latest incarnation of Connor MacLeod - the immortal Scottish swordsman battling across the ages.

The reboot marks Cavill's next major franchise venture after portraying the DC Comics superhero Superman on the big screen in multiple DC projects and headlining Netflix's fantasy series 'The Witcher' for three seasons.

The original 'Highlander' movie came out in 1986 and featured actors Christopher Lambert, Sean Connery and Clancy Brown as immortal beings, hunting down each other to become more powerful. It was followed by four sequels and three television series.

Stahelski is directing the project from a script by Michael Finch. Ryan J Condal and Kerry Williamson had worked on earlier drafts of the film.

The director also produces the project along with The cast also includes Russell Crowe, Karen Gillan, Djimon Hounsou, Dave Bautista, Marisa Abela and Max Zhang. (PTI)

It breaks your heart when films like 'Bheed' and 'Afwaah' don't do well: Bhumi Pednekar

It is heartbreaking when good films don't work at the box office, says actor Bhumi Pednekar, who believes some of the responsibility also lies with the audience as their feedback decides what gets made next.

Citing the example of critically-lauded films such as "Bheed" and "Afwaah", which failed to stay in theatres despite good reviews for tackling issues like pandemic and migrant crisis as well the menace of fake news, Bhumi said right voices are not getting an opportunity to tell their stories.

"It really breaks your heart when a film like 'Bheed' or 'Afwaah' doesn't do well," Bhumi told PTI in an interview.

"'Bheed' has a platform (OTT). The onus is also on the audience, it is not just on the filmmaker. If you want good content and a good film to be made, you've to watch that film. If you don't watch that film, then those films will not be made. It's like, what came first, the chicken or the egg? I don't really have an answer for it. All I know is if you want good work, you have to go support small films," the actor added.

According to the actor, the conversation around films is now just limited to their Friday numbers (box office performance on the opening day).

"...The word-of-mouth films that used to be there, where are they now? Now, a Friday number decides everything. Every film does not have the capability of doing Rs 8, 12 or 20 crore but does that mean it's a bad film? No.

"Word-of-mouth was an entire bracket within our films, which has just completely been taken away. That's why I feel such good films and newer voices don't get an opportunity. I feel the only film that happened with was '12th Fail' because the makers were so bullish about it that they were like, 'We'll keep it in the theatre and then see what happens,'" she said.

Bhumi said even a film like "Laapataa Ladies", directed by Kiran Rao, gained prominence only after its OTT release.

"When it was released, there were newcomers in it... it's such a beautiful film. But people labelled it (failure) because it didn't have a good opening," she added.

On a question about only tentpole films like "Dhurandhar" doing well theatrically, Bhumi said

she loved the Aditya Dhar movie, which has earned over Rs 1,300 crore globally.

"'Dhurandhar' is a great film. It's just not a tentpole film. It's a phenomenal film. I loved the film. There is a director's voice in the film, it has fantastic performances. The beauty of cinema or any art form, everybody has their point of view," she said.

The actor said she has always strived to do all kinds of movies, whether it is a niche title like "Sonchiriya" or a commercial project like "Pati Patni Aur Woh".

"I am an actor, so if I'm doing 'The Royals' and then I'm doing 'Daldal' as well. My job is to be in a different kind of role, and push myself as well. I'm very optimistic that we are the cusp of change," she said.

"My new goals are just doing work that helps me grow as a human being and as an actor, and only work with filmmakers that love me for what I have to offer, just do work that breaks this mediocrity that the industry is going through right now."

The actor also spoke about the failure of "The Lady Killer", co-starring Arjun Kapoor. The movie, Bhumi said, was incomplete when it made its debut in cinema halls. Directed by Ajay Bahl of "BA Pass" and "Section 375" fame, the film reportedly underwent multiple re-shoots and exceeded its budget. It received a limited theatrical release before being made available for free on the T-Series YouTube channel.

"What happened with 'The Lady Killer', honestly, even we don't know. It was an incomplete film that went out. I don't think anything was spoken about it then, I did not want to, and I'll just stick to that as well. But as actors, it's not really in your control.

"It was an incomplete film that was released in four screens, like not even theatres," she said, adding that she hoped that people involved will speak up "but nobody did".

Bhumi's debut streaming show "The Royals" on Netflix didn't get the best of reviews but the actor said it is her "one of the most viewed pieces of work".

"If I go to L.A. or any part of the world, some non-Indian person will recognise me and be like, 'Were you in 'The Royals'? I always knew that show was going to travel," she said. (PTI)



EFI sends rape-accused EC member as coach to Jordan

Sports Ministry flags governance issues

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: The naming of rape-accused Col (Retd) Tarsem Singh Warraich for an overseas assignment has yet again brought the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) under the scanner, even as the Sports Ministry, in an unrelated development, has issued a show-cause notice to the federation over prolonged governance and compliance failures.

The immediate controversy centres on EFI's decision to send Tarsem as coach-cum-manager of the Indian team for the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) World Cup Qualifiers in Jordan from January 29-31.

Top two teams will qualify for finals in November in Jordan.

Tarsem, an executive committee member of EFI, has never competed in a national tent pegging championship and was earlier suspended by the federation in an impersonation-related case from 2022-2024.

His selection was censured by the father of a junior rider who wrote to the world governing body ITPF. Giving details, he mentioned that an FIR has been

registered against Colonel Tarsem Singh Warraich in Sonapat with regards to sexual harassment complaint filed by two women.

"Given the seriousness of the offense and the fact that the individual is only out on bail how can the sports authorities allow Colonel Tarsem Singh to travel outside the country let alone represent the Nation," he wrote.

Responding to which ITPF has asked EFI to take "appropriate action."

"We request that this issue be treated with the utmost seriousness, and that appropriate action be taken after due verification of the information provided. We would also appreciate being informed of the outcome and any measures taken in this regard, in order to ensure the safety of all competitors and uphold the integrity of the sport," ITPF mail read.

Tarsem has emphatically rejected the allegations, saying the case is fabricated and that the court has not barred him from doing his duties.

"The court has not neither stopped me from travelling nor barred me doing my duty. I, as member of the Tent Pegging EFI, have the responsibility to act as per the order. The EC asked me to travel and so I have," Tarsem told PTI from Jordan.

"It is a false case. I do not even know one of the girls. It was a result of the tiff



I had with a few people in the organisation I worked for."

According to sources, the ITPF has also refused to allow Tarsem to appear in a judges' course being conducted alongside the Jordan event after objections were raised by fellow participants.

Repeated calls to interim EFI president Jagat Singh, though, went unanswered.

Selection trouble before event
The selection process for the Jordan

event ran into turbulence after EFI failed to conduct the scheduled selection trials following the National Tent Pegging Championships in January.

Multiple and contradictory lists of probables were issued over successive days, prompting objections from riders over non-adherence to laid-down criteria. The trials were eventually stalled, and riders were asked to leave the camp with their horses.

On January 16, EFI informed the ITPF

that the Indian team would be unable to participate in the qualifiers, citing adverse weather conditions. The international body rejected the request, stating that withdrawal after confirmation would attract penalties, and issued a penalty invoice.

A day later, EFI sent a revised list of four athletes along with Tarsem Singh's name to the ITPF.

Explaining the trials fiasco, Tarsem said, "Col Jaiveer Singh withheld the information on World Cup. We got to know about it very late. We requested the ITPF to extend the deadline for us and they obliged."

"However, the Haryana Police ground was not available for trials and we picked the best four riders from the Nationals. And today (Thursday) we have won one silver and one individual bronze. Can you challenge this performance?," he said.

Ministry showcauses EFI

Separately, the Sports Ministry on January 28 issued a detailed show-cause notice to EFI, seeking an explanation for its failure to comply with conditions attached to exemptions granted under the National Sports Development Code, 2011.

The ministry noted that while exemptions were granted to EFI in November

2021, the federation was required to develop sports infrastructure and ensure the existence of state and district units in at least two-thirds of states and Union Territories.

It said EFI had not apprised the ministry of compliance despite the lapse of more than four years.

The show-cause notice cited judicial observations questioning EFI's practice of granting direct membership to individuals, clubs and various Indian Army units, which courts have observed appeared aimed at retaining voting control rather than promoting the sport.

The ministry further pointed to EFI's failure to publish annual competition calendars, notify national championships in advance, frame and publish selection policies, utilise allocated budgets, empanel coaches and support staff, and submit concrete plans for upcoming international events.

It warned that these shortcomings were adversely affecting athletes and could lead to embarrassment for the country, noting that the international governing body FEI has cautioned about possible disaffiliation.

EFI has been given 15 days to respond, failing which action under the Sports Code, including withdrawal of recognition, may be considered. (PTI)

Jurel misses out on ton as UP manage only 237 Tiny Bodø/Glimt wins again in Champions League to set up potential playoff with Real Madrid

NAGPUR, Jan 29: India international Dhruv Jurel missed out on a deserving ton by just four runs as his team Uttar Pradesh was bowled out for 237, courtesy a six-wicket haul from Vidarbha left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey on day one of their final Group A Ranji Trophy league fixture here.

At stumps, hosts Vidarbha (25 points), who are looking at an outright win to qualify for the knock-outs, were 33 for no loss.

Opting to bat, UP were struggling at 109 for 6 at one stage before Jurel and seamer Shivam Mavi (47) added 92 runs for the seventh wicket in a recovery act that enabled the visitors to cross the 200-run mark.

Jurel hit 11 boundaries and was a bit severe on spinner Parth Rekhade (1/60) but it was India A regular Dubey, who ran through the UP line-up with figures of 6 for 63 in 19.5 overs.

The UP innings folded a delivery short of 69 overs with none of the other nine batters able to cross the 20-run mark.

Jurel was the eighth batter out and Dubey's fourth victim caught by Parth Kadam.

Sukirt, Ninad take Baroda to 247/5 vs TN



In another Group A game in Salem, Sukirt Pandey's patient 73 not out off 222 balls and Ninad Rathwa's (66 off 112 balls) half-century took Baroda to 247 for 5 against Tamil Nadu on the opening day.

The duo added 85 runs for the fifth wicket after Baroda were left tottering at 72 for 4.

Sukirt also added 90 runs for the sixth wicket with Atit Seth (45 batting). Off-spinner J Hemuchudeshan took three wickets.

Chetan's 160 in Nagaland's 322 for 6 vs Andhra

Keeper-batter Chetan Bist smashed an unbeaten 160 as Nagaland reached 322 for 6 against Andhra on the opening day of their group A match in Sovima.

Bist smacked 23 boundaries and a six and added 167 for the fifth wicket with Dega Nischal (74) after Nagaland were left reeling at 59 for 4.

Kavurui Saiteja and Satyanarayana Raju took two wickets apiece. Andhra (28 points) would ideally want to take six points for a clear cut knock-out berth but even three points would take them

to 31 and keep them in quarters hunt.

Swastik, Govinda take Odisha to 242 for 6 vs Jharkhand

Half-centuries by opener Swastik Samal (79, 168 balls) and veteran middle-order batter Govinda Poddar (64, 120 balls) took Odisha's first day total to 242 for 6 against Jharkhand on the opening day of the Group A game in Jamshedpur.

For Jharkhand, medium pace bowler Saurabh Sekhar (3/34) was the pick of the bowlers. Jharkhand, like Vidarbha are on 25 points and are looking at an outright win and bonus points to ensure a quarter-final berth.

Brief Scores

In Nagpur: UP 1st Innings 237 (Dhruv Jurel 96, Shivam Mavi 47, Harsh Dubey 6/63). Vidarbha 1st Innings 33 for no loss.

In Salem: Baroda 1st Innings 247/5 (Sukirt Pandey 73 batting, Ninad Rathwa 66) vs Tamil Nadu.

In Sovima: Nagaland 1st Innings 322 for 6 (Chetan Bist 160 batting, Kavurui Saiteja 2/28) vs Andhra.

In Jamshedpur: Odisha 1st Innings 242 for 6 (Swastik Samal 79, Govinda Poddar 64, Saurabh Sekhar 3/34) vs Jharkhand. (PTI)

Senegal and Morocco fined and players banned after African Cup final walk-off and chaos

CAPE TOWN, Jan 29: Africa's soccer body issued fines worth more than \$1 million and banned Senegal's coach and Moroccan players Wednesday following a shambolic African Cup soccer final this month that involved a walk-off protest, fans trying to storm the field and fights among journalists.

The sanctions announced by the Confederation of African Football included fines totaling \$615,000 for the Senegalese soccer federation and \$315,000 for the Morocco federation for unsporting and improper conduct by their players, coaching staff and supporters, among other offenses.

The Jan. 18 African soccer showpiece was marred by Senegal players walking off led by coach Papa Thiaw in protest against a penalty awarded late in regulation time to host Morocco. Thiaw was banned for five African games and given an individual fine of \$100,000 for bringing the game into disrepute, the African confederation said.

The game restarted after a delay of around 15 minutes, Morocco missed the penalty, and Senegal won the African title 1-0 after extra time.

The heated final in Rabat also saw supporters trying to storm the field, Morocco and Senegal players scuffling on the sidelines, reporters from the two countries fighting in press areas, and a bizarre sequence where Moroccan ball boys attempted to seize a towel being used by Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy — in an apparent bid to distract him and help their team win the continental title.

That behavior by the home team's ball boys led to a \$200,000 fine for Morocco's federation, which will be a co-host of the 2030 World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal and has come under scrutiny for the shambolic African final.

Senegal players Iliman Ndiaye and Ismaila Sarr were banned for two African games, Morocco's Achraf Hakimi was also banned for two games, with one suspended, and Morocco's Ismael Saibari was banned for three games and fined \$100,000 for unsporting behavior. The African soccer body dismissed an appeal by Morocco to have the result canceled and Morocco declared the winner because of the Senegalese walk-off. (AP)

Real Madrid dropped by Mourinho's Benfica into Champions League playoffs round alongside PSG

LONDON, Jan 29: Real Madrid was stunningly dumped into the knockout playoffs of the Champions League by its former coach José Mourinho — whose Benfica team advanced on a last-gasp goal by its goalkeeper — on Wednesday and will be joined there by title holder Paris Saint-Germain. Madrid started play third in the 36-team standings and despite two goals by Kylian Mbappé lost 4-2 at Benfica and fell to ninth — one place below advancing direct to the round of 16.

Astonishingly, Benfica only advanced to the knockout phase in 24th place on goal difference because Ukrainian goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin scored in the eighth minute of stoppage time with a dramatic header when Madrid was down to nine players. Red cards were shown minutes earlier for Raul Asencio and Rodrygo.

"This victory is historic and important," Mourinho said, adding of his goalkeeper: "We knew that he could do it. You have to put the ball there, but it's an amazing goal for the guy."

Trubin said it was a "crazy moment. I'm not used to scoring. I'm 24 years old and it's the first time."

Madrid fell out of the top-eight places when Sporting Lisbon got a stoppage-time

goal in a 3-2 win at Athletic Bilbao.

"They have outplayed us," Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said of Benfica. "We've been far from the version we should be."

Sporting surprisingly joined Liverpool — which beat Qarabag 6-0 and got a goal from Mohamed Salah — Tottenham, Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester City in sealing top-eight finishes. Table-topping Arsenal, which completed a perfect eight-win program beating Kairat Almaty 3-2, and second-place Bayern Munich had already advanced to the round of 16 that starts in March.

PSG falls

PSG and Newcastle both started in the top eight but drew 1-1 in Paris which sent both falling in the standings to 11th and 12th. The game had an explosive start when Newcastle conceded a penalty for a handball in the first minute, and Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé's spot-kick was saved by Nick Pope.

Madrid, PSG, Newcastle and last year's beaten finalist Inter Milan all will be in the qualifying playoffs draw Friday for teams that placed ninth through 24th.

Still, PSG went through the playoffs round a year ago in taking the longest path



possible with two extra games in February toward its first European title.

"We don't have to think about it too much," said Vitorino, who gave PSG an eighth-minute lead. "We had the same problem last year, and then out of nowhere things changed and the ball started to go in."

Mourinho-Madrid again?

There is a 50-50 chance it will be Mourinho's Benfica against Real Madrid and Mbappé two more times next month.

The bracket for the playoffs means the

LONDON, Jan 29: Tiny Bodø/Glimt is making a big splash in the Champions League and after back-to-back upsets over Manchester City and Atletico Madrid, it has set up a possible showdown with Real Madrid.

A 2-1 comeback win at Atletico on Wednesday saw the Norwegian club scrape into the playoffs. It means it will play either record 15-time European champion Madrid or last year's losing finalist Inter Milan.

"The feeling is enormous. I am so incredibly proud," Bodø/Glimt coach Kjetil Knutsen said. "I'm not going to compare it to anything, but we do what we do. We should be extremely proud of that. Achievements stand on their own."

And given its habit of pulling off stunning upsets in Europe's elite club competition, Madrid and Inter are unlikely to relish a two-legged tie against the team that's located north of the Arctic Circle — farther north than any in Champions League history.

It was the second time in as many weeks that Bodø/Glimt has pulled off a shock result, following the 3-1 win against Manchester City. Pep Guardiola's players were so apologetic to their fans that they refunded ticket costs for supporters who traveled to the match.

Kolo Muani scores for Tottenham in Champions League a day after being involved in car crash

FRANKFURT, Jan 29: Tottenham striker Randal Kolo Muani started — and scored — against Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League on Wednesday, a day after being involved in what manager Thomas Frank described as a "minor" car crash.

Pictures circulated on social media Tuesday showing Kolo Muani, a France international, and Tottenham teammate Wilson Odobert standing next to a black Ferrari that had sustained damage after its tire blew up, Frank said. They had taken part in open training at the club's practice facility earlier in the day.

Odobert reportedly was in his own car but stopped to assist Kolo Muani, and they traveled to Germany together.

Frank reported late Tuesday that Kolo Muani was

"fine" and picked him against Eintracht, for whom he played in the 2022-23 season.

And the striker gave Tottenham the lead with a close-range finish in the 47th minute, setting up Tottenham's 2-0 victory that secured a fourth-place finish in the Champions League and direct qualification to the round of 16.

It was only Kolo Muani's third goal since joining Tottenham on a season-long loan from Paris Saint-Germain. The other two goals came at PSG in a Champions League loss in the French capital.

"We know when you come to a new club and new country it is never straightforward," Frank said of Kolo Muani. "I hope this will give him confidence." (AP)



Despite that win, Bodø/Glimt needed to repeat it to secure a place in the top 24 of the standings in its first season in the Champions League.

And despite falling behind to Alexander Sørloth's first-half goal, it rallied through Fredrik Sjøvold and Kasper Høgh to seal 23rd place. Its reward is the potential of a clash with all-time king of Europe, Madrid, which dropped into the playoffs after losing 4-2 to former coach Jose Mourinho and Benfica.

Inter — a two-time finalist in the last three seasons — is also in the playoffs.

Should Bodø/Glimt pull off an

other unlikely win, it would face the possibility of a rematch with City or Sporting Lisbon in the round of 16.

It is turning into a spectacular debut in the competition for the Norwegians from the fishing town of Bodø, located more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) north of Oslo and with a population of around 55,000.

Brutal winter conditions and its artificial playing field at its 8,000-capacity Aspmyra stadium have helped it pull off shock wins against famous opponents like Roma, Lazio and Porto before the biggest upset of the lot against City last week. (AP)



Bodø/Glimt advances

Norwegian debutant Bodø/Glimt will be a popular addition to the knockout phase, claiming 23rd place by winning 2-1 at Atletico Madrid. That showed how crucial it was to beat Man City last week inside its Arctic Circle home. Benfica's late drama eliminated Marseille, which lost 3-0 at Club Brugge and dropped below the cutoff into 25th place with nine points.

Also in the playoffs are Qarabag, Brugge, Galatasaray and Olympiakos, plus Juventus and Atalanta from Italy.

Italian champion Napoli was ousted in 30th place after losing 3-2 at home to Chelsea.

Barcelona's turnaround

At halftime Wednesday, the in-play standings showed Chelsea in 12th and Barcelona 13th, both heading for the playoffs. Barcelona was trailing at home to lowly Copenhagen, whose goal was scored by 17-year-old Icelandic striker Viktor Dadason, who scored three times in his debut Champions League season.

Barcelona flipped the game in the second half of a 4-1 win with goals from a stellar forward line: Robert Lewandowski, Lamine Yamal, Raphinha and Marcus Rashford. (AP)

Spanish soccer league offers reward of 50 euros for tips to ID bars illegally broadcasting games



MADRID, Jan 29: The Spanish league is stepping up its fight against audio-visual fraud by offering 50 euros (\$59) for each verified tip on the establishments broadcasting games without proper permission, it said Wednesday.

Bars, restaurants, betting places and similar establishments need to subscribe to a specific package to be able to show the games. The league said such broadcasts have a letter on the corner of the screen to identify them, allowing fans to tell whether they are legal or not.

If people see that an establishment is showing an unauthorized broadcast, they should email La Liga with images to help it verify the infraction.

The league also said it has a channel where fans can anonymously denounce illegal broadcasts.

La Liga has been one of the most active European leagues fighting piracy and audio visual fraud. (AP)

I'm getting better with my mindset and I've learned to be smarter: Shivam Dube

VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 29: On a clement Vizag night, Shivam Dube underlined his growing comfort against pace bowling during his 23-ball 65 blitz against New Zealand, and the India all-rounder attributed the upgrade to an improved "mindset" that made him a "smarter" cricketer.

Of course, Dube's 29-run barrage against leg-spinner Ish Sodhi will hog the limelight, but equally important were the three sixes he fetched against pacers Jacob Duffy and Matt Henry.

It was a clear statement that he can no longer be kept quiet by simply bringing in a pacer, and many oppositions will be squirming in the planning room with that new angle in Dube's batting.

But for the man himself, the improvement was because of the regular chance he is getting in top-flight cricket.

"It's just the hard work which I'm doing. I'm getting better with my mindset because I'm playing all those matches and batting in that situation. So, I know what's going to happen, what are the main things which a bowler is going to come to me," Dube said in the post-match press conference here.

Dube has also got regular chances to bowl in this series, though he was not used here because India stuck to their five front-line bowlers, as even Hardik Pandya did not get to bowl.

"That's the key point for my batting and bowling as well. I'm bowling thanks to



Gauti bhai (Gautam Gambhir) and Surya bhai (Suryakumar Yadav). They have given me the bowling opportunity. So, when you bowl, you become a little smart. So, I'm working on that as well and trying to develop some more skills," he added.

The regular game time, Dube admitted, has made him a lot "smarter" as a cricketer in the last few months.

"Yes, I worked really hard, but I have got the opportunity to bowl, bat, and do everything in the match. So, there is something called experience and that has come to me

and that is going in the right direction. There are many things people upgrade.

"All the players, the spinners, fast bowlers, the teams upgrade themselves. So, I can't be the same as I was. I try to be a little better, a little smarter in the next game. So, I learned how to be a little smarter and what my strengths are and where I can target those."

Dube believes his improved comfort levels against fast bowlers helps him put more pressure on the opposition.

"It's really important, it's about the

matchup. So, they want me to hit spinners. That is my role to get the strike-rate high in the middle overs. That is what I always try. It's just not about the spinners, but fast bowlers as well.

"But yeah, definitely there is something where I know that this (hitting against spinners) is my strength. I can give pressure to the opponents at that time. So, my mindset is very clear at that time," he said.

Dube said he was not targeting a particular number of balls to get his runs.

The left-hander's 15-ball half-century was the third fastest in T20s after Yuvraj Singh (12), Abhishek Sharma and Colin Munro (14).

"As a batsman, I don't think about getting 15 less balls. I just try to focus on every ball. That is what I did today. I was focusing on every ball. I was not thinking about getting a fifty in 15 balls or whatever. I was just trying to play (balls) on merit."

Dube then delved into the shellacking he meted out to Sodhi in the 12th over.

"That is where I try to manage my skill and I try to keep the strike rate high in the middle overs. There were some instincts from my side. I thought that, okay, it's difficult to hit spinners tonight. He (Sodhi) was bowling well.

"But I knew that even he is a little scared, he was going to bowl me the bad ball. I was ready for that. So I wanted to dominate at that time and that is what I did," he noted. (PTI)

Feeling disrespected, Djokovic plans on 'creating my own history' in Australian Open semis



MELBOURNE, Jan 29: The most successful player ever in men's tennis felt disrespected, and had to pause before summarizing the offending question out loud just to process it again.

Novak Djokovic, winner of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, including 10 at the Australian Open, was fielding questions about his pending semifinal with defending champion Jannik Sinner when he returned serve on one that he didn't like.

In a nutshell, he was asked to compare eras from when he broke onto the scene while Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were at the top of tennis to now, when Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have blocked him from winning a major for the last two seasons.

"I'm chasing Jannik and Carlos?" he responded. "In which sense?"

In terms of trying to break the "Sincarez" streak of eight titles.

"So I'm always the chaser, and I'm never being chased?" he asked. "I find it a little bit disrespectful that you kind of miss out on what happened in between where the times when I started chasing, as you say, Rafa and Roger, and now that I'm chasing Carlos and Jannik, and there's probably about a 15-year period in between where I was dominating the Grand Slams.

"It's important to put that in perspective. I don't feel like I'm chasing, to be honest. I'm creating my own history."

The top four seeds reached the final four in the Australian Open men's draw, with No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz and No. 3 Alexander Zverev set to meet in Friday's other semifinal. The winners will advance to the championship decider on Sunday.

Sinner vs. Djokovic, 2 vs. 4
Make no mistake, the 38-year-old Djokovic is in Melbourne with one objective: to win a 25th Grand Slam singles title. That would cement him as the most decorated tennis player of all time. He reached the semis at all four majors last year, but didn't contest a final.

He concedes he's "lucky this time" to still be in the running, after trailing fifth-seeded Lorenzo Musetti 6-4, 6-3 in Wednesday's quarterfinal before the 23-year-old Italian retired in the third set with an injured right leg.

And that followed a walkover in the fourth round. In pure statistics, he hasn't won a set since the third round.

But Sinner is also counting his luck. He was on the verge of a

third-round exit when he was cramping and stumbling while down a break against No. 85-ranked Eliot Spizzirri in the third set. He only got a reprieve when the Extreme Heat Policy was activated, and an eight-minute delay to close the roof completely swung momentum.

Sinner is on a 19-match winning streak at Melbourne Park after his comprehensive 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 quarterfinal win over eighth-seeded Ben Shelton.

The 24-year-old Italian has a 6-4 lead in head-to-heads with Djokovic, including wins in the last five. The sequence includes semifinals at the 2024 Australian Open and at Roland Garros and Wimbledon last year.

"I'm chasing Jannik and Carlos?" he responded. "In which sense?"

"It improves you as a player and a person," Sinner said of his matches against Djokovic. "We're still lucky to have Novak here playing incredible tennis at his age."

"I'm lucky to have someone like him in front of my eyes and I can hopefully learn something. I feel like every day, every time he plays, I can learn something about him."

Alcaraz vs. Zverev, 1 vs. 3

The 22-year-old Alcaraz is bidding to become the youngest player to complete a career Grand Slam — which is winning all four major titles. The 28-year-old Zverev, seeded third, is bidding for his first major trophy. He's been runner-up three times, including last year in Australia when his trip was overshadowed by German court proceedings.

Alcaraz said Zverev edged him in a recent practice match with a "high level of tennis, high level of intensity."

"It was impressive the level he's been playing so far, so it's going to be a great battle," Alcaraz said. "I'm excited about playing him here in AO in a semifinal. I know what I have to do. I will be well-prepared and if he wants to beat me, he has to sweat a lot!"

They're 6-6 in career head-to-heads, including two wins apiece at the Slams. In 2024, Alcaraz beat Zverev in the French Open final, after Zverev defeated Alcaraz in the quarterfinals in Australia.

"In my case, I'm still chasing that desired Slam," Zverev said. "Of course, I still want to achieve that, but I also want to enjoy my tennis. Right now I'm doing that." (AP)

My role is to be defensive and get wickets that way: NZ spinner Santner

VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 29: After tormenting India one more time, left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner said his role in T20Is is to bowl defensive, build pressure and take wickets. He added that it was satisfying to see the strategy pay rich dividends in the fourth T20I here.

India came across a familiar foe in Santner as the New Zealand skipper bowled a brilliant spell of 4-0-26-3 to lead his side to a 50-run win at the ACA-VDC stadium.

He extended the misery of Sanju Samson, got rid of the dangerous Hardik Pandya and then capped the fine run with the wicket of Jasprit Bumrah.

"I guess my role might be playing a little bit more defensive and trying to get wickets that way. At times you want to be smart, six singles are a good option. We've seen a lot of power hitting, a lot of big scores. So, I think the role as a spinner (in T20Is), unless there is spin, is to build pressure and get wickets that way," said Santner in the post-match press conference.

"If you're defending a big score, then let the run rate go up. And if it's a lower score, the only way we stop these guys is getting wickets. So, I think, yeah, it's all about adapting and seeing what's on the table," he added.

Santner explained his argument further, citing his dismissal of Pandya, whom he deceived on the flight to have him caught by Zak Foulkes on the edge of the circle.

"I've bowled a lot to Hardik in the Mumbai (Indians) nets and he knows me. I know him. So, I think in that situation, that (being defensive) was the only way we're going to kind of win that game because it's pretty tough to stop the Indian team when they're going," he added.

But on the night, leg-spinner Ish Sodhi went for plenty as Shivam Dube hammered him for 29 runs in an over. Santner sympathised with his senior teammate, saying Sodhi, perhaps, was trying to be aggressive with India tottering at 82 for five in the 11th over and buy some wickets.

"I think if you bowl one in Dube's arc or Hardik's arc or Rinku's arc, they're going to take it on. You play the percentages and you want to play the match-ups. Yeah, I think as a finger spinner, it can be a challenge.

"If a batter is not picking a wrist spinner, you tell them to be a little more aggressive like Kuldeep (Yadav) or (Ravi) Bishnoi. So, Ish, with his more variations, might have been trying to be aggressive with the state of the game," Santner elaborated.

However, the New Zealand captain did not show any misery in lauding Dube for making a breezy 23-ball 65. But he was quick to add that India's longer tail, with Harshit Rana coming in at No. 7, helped New Zealand's cause.

"I've seen him (Dube) do that a lot and he hits it very far. But we knew that if we could get him out, they didn't bat as deep as they have in other games. They had Harshit at seven. But I think Dube is very clear in what he wants to do. When the spinner comes on, he knows that that's a good match-up for him." (PTI)

Divya Deshmukh set to make Norway Chess Women debut

STAVANGER (NORWAY), Jan 29: Indian Grandmaster and World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh will make her debut at Norway Chess Women later this year, becoming the youngest player to compete in the women's tournament since its launch in 2024.

Deshmukh will arrive in Oslo for the prestigious tournament, scheduled from May 25 to June 5, following a breakthrough season last year that firmly established her among the world's elite.

The 19-year-old achieved major milestones on way to winning the Women's World Cup in Batumi last year, by securing the Grandmasters title and also a place in the Women's Candidates tournament.

She joins the likes of reigning World Blitz champion Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan and Ukraine's Anna Muzychuk, the defending Norway Chess Women champion, among others, in the elite tournament.

"I'm incredibly excited to be competing in Norway Chess. It's



my first time in the country, and I'm really looking forward to seeing what Norway is like. I can't wait to experience this unique format and compete in such a prestigious tournament. To all the fans rooting for me, thank you for the love and encouragement, see you all there," said Deshmukh.

Last year, GMs Koneru Humpy

and R. Vaishali had competed in the women's section of the tournament held in Stavanger.

Deshmukh became the fourth Indian woman in history to achieve the GM title, underlining the country's growing strength on the global chess stage.

She has also enjoyed success representing India internationally,

winning both individual and team gold medals and building a reputation as one of the most promising young players of her generation.

"India continues to produce outstanding young chess talent, and Divya is a great example of that momentum," said Benedicte Westre Skog, COO of Norway Chess.

"We're delighted to welcome her to Norway Chess Women and look forward to engaging a growing Indian chess audience as she makes her debut in Oslo."

Norway Chess Women is staged alongside main Norway Chess event.

The tournament features the same format, number of players, playing conditions and prize fund as the Open event, setting a benchmark for gender equality in professional chess.

In the Open category, India's R Praggnanandhaa has confirmed his participation along with reigning World Rapid and Blitz champion Magnus Carlsen and Germany's No. 1 Vincent Keymer. (PTI)

Gillespie back in Pakistan cricket as coach of PSL franchise

KARACHI, Jan 29: Australia's former pacer Jason Gillespie will be back in Pakistan cricket as head coach of Pakistan Super League's new franchise, Kingsmen Hyderabad, after parting ways with PCB in late 2024 following a stint with the national men's team.

Fawad Sarwar, who has brought the new franchise for Pakistani Rs 175,000 crore, confirmed that Gillespie will be the head coach with Grant Bradburn and Craig White as his assistant coaches for PSL 11.

"We have brought in the best for our team and our coaching panel is already working on getting players for the franchise and the auction on 11th February," Sarwar said. Sarwar is a Pakistani businessman settled in the United States and runs teams in the states and also a cricket ground. His cricket brand is known as Kingsmen. (PTI)

Rashid Khan shrugs off 'figured out' tag ahead of T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan has brushed aside suggestions that batters have "figured him out", insisting that precision, not re-invention, will define his impact as his side gears up for next month's ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

After redefining the role of leg-spinners in T20 cricket over the last decade, Rashid endured comparatively modest returns in the previous two Indian Premier League seasons with Gujarat Titans, prompting debate around predictability.

"Well, I feel like it's not about like I should be changing my variation or the line and length...things like that," Rashid told PTI Videos in an interaction facilitated by Red Bull.

Rashid's IPL numbers over the last two seasons tell the story of a dip in form after years of elite performance.

After finishing second on the Purple Cap list with 27 wickets in 17 matches in 2023, his wicket tally dropped to 10 in 12 matches in 2024. It further slipped to only nine in 15 matches in 2025 even as

his economy climbed above 9 runs per over.

The Afghanistan skipper, however, said the margins in T20 cricket are small and that execution remains decisive.

"...I miss my line a little bit, which I used to be very good at earlier. There is nothing much to worry about...Whenever I miss my line and length, I give runs, that's the only thing I believe," the Afghan skipper added.

Rashid said predictability is often misunderstood, pointing out that elite bowlers succeed because of precision rather than mystery. The World Cup starts February 7 and Afghanistan are placed in group D alongside Nepal, Scotland West Indies and UAE.

"There are lots of bowlers about whom people know what they're going to do, but still they're getting out to them," he said.

"If someone is like Mitch (Mitchell Starc) usually bowls an in-swing with the new ball, everyone knows but he still gets you out. He only gets you out because he hits the right area consistently and that what matters," he added. (PTI)

International Series returns to India for second edition in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: The International Series will return to India for the second time when the LIV Golf-backed Asian Tour event is held at the Prestige Golfshire Club in Bengaluru from October 8-11 as part of its 2026 global schedule announced on Thursday.

The Bengaluru leg, the fifth stop of the season, follows the tournament's successful India debut in 2025.

It was in 2025 that American Bryson DeChambeau captured global attention by bringing a whole new audience out to watch golf royalty in action.

The edition was a spectacular success, drawing large crowds and showcasing world-class golf on Indian soil with top LIV Golf players like Joaquin Niemann, Paul Casey, Carlos Ortiz, Abraham Ancer, Harold Varner III, local hero Anirban Lahiri, along with DeChambeau and a host of other stars.

Announcing the return, Rahul Singh, head of the Series, stated in a release. "This year's edition will once again offer a unique opportunity for golf fans across the subcontinent to witness world-class golf and celebrate the prominent position India now holds on the global golfing stage."

"The International Series has become one of the most scalable and genuinely global pathways in men's golf, and the 2026 schedule reflects just how far the Series has evolved," he added.

The tournament is part of a nine-event global calendar that tees off with International Series Japan at Cale-

donian Golf Club from April 2-5.

It also has stops in Singapore, Vietnam, Morocco, China, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines and Hong Kong, offering players qualification opportunities for the Majors and a pathway to the LIV Golf League.

The Series wraps up in Saudi Arabia, setting the stage for a dramatic season finale as The International Series Rankings race reaches its climax.

The PIF Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers will be held from November 18-21 at Riyadh Golf Club.

LIV Golf EVP Ross Hallett said, "The pathway into the LIV Golf League creates a uniquely competitive energy, and that intensity is reflected in the growing quality of fields and venues across the Series."

"Over the next several years, you'll see The International Series continue to grow... We will continue to invest into these events, working with national federation partners to create a viable and sustainable event calendar that supports the next generation of global players."

Asian Tour Commissioner Cho Minn Thant added, "The International Series continues to create greater meaning, higher stakes and more opportunities for players, fans and host nations alike."

Unveiled in 2022, the International Series is a group of high-purse Asian Tour events backed by LIV Golf Investments, offering a pathway to the LIV Golf League. (PTI)

