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**Govt firm on shifting of Gauhati HC campus to Rangmahal**

## Bar body plans hunger strike, to stage demo today

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Tensions between the Assam government and the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCBA) over the proposed relocation of the high court to North Guwahati escalated further on Saturday, with lawyers announcing a hunger strike even as the state prepares to lay the foundation stone of the new campus on Sunday.

Members of the GHCBA said six-hour hunger strikes have already been observed over the past two days outside the existing high court building.

The association has now decided to continue the protest on Sunday, with lawyers planning to sit on a hunger strike from 10 am to 2 pm.

The bar body reiterated its firm opposition to shifting the court complex to North Guwahati and maintained its appeal to members to stay away from the foundation stone-laying ceremony.

The new high court complex is



proposed as part of a judicial township at Rangmahal in North Guwahati.

The foundation stone is scheduled to be laid by Chief Justice of India Justice Surya Kant.

Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and several Supreme Court judges are also expected to attend the event.

Saikia, who resigned from the GHCBA in March last year over the same issue, rejected the arguments put forward by the association against the relocation.

Chief minister Sarma, a former practising lawyer who entered electoral politics in 2001, had also relinquished his GHCBA membership in April amid the controversy.

The advocate general described concerns such as distance to the new campus as subjective and said issues like compensation related to land acquisition could be clarified through official channels.

On the claim that lawyers were not consulted before deciding on the shift, Saikia said there was no requirement to seek the opinion of advocates' bodies for such decisions.

He further denied allegations that the state government had unilaterally decided to relocate the high court, stating that the move was based on a resolution of the full court taken in 2023 during the tenure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India will always have a Hindu PM: Himanta

CM reviews preparations for Modi's proposed visit to Kaliabor on Jan 18



**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday made a strong political assertion on the religious identity of India's leadership, stating that while the Constitution places no restriction on who can become Prime Minister, the country's civilisational ethos would ensure that the post remains with a Hindu.

Addressing the media, Sarma said there is "no constitutional bar" on anyone occupying the highest

executive office in the country.

"Anybody can become the Prime Minister of India," he said, adding that India is fundamentally a Hindu civilisation and expressing confidence that the nation's leadership would always emerge from that civilisational framework.

The chief minister's remarks echoed the ideological position frequently articulated by leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, which views India as a civilisation state rooted in its ancient cultural and religious traditions rather than merely a modern political entity.

Meanwhile, Sarma said a high-level review meeting was held to assess preparations for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed visit to Kaliabor in Assam on January 18. Senior officials reviewed logistical and security arrangements for the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### NIA names two additional accused in Assam Independence Day IED conspiracy case

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** The National Investigation Agency has filed a supplementary chargesheet against two more individuals in connection with the 2024 Assam Independence Day IED seizure case, taking the total number of accused in the matter to five, officials said on Saturday.

The supplementary chargesheet was submitted before a special NIA court in Guwahati on Friday, naming Bhargab Gogoi and Sumo Gogoi.

Both are residents of Assam's Dibrugarh district and were arrested by the NIA in June 2025.

The central agency had taken over the investigation from the Dispur police in September 2024.

According to investigators, the two accused allegedly provided terror funding to Jahnur Boruah, who has already been chargesheeted in the case.

Boruah had earlier confessed to planting four of the 11 improvised explosive devices recovered by police across Assam in August 2024.

The NIA said the IEDs were planted as part of a protest and boycott call issued by ULFA (Independent) chief Paresh Baruah ahead of Independence Day.

The case relates to an alleged conspiracy by the banned outfit ULFA(I) to wage war against the Government of India through coordinated IED blasts at multiple locations in the state.

The case was initially registered by the Assam Police at Dispur police station before being transferred to the NIA for further investigation.

### Injustice, hooliganism will not be tolerated: Tripura CM

'Development of janajatis not possible without BJP'



**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Jan 10:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Saturday said that it is possible to build Ek Tripura, Srestha Tripura through the unity of people from all sections of jaati, janajati, and communities.

"Injustice and hooliganism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. And without the Bharatiya Janata Party, the development of the janajatis is not possible. For a long time, there has been politics of division in the janajati areas. Now they understand that," he said.

Chief minister Manik Saha made these remarks at a public meeting organized by the Kanchanpur Mandal of the Bharatiya Janata Party at Kanchanpur in North District on Saturday.

At the public meeting, Saha welcomed 759 voters from 238 families who joined the BJP.

Before the meeting, the chief minister participated in a roadshow.

Later, while addressing a huge gathering, Saha said that the future of Tripura can be understood

### Drugs worth over ₹ 8 cr seized in Assam, 3 held

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the police have seized drugs worth ₹ 8.2 crore in Cachar district and arrested three persons in this connection.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team seized 1.357 kg of morphine, the chief minister posted on 'X'.

"Drug peddlers, I feel you! You imported 1.357 kg morphine worth ₹ 8.2 crore, only to get busted by @cacharpolice. But you forgot one simple fact: This is Assam!" Sarma said on the social media platform on Friday.

Morphine, a non-synthetic narcotic, is derived from opium and used for the treatment of pain.

"Here, drugs don't circulate; they get (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### 1.56 lakh youths recruited in five years, total to touch 1.60 lakh before polls: CM

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday provided government jobs to 1.56 lakh youths over the past five years and assured that all remaining recruitments would be completed by February 10, taking the total number to 1.60 lakh ahead of the elections.

The chief minister was speaking after distributing appointment letters to 6,347 Grade-III candidates selected through the Assam Direct Recruitment Examination.

He said the entire recruitment exercise had been conducted in a transparent and litigation-free manner, with no cases pending in the high court, adding that Assam's merit-based recruitment model is now being examined by other states.

Describing the process as a reflection of clean governance,

### BJP allies to contest all 3 RS seats in Assam: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** The ruling BJP and its allies will contest all the three Rajya Sabha seats that will fall vacant in Assam in April this year, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

He claimed the victory of their candidates in two seats is confirmed, while the third one may also end up in their kitty.

The seats held by two BJP MPs, Bhubaneswar Kalita and Rameswar Teli, and one Independent MP, Ajit Bhuyan, will fall vacant in April.

"The BJP, AGP and our united front will nominate candidates in all three seats," Sarma said at a press conference here on Friday.

"We will win in two for sure. The third one, we may win or lose," he added.

Sarma said the BJP and its allies had not fielded a candidate against Bhuyan last time as they thought that he was "neutral and will work for good". (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Assam Cong sets up legal panel to track probe and trial in Zubeen's death case

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** The Assam Congress has constituted a panel of senior advocates to keep a close watch on the investigation and court proceedings related to the death of singer Zubeen Garg, the party announced on Saturday.

The decision, taken on Thursday, was made public a day after the state Cabinet approved the appointment of a five-member team of special public prosecutors for the case.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi approved the formation of the advocates' committee, party general secretary (organisation) Bipul Gogoi said in a statement.

The committee includes senior

advocates Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury, Ram Prasad Sarmah, Dilip Choudhury, Hamidur Rahman, Hemanta Kalita and Rubi Gogoi.

According to the party, the panel will monitor both the progress of the investigation and the subsequent judicial process.

Earlier, the state government appointed Brojendra Mohan Choudhuri as additional public prosecutor, along with Kishor Dutta, Pranjal Dutta and Vikash Jammur as assistant public prosecutors.

Zubeen Garg, a noted singer, composer and actor, died on September 19 while swimming in the sea in Singapore, where he had travelled to attend the North East

### 32 held by vigilance in 2025 on corruption charges: CM

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said 32 public servants were arrested by vigilance last year on graft charges and asserted that his government would not tolerate corruption.

He also affirmed the state government's stance against corruption.

"Seedhi Baat, No Bakwas (straight talk, no nonsense) - Assam does not tolerate corruption," Sarma said in a post on X.

The chief minister shared that "29 trap operations" were undertaken and "32 public servants arrested in 2025".

During the year, the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption made record interventions to ensure that "corruption cannot raise its head", he (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Gallstones are a well-established risk factor

### TU study identifies blood markers to aid early detection of gallbladder cancer

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Jan 10:** Researchers at Tezpur University have reported the discovery of distinct chemical patterns in blood that can help differentiate gallbladder cancer cases linked to gallstones from those occurring without them, a development that could open new avenues for the early detection of one of the most lethal gastrointestinal cancers.

The study has identified specific blood-based metabolic signatures that show promise as potential biomarkers for gallbladder cancer, according to a statement from the university.

Gallbladder cancer is known for its aggressive nature and late diagnosis, and its incidence is particularly high in North East India, where

it ranks as the third most common cancer.

Most patients are diagnosed at advanced stages due to the disease's largely symptomless progression.

While gallstones are a well-established risk factor, many individuals with gallstones never develop cancer, and a sizeable number of patients are diagnosed without any prior history of the condition.

With projections indicating a further rise in cases in Assam, researchers have stressed the importance of developing reliable methods for early detection.

The research was led by Assistant Professor Pankaj Barah and research scholar Cinnmoyee Baruah from the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology at



Tezpur University, and has been published in the Journal of Protonic Research of the American Chemical Society.

lated chemicals, could clearly distinguish gallbladder cancer cases with gallstones from those without, raising the possibility of simple blood tests for early diagnosis.

Described as the first pilot study of its kind from North East India, the research analysed blood samples from three groups: gallbladder cancer patients without gallstones, gallbladder cancer patients with gallstones, and individuals with gallstones but no cancer.

Advanced metabolomics analysis revealed widespread metabolic changes, with 180 altered metabolites identified in gallstone-free cancer cases and 225 in cases associated with gallstones.

The researchers also identified distinct (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Guv inaugurates healthcare management conclave, bats for affordable services

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Saturday inaugurated the 2nd North-east Healthcare Management Conclave organised by the Association of Healthcare Providers India (AHPPI), North East Chapter.

Speaking at the conclave on the theme 'Strengthening Patient Care and Infrastructure for a Resilient Northeast', the governor said in Indian tradition, health has always been accorded the highest priority with a "healthy individual forming the basis of a healthy society which in turn leads to a healthy nation".

The governor emphasised that healthcare goes far beyond diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

"It is a vital mechanism for protecting human dignity, ensuring social justice and an effective healthcare system must be rooted in trust and compassion, while guaranteeing timely, accessible,

affordable, and quality services for all citizens", he said.

Acharya further said in alignment with the national vision, the Assam government has been undertaking extensive infrastructural and human-resource development to strengthen healthcare infrastructure.

Schemes such as Ayushman Assam and the Chief Minister's Jan Arogya Yojana, expansion of medical colleges and nursing institutions, modernisation of district hospitals, and enhancement of critical care and advanced treatment facilities are reinforcing the healthcare ecosystem in the state, he said.

He pointed out that patient care and infrastructure development are the two strong and complementary pillars of the healthcare sector.

"Infrastructure becomes truly meaningful only when supported by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# OPPO unveils Reno15 Series with AI-driven camera

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** OPPO India recently launched its new Reno15 Series, expanding its premium smartphone portfolio with a strong focus on travel photography, artificial intelligence and refined design.

The lineup includes three models — Reno15 Pro, Reno15 Pro Mini and Reno15 — aimed primarily at young users and photography enthusiasts.

The Reno15 Pro and Pro Mini are equipped with a 200MP main camera, paired with a 50MP telephoto lens offering 3.5x optical zoom and up to 120x digital zoom. The camera system is supported by OPPO's PureTone Imaging Technology and a suite of AI-based editing tools designed to enhance portraits, landscapes and low-light shots.

A 50MP ultra-wide selfie camera is also included across the series.

Commenting on the launch, OPPO India Head of Communications Goldee Patnaik said the company has seen a clear shift among Indian consumers towards premium experiences, particularly in camera performance, AI features and design.

She said the Reno15 Series builds on the brand's growing user base by offering meaningful upgrades focused on real-world usage rather than incremental changes.

A key design highlight of the se-



ries is OPPO's new HoloFusion Technology, which introduces a layered, three-dimensional visual effect on a single-piece glass back.

This is complemented by the Dynamic Stellar Ring camera layout.

The phones are offered in multiple colour options inspired by natural elements, including Sunset Gold, Cocoa Brown, Glacier White, Crystal Pink, Twilight Blue and Aurora Blue, depending on the model.

The Reno15 Pro Mini marks the first "Pro Mini" device in the Reno lineup, combining flagship specifications with a compact form factor.

It features a 6.32-inch AMOLED display, while the stan-

dard Reno15 and Reno15 Pro come with larger AMOLED panels.

All models support up to 120Hz adaptive refresh rates, high brightness levels and slim bezels for an immersive viewing experience.

In terms of durability, the Reno15 Series features OPPO's All-Round Armour Body with an aerospace-grade aluminium frame and sponge bionic cushioning.

The devices carry IP66, IP68 and IP69 ratings, offering protection against dust, water immersion and high-pressure hot water.

On the performance front, the Reno15 Pro and Pro Mini are powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 8450 processor, while the Reno15 runs on the Snapdragon 7 Gen 4

chipset.

The series also integrates OPPO's AI LinkBoost and AI HyperBoost technologies to improve connectivity, gaming stability and overall responsiveness.

Battery capacity ranges from 6,200mAh to 6,500mAh across the models, with support for 80W SUPERVOOC fast charging. The Pro variant additionally offers 50W wireless charging.

OPPO claims the devices are designed for long-term battery health and heavy daily usage.

The Reno15 Series runs on ColorOS 16, which brings enhanced AI features, smoother animations and deeper integration with Google Gemini.

The operating system includes tools such as AI Recorder, AI Writer and AI Mind Space, alongside privacy protections through OPPO's AI Private Computing Cloud.

Alongside the smartphones, OPPO also introduced the Reno15c, featuring a 7,000mAh battery, as well as new ecosystem products including the OPPO Pad 5 tablet and OPPO Enco Buds3 Pro+ wireless earbuds.

In terms of pricing, the Reno15 Pro starts at ₹ 67,999, the Reno15 Pro Mini at ₹ 59,999, and the Reno15 at ₹ 45,999.

The devices will go on sale from January 13, 2026, across major online platforms, mainline retail outlets and the OPPO e-store.

## ICAI Guwahati Branch holds memorial lecture on recent GST circulars

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** The Guwahati Branch of the Eastern India Regional Council of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India organised the S Vaidyanath Aiyar Memorial Lecture on "Recent Circulars in GST - Important Aspects" at ICAI Bhawan here on Saturday, January 10, 2026.

The programme was held under the chairpersonship of CA Raginee Goyal, Chairperson of the Guwahati Branch.

The memorial lecture was delivered by CA Mohan Agarwal, who offered a detailed overview of the latest GST circulars and explained their practical implications for professionals.

During the session, the speaker highlighted key interpretational issues, compliance-related challenges and evolving perspectives under the GST framework.

The lecture proved beneficial for practising chartered accountants and other professionals dealing with indirect taxation.

An interactive discussion followed the presentation, during which participants engaged with the speaker and sought clarifications on complex and contemporary GST-related issues.

## Wagh Bakri Tea chief Piyush Desai conferred with lifetime achievement award

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Wagh Bakri Tea chairman Piyush Desai has been conferred with the lifetime achievement award by the North Eastern Tea Association (NETA), officials said on Saturday. The group has been in the tea business since 1892.

"Desai is a patriarch of the Indian tea industry. There is a special bond between Assam and Gujarat due to the fact that Assam is the largest producer of tea and Gujarat is the largest consumer," NETA Advisor Bidyanand Barkakoty told PTI.

The association's immediate past chairman Ajay Dhandhanias said Desai is a "tea tasting and evaluation expert and visionary in the industry".

Desai, a former chairman of the Federation of All India Tea Traders Association (FAITTA), an apex body of packers and traders of tea in the country, has rich experience of over six decades in the industry, he said.

NETA had earlier conferred the lifetime achievement award to two octogenarians - Apurba Kumar Baroah and Sagar Mehta, who had contributed to the tea industry and society at large. (PTI)

## Nippon Paint India outlines India-focused growth strategy under new MD

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 10:** Nippon Paint India has unveiled an India-centric growth roadmap under the leadership of its new Managing Director, Sharad Malhotra, reaffirming its long-term commitment to the Indian market and signalling an accelerated push for pan-India expansion.

The strategy, the first detailed articulation of the company's India plans following the leadership transition, focuses on strengthening an India-first operating model, expanding its national footprint through a unified approach and exploring inorganic growth opportunities to further strengthen its portfolio.

Backed by seven manufacturing facilities across the country and technical expertise developed in Japan, Nippon Paint India said it would deepen investments to build a self-sustaining India platform rooted in manufacturing excellence, quality and local market relevance.

The company plans to move beyond its traditionally strong southern markets by sharpening market segmentation and increasing penetration in high-growth urban and semi-urban centres, while consol-

idating its leadership in core regions and expanding its distribution network nationwide.

Sharad Malhotra said India remains a priority market for Nippon Paint and that the company's focus would be on building a differentiated growth model aligned with global standards while responding to local market needs.

He said the direct access to Japanese technology, governance practices and manufacturing discipline positions Nippon Paint India as a fully integrated global player in the country, with a clear mandate to drive India-specific growth.

Echoing this view, Mark Titus, President of the Decorative Business at Nippon Paint India, said the Indian decorative paints segment offers significant long-term potential, driven by premiumisation, brand-building and stronger engagement with channels and influencers.

He said the company aims to scale in a calibrated manner, bringing global best practices in product innovation and manufacturing while developing strong, market-relevant brands in India.

As part of the new strategy, Nippon Paint India will consolidate all

its paints and coatings businesses under a single, unified operating model.

The company said this would enable greater flexibility in manufacturing, operational efficiencies and a cohesive pan-India distribution footprint, supporting scale and synergies across markets.

With more than six decades of leadership across the Asia-Pacific region, Nippon Paint said it will continue to leverage its experience in technology-led growth, disciplined expansion and manufacturing excellence in India.

The company will pursue balanced growth across decorative, industrial, automotive refinishing, automotive OEM and wood coatings, with an emphasis on customer-centric innovation, brand-led differentiation and long-term value creation.

Sustainability, innovation and strong governance remain central to the group's global philosophy. Nippon Paint said its "Asset Assembler" model would continue to guide growth through a combination of organic expansion and selective inorganic opportunities, including mergers and acquisitions, aimed at delivering sustained long-term performance.

## FIFA World Cup trophy lands in Delhi, to be in India for 3 days as part of world tour

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** Ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026, with the tournament set to kick off on June 11, the original trophy arrived in India on Saturday as part of its world tour.

The original trophy was unveiled here at a ceremony in the presence of former Brazilian World Cup-winning player and FIFA legend Gilberto D'Silva, and Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya. D'Silva said the trophy will inspire youngsters in India to play more football, just like they play cricket. "...this trophy...is to inspire so many young kids, inspire the next generation of players, women and boys to become successful also here in football, as they have done in other sports, especially in cricket," he said.

The World Cup trophy has come to India after a gap of al-

most 12 years as part of its international tour. The trophy tour is being organised by global beverage major Coca-Cola, the official partner of the FIFA World Cup.

During its three-day India tour, the trophy will be in Delhi for two days before being taken to Guwahati in Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, Mandaviya said, the trophy will encourage the youth of the country towards the game of football. The government is working to develop a culture of sports in the country, which has the largest number of youths globally. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, sports has emerged as a national priority," he said, adding, "We are working to bring India among the top-ten sporting nations of the world in a decade by 2036." (PTI)

## Techno Paints to raise ₹ 500 cr through IPO in FY27

**HYDERABAD, Jan 10:** Techno Paints and Chemicals is planning to raise ₹ 500 crore through an IPO in the next financial year, company sources said on Saturday.

Sachin Tendulkar has been appointed as the brand ambassador of the paint manufacturer for three years, a move expected to help the company expand across the country.

With the addition of the "Master Blaster", the paint maker said in a press release, the brand aims to strengthen its national presence.

"We are honoured to collaborate with one of the world's most iconic cricketers and a Bharat



Ratna, Sachin Tendulkar. We are looking forward to achieving bigger and greater things this year with expansion and the IPO, and no one could have been a better ambassador or growth partner for us," said Akuri Srinivas Reddy, Chairman of Techno Paints and Chemicals.

Earlier in 2023, the company had announced the appointment of film actor Mahesh Babu as its brand ambassador. He served in that role for a period of two years.

The company earned revenue of ₹ 210 crore in 2024-25 and is expect-

ing ₹ 450 crore in the current financial year, Reddy said, adding that it is targeting revenue of ₹ 2,000 crore by 2029-30.

Techno Paints manufactures decorative, industrial, and speciality paints, offering over 3,000 shades of decorative paints. The company is currently operating in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Odisha, and Chandigarh.

It plans to expand to Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh by the end of this year, and to the Middle East in 2026-27, the release added. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Bar body plans

of then Chief Justice Sandeep Mehta. Saikia also cited a GHCBA resolution from November 2022 in which the association had stated it had no objection to all courts being housed in a single campus.

Accusing the GHCBA of projecting a misleading narrative, Saikia said he would welcome legal proceedings on the issue, as it would place all facts in the public domain.

He added that the Advocate General's office condemned attempts to trivialise the matter and expressed gratitude to the high court for taking a timely decision on relocation.

The GHCBA has consistently opposed the proposed shift of the high court from its present location in Uzan Bazar, in the heart of Guwahati on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, to the river's northern bank.

The state government plans to develop a judicial township at Rangmahal, spread over 129 bighas, or more than 42.5 acres.

In November last year, the state cabinet approved an allocation of ₹ 479 crore for the first phase of the project.

Earlier, the bar association had called for an immediate suspension of the project, citing the interests of stakeholders and the general public.

The Gauhati High Court currently functions from a historic building in Uzan Bazar, alongside a modern multi-storey structure inaugurated a few years ago.

The two buildings, located on opposite sides of Mahatma Gandhi Road, are connected by an underground tunnel equipped with escalators.

The Assam government has said the relocation is also linked to its plans for developing the Brahmaputra riverfront, which would require acquisition of the existing high court land.

## India will always

public programme scheduled during the visit. During the visit, the Prime Minister is slated to lay the foundation stone of the Kaziranga Elevated Corridor, a major infrastructure project estimated to cost ₹ 6,957 crore.

The project will be implemented by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Officials said an audio-visual presentation highlighting the project's key features will follow the foundation stone-laying ceremony.

The Kaziranga Elevated Corridor is part of the four-laning of the Kaliabor-Numaligarh stretch of NH-37 (new NH-715).

It includes about 34.45 km of elevated, wildlife-friendly corridors, along with bypasses at Jakhlabandha and Bokakhat.

Designed in accordance with court directions and recommendations of the Wildlife Institute of India, the project aims to improve connectivity between Central and Upper Assam while safeguarding the biodiversity of Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The corridor is scheduled for completion within 36 months.

The programme will also include the virtual flagging off of two new Amrit Bharat Express trains — from Dibrugarh to Gomti Nagar (Lucknow) and from Kamakhya to Rohtak — further enhancing rail connectivity between Assam and northern India.

## BJP, allies to contest

"But what he did with his Rajya Sabha MP funds we all know," the CM said, referring to corruption charges against the utilisation of Bhuyan's funds.

The BJP has 64 members, while its allies AGP, UPPL and BPF have nine, seven and three MLAs each in the current assembly.

In the opposition camp, the Congress has 26, AIUDF has 15 members, and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator in the House. (PTI)

## 1.56 lakh youths

and contribute towards bringing positive changes in the state administration. He further advised them to present a gift to their parents with their first salary and, if possible, to support namghars and other institutions of faith in their localities with their subsequent earnings.

## Drugs worth over

confiscated, 3 arrested, drugs seized, business permanently closed," Sarma said. The police have initiated legal action in connection with the seizure and the arrests, an officer said. (PTI)

## Injustice, hooliganism will

about Viksit Bharat 2047, and this is not just talk. If the country develops financially, the state will also develop. Conversely, if the state develops, the country will develop. Tripura is ranked second highest among the states of the North Eastern region in terms of GSDP and per capita income. NITI Aayog has declared Tripura a front-runner state. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, Tripura is ranked third from the bottom among the 28 states in the country in terms of law and order. We want to reach number one there," he said.

Saha said that if everyone remains united, there will be no compromise on development. "Our Prime Minister is gradually strengthening the country. Today, India is moving towards progress. Our GDP is increasing compared to other countries. If we are united, we can strengthen the state. Our Prime Minister has changed the definition of politics, and we also want to change this definition in Tripura. We have seen one party beating another party, murder, terrorism, rape, and arson. We will not spare anyone. Even if our own people do something wrong, we will not spare them. This is not just words; it is being done through deeds. Injustice means injustice, and hooliganism means hooliganism. These will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will be punished according to the law. I have repeatedly said that if force has to be used to maintain peace, it will be done. Investors will come to the state only if there is peace," he said.

Saha said that he has instructed the Janajatis Welfare Minister to do whatever is possible for the welfare of the janajatis.

"If you only stay in touch with people without encouraging them, there will be no benefit. Work is important. Nothing will be achieved by threatening anyone, and it is not acceptable to misuse a position of authority," he said.

## Assam Cong sets

and criminal breach of trust for allegedly misappropriating entrusted funds or property. The case is being heard by the Kamrup (Metro) District and Sessions Court, which has fixed January 17 as the next date of hearing.

## 32 held by

said. "Extensive traps were laid, officials caught red-handed and 100 per cent of cases were chargesheeted. The message is clear," Sarma added. (PTI)

## Guv inaugurates healthcare

efficient management, skilled human resources, ethical practices, and humane sensitivity. In this regard, healthcare managers play a crucial role in optimal resource utilisation, maintenance of quality standards, and balancing innovation with compassion", the governor said.

He hoped that collective dedication and cooperation would help build a healthy North East and a strong India.

The inaugural session was attended by president of AHPI North East Chapter Neelabh Majumdar, Deputy Director General Sunil Khetrapal, Secretary Rohit Upadhyay, Organising Chairman Dr J P Sharma, along with several eminent healthcare professionals. (PTI)

## TU study identifies

biomarker panels for each category, showing high diagnostic accuracy. Many of these markers involved bile acids and amino acid derivatives that are known to play a role in tumour development and progression.

The study was conducted through an interdisciplinary collaboration bringing together surgeons, pathologists, pharmaceutical scientists, molecular biologists and computational experts.

Clinical support was provided by Assam Medical College and Hospital in Dibrugarh, Dr B Borooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati and Swagat Super-Speciality Hospital, while analytical and computational inputs came from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and the CSIR-Indian Institute of Toxicology Research in Lucknow.

Emphasising the clinical relevance of the work, Gayatri Gogoi, a pathologist at Assam Medical College, said the integration of tissue pathology with blood metabolomics helped bridge the gap between laboratory research and clinical diagnosis.

Gastrointestinal surgeon Subhash Khanna of Guwahati described the findings as an important step towards practical, early diagnostic tools that could support better clinical decision-making.

While noting that larger, multi-centre studies will be needed before the findings can be translated into routine clinical use, the researchers said the study lays a strong scientific foundation for developing non-invasive screening methods, particularly for high-risk regions such as North East India.

**CORRIGENDUM -2 FOR TENDER NOTICE NO. CON/2025/DEC/04 DATED. 09-12-2025**  
**Corrigendum-2 for Tender Notice No.:CON/2025/DEC/04 against Tender No. CE-CON-DK-EPC-2025-06 has been published. For details please visit in website www.ireps.gov.in.**  
**Chief Engineer/Con/ Nagaland Project/Maligaon NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY Construction Organization**  
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## Party terms move an attempt to erase Mahatma Gandhi's legacy, alleges political conspiracy

# Congress opposes renaming of MGNREGA in West Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

**KHERONI, Jan 10:** The West Karbi Anglong District Congress has voiced strong opposition to the government's decision to rename the MGNREGA scheme to VB-G RAM G, labelling the move as an attempt to erase the legacy of the Father of the Nation.

In a press conference at the Rongkhang Block Congress office at Dongkamukam, the District Congress leaders have hit out at the BJP, claiming that removing Mahatma Gandhi's name from the flagship rural employment scheme is a deliberate political conspiracy.

Mohan Rongpi, spokesperson for the APCC and West Karbi Anglong District Congress, delivered a stinging critique of the move said that after the physical assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948, the current government is attempting a "second assassination" by systematically removing his name from national identity and public memory.

"Renaming a scheme does not mean development. Real progress and change will only happen if the government initiates a high-level probe into corruption and puts an end to the practice of embezzling



public funds," said Mohan Rongpi.

The party alleged that the BJP is trying to make Mahatma Gandhi "invisible" in modern India.

Augustine Enghee, president, West Karbi Anglong District Committee stated that the MGNREGA was introduced by the then UPA government so that the "poor and marginalised" can have at least have employment for 100 days and "make a living."

Attacking the BJP, Enghee said, "After the BJP came to power everything that stands for in the Constitution have been obliterated. The BJP is for the rich as it is on the way to cease the MGNREGA scheme for the poor."

He claimed that changing the name of the scheme will increase unemployment in India as the marginalised will be exploited by not paying them Minimum wage.

The Congress leadership argued that changing the name of a scheme does not equate to actual development or progress on the ground. According to the party, true change will only be visible when the government addresses systemic issues.

The District Congress maintained that the focus should remain on transparency and the welfare of the rural poor rather than symbolic name changes that distance the nation from its historical roots.

## ATTSA Demow submits MoU demanding justice for police firing victim

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, Jan 10:** The Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA), Demow Branch, submitted a memorandum to the Co-District Commissioner of Demow Co-District on Saturday following a tragic police firing incident that claimed the life of a local resident.

The incident occurred on the night of January 6 in Kharahat Bor Deroi Gaon near Demow, where Ranjit Pandav was reportedly killed during police action. The memorandum, signed by ATTSA Demow president Biswanath Nag and Secretary Amon Mirdha, detailed the events of the incident and demanded one-time financial assistance for the family of the deceased.

In addition to seeking justice for the victim, ATTSA raised concerns over the increasing production of 'sulai' (illicit alcohol) and circulation of luxury liquor in tea garden areas. The association urged authorities to take immediate legal action against the manufacturers and sellers and called for a ban on the sale of such liquor in local shops.

## Illegal excavation at historic Jerengapathar sparks public outrage

### Land mafia activity linked to NH-37 widening raises concerns over heritage, revenue loss

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 10:** Illegal land excavation at the historic Jerengapathar and adjoining areas of Desangmukh, Desang Rajabari, Konwarpur, Sensuwa Bongaon and several other locations in Sivasagar district has caused serious concern among the general public. The illegal activities have reportedly intensified since the commencement of four-laning works of National Highway 37, leading to alleged loss of state revenue amounting to several crores of rupees.

According to local sources, a section of land mafias has been carrying out large-scale excavation unchecked. The situation took a serious turn on Wednesday when land mafias allegedly threatened local scribes and video journalists at Jerengapathar with dire consequences for reporting on the issue.

Amid growing public resentment, officials from the Amguri Revenue Circle Office (RCO), along with Forest and Transport Department officials, visited the excavated areas of Jerengapathar on Thursday. The officials assured



the local people that action would be taken against those involved in illegal excavation and that strict vigilance would be maintained across the entire area.

Although the Transport and Forest departments have seized several dumpers from different locations, locals allege that illegal excavation continues unabated, allegedly with the backing of some political leaders.

Meanwhile, the All Tai Ahom Students Union (ATASU) submitted a memorandum to the Chief

Minister and the Forest Minister, demanding immediate and stringent action against those involved in the illegal activities. ATASU members, led by its president Basanta Gogoi, urged the government to keep constant watch over the historic Jerengapathar and the Ahom-era Pohagarh.

The student body also demanded legal action against individuals who allegedly threatened media personnel while they were performing their professional duties.

## Mentally challenged woman raped in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 10:** Kokrajhar witnessed a highly tense situation following the rape of a mentally challenged young woman by a person in Kokrajhar town on Saturday.

The incident took place near Patharghat on Saturday morning. The accused person reportedly raped a mentally challenged woman at her own home when she was alone. The accused person immediately fled the spot after raping, who was a daily wage earner from Bahalpur area of Dhubri district. The rapist has been identified as Rafikul Islam.

The victim woman revealed the incident before a nearby women and later local people staged a sit-in protest against the incident for nearly three hours on the Kokrajhar-Bilasipara connecting road in front of Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station.

The protesters demanded capital punishment for the accused rapist Rafikul Islam and warned

that otherwise the public would burn the rapist alive. They also sought the intervention of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma and demanded justice for the orphaned, mentally challenged rape victim. Shops, vehicles and commercial activities were shut down along the Kokrajhar town during the protest.

Amidst the ongoing situation, in the evening, another tense situation arose just about 50 metres from Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station over the issue of shops not being closed. Amid the ongoing protests against the rape of the mentally challenged woman, tension flared after shopkeepers from a particular community did not allow to close their business establishments.

When people raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" moved forward to enforce the shutdown of shops, a youth from a particular community tried to stop them, leading to a heated situation. As the argu-

ment between the two sides intensified, those enforcing the shutdown attacked the shop and chased the youth onto the main road, beating him.

Amid attacks by several hundred people, the youth managed to escape with injuries in the presence of the police and fled the scene. The injured youth was later identified as Rashidul Islam, an ABMSU activist from the Magurmari area of Kokrajhar district.

A large police contingent led by Kokrajhar Superintendent of Police Akshat Garg and Additional Superintendent of Police Navanita Sharma arrived at the spot and took swift action to control the situation.

After senior police officials assured that strict legal action would be taken against the accused following a proper investigation, the situation eased to some extent. Till the time of filing this report, discussions between the police and protesters were still ongoing.

## Asom Khilonjia Mancha delegation visits West Karbi Anglong



HT Correspondent

**KHERONI, Jan 10:** A high-level delegation from the Asom Khilonjia Mancha (Assam Indigenous Forum), led by pro-talk ULFA leader and forum president Mrinal Hazarika, visited West Karbi Anglong on Saturday to address issues concerning the protection of indigenous communities. The delegation included several prominent figures, including State General Secretary Pranjal Deuri, active member Bikash Baruah and other key officials of the forum.

Upon arriving in the district, the team visited the residence of prominent Karbi youth leader Litsong Rongphar. The delegation inquired about his health and wished him a speedy recovery.

Following the personal visit, a crucial meeting was

held at Rongphar's residence. The discussions centred on the current socio-political landscape and the safety of the "sons of the soil" (indigenous inhabitants) in the region.

Speaking on behalf of the forum, Mrinal Hazarika reaffirmed their unwavering support for the indigenous people. He emphasised that the Asom Khilonjia Mancha would always stand at the forefront to protect the rights and land of the native population.

"Our primary objective is to ensure that the rights of the indigenous people are never compromised. We are committed to standing by the local communities of West Karbi Anglong in their struggle for security and identity," Hazarika stated.

The visit is seen as a significant move toward building a unified front among various indigenous groups in Assam to safeguard their collective interests. It may be mentioned here that Rongphar led the agitation in form of "indefinite hunger strike" at Phelangi in West Karbi Anglong demanding eviction of illegal settlers from protected Professional Grazing Reserve and Village Grazing Reserve in late 2025. The demand led to the alleged raid on the hunger strikers by the authorities at dawn of December 22, 2025 that triggered a mob into vandalising and burning the ancestral home of Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council at Dongkamukam.

However, it forced the state government to negotiate with the strikers that has been stalled by legal hurdles.

## Pijush Hazarika reviews preparations for Srimanta Sankardev Sangha session

HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 10:** Cabinet Minister Pijush Hazarika on Friday visited the Jyoti-Bishnu Samannay Khetra at Dhalaibil, where the 95th annual session of the Srimanta Sankardev Sangha is scheduled to be held on February 6, 7 and 8. The minister inspected the venue and reviewed the ongoing preparations for the mega religious and cultural event.

Addressing media persons during his visit, Minister Hazarika assured that the state government would extend all possible cooperation to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the conference. He said that necessary instructions have already been issued to the Public Health Engineering (PHE), Public Works Department (PWD) and Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) to expedite their respective works at the venue.

Nadur MLA and working president of the reception committee, Padma Hazarika, along with ASTC chairman Pallab Lochan Das, accompanied the Sonitpur guardian minister during the inspection. Members of the organising committee warmly welcomed the visiting team and briefed the minister on the progress of preparations for the upcoming annual session.



## Two-day Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilan from January 17

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, Jan 10:** A two-day extensive programme of the Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilan is scheduled to be held on January 17 and 18, 2026, at Ledo College and amid the natural surroundings of the Buridehing River in Margherita. The event will witness the participation of more than a hundred renowned and distinguished poets, litterateurs and writers from various states of the country.

Several eminent poets and writers will attend the literary meet as honoured guests. Among them are Mayur Borah from Guwahati, Bisudev Das from Kolkata, Sarbjit Sarkar, Rajarshi Narayan Patranabis, Bikash Gan Choudhury, Ritu Sen Choudhury, Kanishka Bhattacharjee, Biman Saha and Sarthak Roy Choudhury from Kolkata, A.N. Pathak from Dhanbad, Sanket Mhatre and Bobby Power from Mumbai, Purushottam Upadhyay from Guwahati, Pushpa Gogoi, Dr Anil Saikia, along with many others.

One of the main attractions of the Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilan will be the presentation of several prestigious national awards. The Dr Birendra Nath Barua National Award-2025 will be conferred on distinguished Jharkhand litterateur A.N. Pathak. The Bhupen Chandra Neog National Folk Culture Award-2025 will be presented to Dr Anil Saikia, a noted folk culture researcher from Moran, while the Suren Phukan National Social Welfare Award-2025 will be awarded to eminent litterateur Dr Pushpa Gogoi of Dhemaji. On the second day of the programme, more than a hundred poets from different parts of the country will take part in a poetry symposium, making it one of the highlights of the literary conclave.

Dr Ranjit Dutta and Ranajyoti Neog, president and general secretary of the reception committee respectively, said that the Ledo Rashtriya Sahitya Sanmilan would not only accord a special status to Ledo and Assam on the national literary map but would also emerge as a powerful platform for literary and cultural exchange across the country.

## Abandoned newborn found dead at Dhubri's Jogamaya Ghat

HT Correspondent

**DHUBRI, Jan 10:** A somber and chaotic scene unfolded at Jogamaya Ghat in Dhubri on Saturday evening after the body of a newborn girl was found abandoned, triggering an immediate response from local authorities and widespread concern among residents.

According to sources, the dead infant was found with a navel clip still attached to the umbilical cord stump, indicating that the baby had been recently born. The incident came to light shortly after a marine engine boat, reportedly bound for Salmara, departed from the ghat. Moments later, locals noticed the newborn lying abandoned at the site.

The discovery sent shockwaves through the community, drawing a large crowd to the ghat and creating a tense and emotional atmosphere. Many residents expressed anguish and outrage over the incident, calling for accountability and stronger measures to protect vulnerable lives.

Local citizens immediately informed the police. Acting swiftly, Pritam Das, Officer-in-Charge of Dhubri Sadar Police Station, reached the spot along with a police team. The area was secured and the body of the newborn was taken into custody before being sent to Dhubri Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) for a detailed medical examination and post-mortem.

Police have launched an investigation into the incident. As part of the probe, investigators are examining the timing and movements of the Salmara-bound marine engine boat to ascertain whether there is any connection between the vessel and the abandonment of the infant.

The tragic incident has once again highlighted serious concerns regarding child welfare and the need for greater awareness and support systems to prevent such occurrences in the region.

## 65th Bodo Sahitya Sabha session sets new benchmark in organisation

3-day literary meet at Howraghat draws over 2,000 delegates from India and abroad

HT Correspondent

**HOWRAGHAT/KOKRAJHAR, Jan 10:** With a vision to establish Bodo literature, art and culture on the global stage, the 65th Annual Session of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) commenced with a vibrant three-day programme at Thengfakhri Phwthar, Baralagaon. The session, being held from January 9 to 11, has witnessed a massive gathering of over 2,000 delegates from various districts of Assam, besides participants from neighbouring states and countries such as West Bengal, Meghalaya and Nepal.

Recognised as the second-largest literary and cultural organisation in Assam after the Assam Sahitya Sabha, this year's Bodo Sahitya Sabha session has earned widespread appreciation for its exceptional organisational standards and visionary planning.

One of the most striking features of the session is the thoughtful selection of the venue. Departing from the usual open-



field locations that often become muddy or uneven, the organisers chose elevated ground for the main pavilion (Mandap), delegate halls and camps. This ensured a clean, orderly and hassle-free environment for all participants.

To counter the biting January cold, the organising committee introduced innovative housing arrangements for delegates. Hos-

pitality at the 65th BSS session has set a new benchmark.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha has also excelled in logistics, discipline and hygiene.

As part of the program on the second day, Bodo Sahitya Sabha president, Dr Surath Narzary hoisted sabha flag followed by floral tributes to martyrs amidst presence of large number of gathering.

## Ghatowar criticises Centre for dropping Gandhi's name in MGNREGA rebranding

HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 10:** Senior Congress leader and former Union Minister Paban Singh Ghatowar on Saturday launched a sharp attack on the central government's decision to rename the flagship rural employment programme, MGNREGA, calling the move "unfortunate and surprising."

Addressing the media at Rajiv Bhavan in Dibrugarh, the five-time MP and former DoNER Minister criticised the rebranding of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to the 'Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Grameen)', or VB-G RAM G.

"The omission of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the scheme is not just unfortunate, it is surprising and raises serious questions. What is the motive behind this deliberate erasure? MGNREGA is not just a scheme; it carries the legacy and ideology of the Father of the Nation, ensuring dignity of labour and social security for the poorest," Ghatowar said.

He emphasised that MGNREGA, introduced during the UPA era, has served as a critical safety net for millions of rural Indians. By removing Gandhi's name, the leader argued, the government is distancing the programme from its original ethos and creators.

"This appears to be a calculated attempt to rewrite history and undermine the contributions of previous governments. The name 'Mahatma Gandhi' symbolised a commitment to rural upliftment. Its removal is symbolic of a larger shift away from those core principles," he added. Ghatowar's remarks came amid growing political controversy over the renaming with opposition parties labelling it "vendetta politics" aimed at erasing the Congress-led UPA's legacy.

Vice presidents of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha Sitaram Basumatary and Prasanta Boro paid floral tributes to the martyrs on the occasion.

A book release ceremony was also held. As many as 90 books were released in the event written and published by different publications, individuals.

A felicitation program honoured award-winning personalities, successful students and Bodo literary figures, including Sahitya Akademi and Padma Shri awardees. Awards like Rangchar and Someswari were presented to writers contributing to the promotion of Bodo literature. Assam Cabinet Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma and Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary attended the event. Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma will be the chief guest at open session, highlighting the Sabha's role in promoting Bodo language, literature and culture nationally and internationally.

## Srimanta Sankardev Vidyalaya hosts science exhibition and farewell

HT Correspondent

**HOWRAGHAT, Jan 10:** Srimanta Sankardev Vidyalaya, Howraghat, organised a day-long science model competition and exhibition on Saturday. The event was inaugurated by Mrinal Kumar Mahanta, Headmaster of Howraghat Town Girls' High School. Students showcased innovative projects, which were judged by Block Coordinator Prabhin Nath and Vikram Kumar Chanda, with prizes awarded to the top three teams.

Prominent local education and social figures, including Debendra Sarma, Bidyaram Singar, Mukta-lal Das, Brajen Timung and Deepak Bordoloi, attended the event.

Following the exhibition, a farewell and felicitation ceremony for outgoing Class 10 students was held, presided over by Biman Borah, Secretary of the School Management Committee. Guests of honour included Raju Chetry, SI of the Health Department and former national-level volleyball player Hima Chetry, who encouraged students to excel in their board exams and future pursuits.

## Jaljoli Primary School hosts 'Bhogali Mela' to impart practical learning

HT Correspondent

**MANGALDAI, Jan 10:** The historic Jaljoli Primary School, established 156 years ago in 1870 and located under the Mangaldai Legislative Assembly constituency, has drawn the attention of locals and passersby alike with a unique and innovative educational initiative. In the school's lush green courtyard, around 30 young students set up stalls under the banner of a "Bhogali Mela", gaining hands-on practical knowledge through real-life experience.

The tiny students enthusiastically took on the role of shopkeepers, selling everyday household items brought from their homes. These included coconuts, betel nuts and leaves (tamol-pan), colocasia (kosu), different varieties of rice, vegetables, leafy greens and traditional pitthas (rice cakes). As customers bargained, asked about prices and enquired how much change should be returned for a given amount, the young sellers confidently calculated and responded with accurate answers. Visitors, charmed by the effort, purchased the items and carried them away with appreciation.

Explaining the objective behind the initiative, Headmistress Mira Kalita Kumar said that the school curriculum includes lessons on markets and the teachers wanted to ensure that students gain practical exposure rather than limiting learning to textbooks.

CRCC Pragayjoti Kashyap said such initiatives could help students better understand concepts like markets and arithmetic in a practical and engaging manner.

Local youth and Officer-in-Charge of the Udalguri Police Station's Wireless branch, Nikunj Saharia, also visited the mela and highly praised the dedication and creativity of the teachers in nurturing life skills among young learners.

# Bhogali Bihu: Assam's joyous tradition

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Bhogali Bihu, popularly known as Magh Bihu, is one of the most awaited and colourful festivals in Assam, which marks the harvest season. The festival is observed in mid-January and has much cultural and agricultural significance for the people of Assam. It is the festival not just of harvest, but a day to express thanks to nature and its bounty; it unites families, communities, and regions into a single collective spirit of festivity. Its unique rituals, feasts, and symbolic practices reflect the deep-rooted agricultural heritage of Assam and its people's time-honored connection to the land they till.

The core concept of Bhogali Bihu is abundance and thanksgiving. It is the harvest festival, which is celebrated as a time when farmers and rural communities are thankful for the good yield and prosperity it brings to them. It is a multiple-day festival beginning with a preparatory day known as Uruka. Uruka marks the eve of Bhogali Bihu as the community feasts, bonds, and celebrates together. Uruka is marked by the establishment of temporary thatched huts known as "bhelaghor" or "Meji" made from hay, wood, and other plant materials. It is in these huts that families assemble to prepare their traditional foodstuffs and have fun together. The bonfire that is set up during Uruka signifies the burning of all past misery and challenges so that there can be a new beginning filled with plenty and happiness.

Food is central to the celebration, being an integral part of Bhogali Bihu. The festival has come to be identified with feasting, and it is the turn of Assamese cuisine. Traditional dishes such as pitha (sweet rice cakes), til pitha (sesame sweets), and other preparations made from newly harvested rice are a part of the Bhogali Bihu spread. These foods are more than just snacks; they epitomize fruits of labor—the fertility of the soil and the human toil. Usually, families or communities prepare this food in such large quantities and share it out because the collective nature of this festival is quintessential. Such sharing of food enhances social cohesion and reinforces that spirit of collective living so dearly held in the Assamese psyche.

The day following Uruka is the grand celebration of Bhogali Bihu, lit by the lighting of the Meji. This huge pyre of hay, wood, and other organic materials was set alight in early morning hours. This is the most prominent ritual during the festival, which invokes purification, the disappearance of the old year, and the ushering of a new year. As the flames reach high, the people gather to pray to the gods for a prosperous and abundant year ahead. The burning of the Meji also reminds the people of the cyclical nature of life, in which every end brings with it the promise of a new beginning.

Following the ritual of the Meji, other acts such as the bihu dance take place at this time with the festive feel peaking its height. More traditional folk dances have taken the theme of Bihu dance and singing in rejoicing the spirit behind the har-



vest. These performances, often accompanied by the beat of the dhol (a traditional drum), are not merely entertainment but are an expression of cultural identity and community pride. They convey a sense of continuity and a deep appreciation for the earth's cycles and the work that goes into making the harvest a success.

Apart from the collective celebrations, Bhogali Bihu also signifies a great sense of respect for nature and its cycles. The rituals, from the preparation of the Meji to the offerings during the festival, depict a profound acknowledgment of the interdependence between humans and nature. The festival is a reminder of the importance of sustainable farming practices, respect for the

land, and gratitude for the resources that it provides. The bonfires, the food offerings, and the community celebrations all underscore the reverence with which the people of Assam treat the land that sustains them.

Over time, Bhogali Bihu has evolved, blending traditional practices with contemporary influences. The core values of the festival remain intact, but urbanisation and modernisation have led to changes in how it is celebrated. In urban areas, people may not farm like their ancestors did in rural areas, but the spirit of the festival is still alive. The emphasis on feasting, community, and tradition continues as families and friends gather to celebrate the joy of life and the bounty of the

harvest. The Meji ritual is even modified and accommodated into urban contexts as well. This could include symbolic bonfires and other offerings rather than huge pyres made in the open areas of rural lands.

After all the modernisations, it remains an immensely powerful theme about Bhogali Bihu as the festival celebrates and brings together all segments of people and integrates all without respect to classes or economics. The sense of community, the connection to the land, and the shared gratitude for the harvest create a collective experience that reinforces Assamese identity. Bhogali Bihu is a time for renewal, both spiritually and culturally. It reminds the people of Assam of their

roots, their relationship with nature, and the importance of coming together in times of plenty to celebrate life.

Bhogali Bihu is much more than a harvest festival. It is a very festive expression of life, community, and deep cultural bonds connecting the Assamese to their land. In its rituals, food, music, and dances, it says thanks for nature's bounties and cements that feeling of being together that Assamese culture stands for. In a world that is changing fast, Bhogali Bihu reminds us of the timelessness of tradition, community, and cycles of nature, which sustain all of us. *(The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)*

## The festive Magh Bihu day at Kaziranga



By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The winter sun rose gently over the Kaziranga forest, painting the misty grasslands with a golden hue. It was Magh Bihu, the harvest festival of Assam, a day of feasting, bonfires, and joy. The air was filled with the fragrance of freshly cut paddy, the crackle of wood burning in the traditional meji, and the laughter of people preparing for the celebrations. A group of tourists had arrived to witness both the grandeur of Kaziranga's wildlife and the warmth of Assamese culture.

Among them was a young Assamese engineer named Arindam. He had boarded the tourist bus early that morning, carrying with him the excitement of returning to his roots. Though he worked in Guwahati in a modern office filled with deadlines and machines, his heart always longed for the rhythm of the countryside, the songs of the dhol, pepa and the taste of freshly made pitha. As the bus rolled through the misty roads, Arindam noticed a girl sitting two seats ahead, her eyes wide with wonder as she gazed at the passing landscape. She looked unfamiliar, yet there was something about her presence that drew him. When the bus halted near a tea stall, he found himself standing beside her.

"Beautiful morning, isn't it?" he said, offering a smile.

"Yes," she replied warmly. "I've never seen Assam like this. The fog, the fields, the people—it feels like poetry."

Her accent was different, lilting, and Arindam realised she was not Assamese. They began talking, and soon he discovered she was a new colleague at his office, having joined only a week ago. Her name was Ananya, a young woman from Andhra Pradesh, a Telugu girl who had come to Assam for work and was now exploring its culture. The coincidence delighted him. What had started as a casual conversation soon blossomed into a friendship. By the time the bus reached Kaziranga, they were laughing together, sharing stories of their families, their childhoods, and their dreams.

Kaziranga greeted them with its vast grasslands, the majestic one-horned rhinoceros grazing peacefully, and flocks of migratory birds filling the sky. But that day, the forest was not only about wildlife; it was alive with the spirit of Magh Bihu. Villagers had set up makeshift kitchens, preparing pitha, laru and other delicacies. The tourists were invited to join, and Arindam eagerly took Ananya to the spot where women were rolling rice flour into delicate shapes.

"Here, try this," he said, handing her a freshly fried til-pitha.

She bit into it, her eyes lighting up. "It's delicious! Sweet, but not too sweet. I think I could eat a dozen." Arindam laughed. "Careful, or you'll have to dance the Bihu to burn it off."

As they enjoyed the food, Arindam's parents, who had come along for the trip, watched them closely. His mother whispered to his father, "Look at them. She is beautiful, graceful, and kind. I think she would be perfect for our son."

On the eve of Magh Bihu the Assamese home becomes a place of warmth and anticipation. The courtyard is swept clean, the earthen oven prepared, and the air fills with the fragrance of freshly ground rice flour. Sticky rice, soaked and dried days before, is pounded into a fine powder that will become the base of the pitha. Women sit together on low stools, their hands moving with practiced rhythm, shaping the flour into delicate forms while children hover nearby, eager to taste the first batch. The sesame seeds are roasted until they release a nutty aroma, then mixed with molten jaggery that glistens like dark honey. This mixture is tucked inside thin sheets of rice flour, folded carefully, and roasted on a hot pan to make til pitha, the most beloved of all.

The kitchen hums with conversation and laughter. Elders recall past Bihus, when the granaries were full and neighbors gathered to share food late into the night. The younger ones listen, half-distracted by the sizzling sound of ghila pitha frying in oil, their golden crusts crisping as they float to the surface. Someone brings out bamboo tubes,

cleaned and lined with banana leaves, into which rice flour mixed with coconut and jaggery is packed tightly. These are placed over the fire, and as the bamboo chars, the sunga pitha inside cooks slowly, absorbing a smoky flavor that is unique to this season.

The rhythm of preparation is unhurried, almost ceremonial. Each step carries the weight of tradition, passed down through generations. The act of making pitha is not only about food but about togetherness. Neighbors drop in, offering a hand or simply sharing a story, and they are always given a warm piece of pitha fresh from the pan. Children run about with sticky fingers, their mouths sweet with jaggery, while elders smile knowingly, remembering their own childhoods.

As the night deepens, the meji bonfire is lit outside, its flames rising high into the winter sky. Families gather around, carrying plates of pitha, laru and other delicacies. The fire crackles, sending sparks upward, and the taste of the pitha seems richer in the glow of the flames. The sesame and jaggery warm the body against the chill, the rice flour fills the stomach, and the heart is filled with the joy of abundance.

Inside the home, the last batches are prepared, carefully stored to be shared with relatives and guests the next day. The kitchen quiets, but the lingering aroma of roasted sesame and fried rice cakes remains, a reminder of the festival's essence. Magh Bihu is not only celebrated in the fields or at the bonfire; it is born in the kitchen, in the hands that shape the pitha, in the laughter that accompanies its making, and in the love with which it is offered.

The Assamese home, during Magh Bihu, becomes a sanctuary of sweetness, tradition, and togetherness, where every piece of pitha carries the taste of heritage and the warmth of family bonds. His father nodded. "Yes, perhaps fate has brought them together on this festive day." The idea of marriage was planted in their minds, and soon they began hinting at it to Arindam. He blushed, embarrassed, but he could not deny that he felt drawn to Ananya.

Yet, as the day unfolded, a mysterious twist emerged.

While exploring the forest trails, Ananya suddenly froze. She had spotted someone familiar—a man she knew from her sister's past. He was standing near a group of tourists, his face half-hidden by the mist. Memories rushed back to her. This man had once been her sister's lover, and Arindam, the very friend she had just made, had been his rival in love.

The revelation shook her. She confronted Arindam later, her voice trembling. "Did you know that my sister once loved a man from Assam? And that you

were his rival?"

Arindam's face turned pale. He nodded slowly. "Yes, I knew. It was years ago. We were young, foolish, and caught in emotions. I never meant to hurt anyone."

Ananya felt torn. The past seemed to cast a shadow over the present. She wondered if their budding friendship was doomed by old wounds.

But fate had another plan. That evening, as the villagers lit the meji bonfire, the tourists gathered around. The flames rose high, crackling against the night sky, symbolizing the burning away of old grievances and the welcoming of new beginnings. The air was filled with the sound of drums, the rhythm of dance, and the joy of celebration. Ananya's sister's former lover approached her. He looked at her kindly and said, "The past is gone. Your sister has moved on, and so have I. There is no rivalry now, no bitterness. Life is too short to hold grudges."

His words, combined with the warmth of the festival, melted the tension in her heart. She realized that the beauty of Assam, the spirit of Magh Bihu, and the serenity of Kaziranga were teaching her something profound: forgiveness.

Arindam joined her by the fire, his eyes reflecting the flames. "I don't want the past to stand between us," he said

softly. "I want to build something new, something true. Will you let me?" Ananya looked at him, her heart filled with both relief and affection. The forest around them seemed to whisper its blessing, the rhinos grazing peacefully, the birds singing in the distance, the villagers dancing with abandon.

"Yes," she said finally, her voice steady. "Let's forget the past. Let's begin anew." The night grew deeper, and the festival continued with songs and dances. Arindam's parents, seeing the closeness between the two, felt their hearts swell with joy. They approached Ananya, speaking gently. "We would be honored if you became part of our family."

Ananya smiled, touched by their warmth. She had come to Assam as a stranger, but now she felt she belonged.

The next morning, as the sun rose over Kaziranga, painting the sky with shades of orange and pink, Arindam and Ananya walked together through the dew-laden grass. The forest was alive with the calls of birds, the rustle of leaves, and the distant sight of elephants moving gracefully. Arindam stopped, looking at her with sincerity. "Ananya, yesterday I realized that life is about moments like these—moments of peace, forgiveness, and love. I want to spend my life with you. Will you marry me?"

Her eyes filled with tears of joy. "Yes, Arindam. I will."

The decision was made, not in haste but in the gentle embrace of nature and culture. The Magh Bihu celebration had not only brought them together but had also healed old wounds, reminding them that love is stronger than rivalry, and forgiveness is more powerful than resentment. As the bus carried the tourists back from Kaziranga, Arindam and Ananya sat side by side, their hands intertwined. The road stretched ahead, winding through fields and villages, carrying them toward a future filled with promise.

Kaziranga had given them more than memories of rhinos and bonfires; it had given them a new beginning. The festive spirit of Magh Bihu had woven their lives together, binding them in a bond that was both cultural and personal.

And so, under the vast sky of Assam, amidst the songs of birds and the laughter of villagers, an Assamese engineer and a Telugu girl found love, forgiveness, and the courage to embrace a shared destiny. *(Professor Ratan Bhattacharjee is an International Tagore Awardee multilingual writer of short stories and an Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University. His latest publication is Twilight of Love (Partridge 2025). Email profpratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)*



# In the name of education, childhood is snatched away from children

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

A small newspaper headline can often unmask an entire society. “Teenagers are leaving home after being asked to study and prevented from making reels”—this sentence isn’t just information, but a statement of a profound tragedy of our times. It reveals that home, supposedly the safest place for children, is in many cases becoming a center of unbearable pressure for them. Studies, discipline, and worries about the future—all of these are essential, but when they are imposed on children with fear, taunts, insults, and comparisons, the result is not motivation to learn, but escape. This news forces us to pause and consider what we truly want from our children—marks, ranks, and performance, or balanced, sensitive, and healthy human beings?

Today’s teens are going through unprecedented changes. The digital world has expanded their options—Reels, short videos, online friendships, instant fame, and instant praise. All of this is alluring, but also inherently unstable. In these times, the role of the family becomes even more crucial. Unfortunately, in many homes, communication has been replaced by commands, understanding by comparison, and empathy by expectations. “We are saying this for your own good”—this phrase often strikes children as a fear, as it is not accompanied by a willingness to listen.

Society has developed a one-sided view of education. The yardstick for success has been narrowed to good grades, prestigious colleges, and a so-called secure career. In this race, it’s forgotten that not every child is the same. Some are interested in science, some in art; some thrive in sports, some in writing. When everyone is forced into a single mold, many children break down. They begin to consider their failure a personal offense and gradually lose self-confidence. Leaving home is the culmination of that breakdown—a desperate attempt, where the child seeks to escape and find peace.

Adolescence is a time of emotional turmoil. The body changes, the mind is filled with questions, and there’s a restlessness about establishing an identity. During this time, if the home is filled with scolding, yelling, contempt, and constant surveillance, the child feels



isolated and feels unappreciated. They feel their feelings are unappreciated. Parents often mistake their children’s silence for discipline, but it’s actually a buildup of tension within. It’s hard to predict when this tension will explode—leaving home, turning to drugs, or even self-harm.

Blaming Reels and social media solely for this problem would be an oversimplification. It’s true that excessive screen time impacts children’s concentration and patience, but the question is why do children seek refuge in screens? Often, it’s because they feel heard, appreciated, or at least not judged. If there’s lively communication, shared time, and trusting relationships at home, digital attraction remains balanced. The problem isn’t technology, but our relationship with it.

Parents’ concerns are natural. They want to learn from their own experiences and protect their children from difficulties. But when concern turns into control, it’s detrimental. Taking away children’s hobbies, preventing

them from seeing friends, and constantly comparing them—these methods may seem like discipline in the short term, but they shatter trust in the long run. A child may appear obedient, but rebellion festers within. A love for learning stems not from fear, but from meaning—when a child understands why they’re studying and what direction they’re moving toward.

The role of schools and educational institutions is no less crucial. The exam-centric system turns children into marks machines. Serious investment in counseling, life skills, and mental health remains elusive. Teachers often overlook children’s emotional needs under the pressure of completing the curriculum. If school and home work together to create a supportive system—one where there is dialogue about a child’s interests, abilities, and mental state—many tragedies can be prevented. The social display of successes and ridicule of failures also exacerbate the problem. Comparisons from relatives, neighborhood expecta-

tions, the buzz of achievement on social media—all of these multiply parental pressure, which in turn is passed on to children. We must collectively accept that not every path is the same, and that even late-blooming flowers exude fragrance. Life is not linear; it has pauses, turns, and restarts.

Silence is the most dangerous aspect of mental health. Children’s sadness, irritability, sleep changes, and a sudden disengagement from studies—these are all signs that are easy to dismiss as “drama” or “stubbornness.” But timely, sensitive intervention—a calm conversation, non-interruptive listening, and professional counseling if needed—can save many lives. Counseling is not a stigma, but a wise step.

Creating a culture of dialogue within the home is a pressing need today. Daily shared time—without mobile phones, without commands—is where children can share their day, fears, and dreams. Parents’ acceptance of the possibility of mistakes helps children become more honest. Rules are

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important, but explaining the reasons behind them and listening to children’s opinions is just as crucial. Discipline should come from consent, not fear.

Initiatives are also needed at the policy level. Trained counselors in schools, regular workshops for parents, and the inclusion of life skills and emotional education in the curriculum—these steps are the need of the hour. Digital literacy is not just about using technology, but also about understanding its limitations. Children must be taught self-regulation so they can balance screen time and learning.

Ultimately, the question is what kind of society do we want to create? One that scares children into “success,” or

one that understands and empowers them? Teenagers leaving home are a sign of our collective failure. This isn’t just the story of one family, but a reflection of our priorities. If we don’t stop, listen, and change today—the news will be even more bitter.

We must remember that children are not the future, but the present. Their laughter, curiosity, and disagreement—all are part of life. Education is important, but even more important is the environment in which it occurs. When the home becomes a place of friendship, respect, and trust, children will not run away—they will stay and soar. This is the greatest call of the time, and this is the greatest responsibility we have.



## Echoes of a Promise

*A Love story beyond time*

(CONTD. FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE)

By: Chafikhur Rahman

The next morning was bright after the night’s rain. The hills sparkled fresh, every leaf washed clean, every stone shining in the sun. A cool wind carried the smell of wet earth and wild lemon blossoms. Rudra Baruah drove the SUV along a narrow path that wound toward the river. Beside him sat Kaberi Mahanta, her hair tied neatly, her eyes thoughtful and distant.

They had agreed the night before: today they would visit the old temple by the river, the place where Ratneswar and Kabita were last seen alive. The file mentioned it, the villagers whispered about it, and both Rudra and Kaberi had seen it in their dreams.

Neither spoke much during the drive. Words felt small against the weight of what they were about to face.

The car could go only so far. After a point, the road turned into a muddy track, bordered by tall grass and bamboo. Rudra stopped the SUV.

“We’ll have to walk from here,” he said. Kaberi nodded. She stepped out carefully, her sandals crunching the wet earth. The air was filled with bird calls, the rustle of leaves, and the distant murmur of the river.

As they walked, Kaberi whispered, “I feel as if my feet already know this path. As if I have walked here a hundred times before.”

Rudra glanced at her. “I was about to say the same. Every turn feels familiar. Even the smell of the bamboo.”

They walked side by side, sometimes brushing

shoulders, neither pulling away. The silence between them was heavy, but not uncomfortable—it was like walking with someone who shares the same heartbeat.

At last, through the trees, the temple appeared. It was small and old, built of stone, half-covered by moss and creepers. A banyan tree grew beside it, its roots twisting down like ropes, wrapping around the walls. The temple bell hung silent, its rope frayed by years of wind and rain.

For a long time, Rudra and Kaberi stood without moving.

“This is it,” Kaberi whispered. “This is the place from my dreams.”

Rudra’s breath caught. “Mine too.”

They stepped onto the stone steps leading to the temple. The stones were cool under their feet, damp from the rain. Rudra touched the wall. A shiver went through him—as if the stone remembered his touch from long ago.

Kaberi walked to the bell and lifted the rope gently. The bell gave a low, soft sound, like a sigh.

In that moment, both of them felt it: a flood of memories, not from this life but from another.

Rudra saw himself—young, with books under his arm—waiting on these very steps. He heard a voice calling him: “Ratneswar... I will meet you after class at the temple.”

Kaberi saw herself—her hair loose, her red dupatta flying in the wind—running up the steps, smiling. She heard herself say: “Ratneswar, one day we will marry here. This temple will bless us.”

They both gasped softly, their eyes wide, their bodies trembling.

“Did you... see?” Kaberi whispered.

“Yes,” Rudra said. His voice was rough, almost breaking. “I saw you. I saw me. Here. Long ago.”

They walked down the steps to the riverbank. The water flowed steady, reflecting the sunlight in broken silver lines. The flat stone where the fishermen had found the bodies still lay there, half in water, half out, like a silent witness.

Kaberi’s hand trembled as she pointed. “That stone... I remember sitting there. Reading poems. Laughing. It was our stone.”

Rudra stepped closer, his boots crunching the pebbles. His chest tightened as if the river itself pressed against him.

He closed his eyes. For a moment, he heard voices—laughter, then shouts, then a scream. The sound of a stick striking. The splash of water.

He opened his eyes quickly, his heart racing. Kaberi touched his arm. “What did you hear?”

“Echoes,” he whispered. “Echoes of that night.”

They sat on the stone steps of the temple, side by side, looking at the river. Neither spoke for a long time. The silence was heavy, but it carried comfort too, as if the river was telling them: you are not strangers here.

Finally, Kaberi said softly, “Do you believe now, Rudra? That we were them?”

Rudra turned to her. Her face glowed in the morning light, her eyes full of both strength and sadness.

“I don’t just believe,” he said. “I know. My soul knows. I was Ratneswar. You were Kabita. And we are here to finish what was left unfinished.”

Kaberi’s eyes filled with tears. Not of weakness, but of a deep recognition. She whispered, “Then let us not fail this time.”

Rudra reached for her hand. Their fingers touched and held, firm, steady, as if they were completing a circle broken thirty years ago.

Standing before the temple, with the river flowing like time itself, Rudra and Kaberi made a silent vow. They did not speak it aloud, but both felt it in their hearts:

We will uncover the truth. We will bring justice to Ratneswar and Kabita. We will not let love die twice. As they walked back toward the path, Kaberi stopped suddenly. “Rudra... look.”

On the far side of the river, half-hidden by trees, a man was standing. He wore a dark jacket, his face shadowed. He was watching them.

When he realized they had noticed, he turned quickly and disappeared into the forest.

Rudra’s instincts flared. “Someone is watching us. Someone doesn’t want this case reopened.” Kaberi’s eyes darkened. “Then we must move faster. Before they move against us.”

They walked back to the SUV in silence, but their steps were quicker now, sharper, filled with urgency.

The hills around them were calm, but beneath the calm, danger stirred.

That night, Rudra sat at his desk and wrote in his notebook:

“At the old temple, the past is alive. The river remembers. And someone in the present is afraid.” He closed the book and looked out of the window at the stars. For the first time, he was not afraid. He was ready.

(CONTD. ON NEXT ISSUE)



## Roadside raking

By: Otteri Selva Kumar

In the bustling streets of Chennai, where the sun casts long shadows and the air hums with the ceaseless din of city life, there existed a small yet vibrant hub where dreams brewed alongside steaming cups of filter coffee. This was the site of Roadside Raking, a unique collage workspace situated just beside a bustling highway, where creativity met chaos, helmed by a group of young artists: Nanthu, Nivesh, Usman, Uma, and Usha.

Nanthu, a sprightly young man with eyes like the monsoon sky, was the unspoken leader of this ragtag group. His speciality lay in transforming scraps of forgotten fabric and snatches of discarded paper into vivid tapestries of color and emotion. Nivesh, on the other hand, was a quiet observer, his lean fingers always smeared with chalk or charcoal, sketching the busy life of Chennai as it unfolded.

Then came Usman, whose laughter was as loud as the honks of the autos zooming past. With his knack for capturing quirky, candid moments in his photographs, he added life to any canvas. Uma, with her gentle demeanor and thoughtful gaze, was the writer of the group.

Her words stitched the images together, creating stories that danced off the surface. Lastly, Usha, with her bright scarves and brighter ideas, used her designing skills to bring structure and form to their collective chaos.

Their project was ambitious - a roadside collage that captured the vivid, pulsating heart of Chennai, a city teeming with stories at every corner. The plan was to work on this massive collage in real-time, inviting passersby to contribute, making it a living, breathing testament to the city’s spirit.

One particularly steamy afternoon, as the city draped itself in the sultry haze of summer, a challenge arose. The municipality had announced a clean-up drive, and their beloved spot was to be cleared. With only two days’ notice, the team was in a frenzy. This collage was more than just art; it was a narrative of their city, their home, and their shared dreams. Losing it meant losing a part of themselves.

The group gathered under the shade of

an old neem tree, brainstorming fervently. Uma suggested they document every piece of the collage, turning it into a digital exhibit. “It’s about keeping the spirit alive, not just the physical piece,” she said, her voice firm with resolve. Usman proposed a photo exhibition that could travel, while Usha chimed in with ideas for interactive installations across the city.

But it was Nanthu who brought the action into play. “Why not move the entire collage?” he wondered aloud. “We can break it into sections and transport it. This way, the whole city can be part of it, beyond just our corner.”

Revitalised by Nanthu’s dynamic idea, they set about executing their plan. They divided the collage into portable sections, each piece telling a part of the Chennai story. Usman and Nivesh handled the photography and sketching, capturing the essence of each segment. Uma wove the narratives together, her words linking the images in a digital diary that was immediately shared with their community.

Usha designed mini-stands and frames that could fold and unfold easily, making the pieces mobile.

On the day of the clean-up, their corner was bustling not with the usual array of materials but with action and anticipation.

The team, along with volunteers who had followed their journey, moved the collage in a spirited procession that felt more like a festival. Each section found a new home - in cafes, libraries, schools, and parks around Chennai.

The Roadside Regulars, as they were fondly called, didn’t just save their collage; they made it a pulse that beat across Chennai. In every nook of the city, there was a piece of their art telling a story - about heritage, about modern hustle, the quiet corners where old men played carrom, and the noisy streets where youngsters thrived.

Their tale of resilience and creativity echoed in every corner of the city. And on any given day, one could see Uma typing away in a quiet cafe corner, Usman clicking away his camera, Nivesh lost in his sketches, Usha designing fervently, and Nanthu, who had once dreamed of just saving a collage, now painting the town in the hues of hope and dreams shared by many.



## TURKMAN GATE STONE-PELTING INCIDENT

## 16 arrested so far, 3 more held



**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** Delhi Police has arrested three more persons accused in the Turkman Gate stone-pelting incident, taking the total number of arrests in the case to 16, an official said on Saturday.

The arrested people have been identified as Mohd Naved (44), Mohd Faiz (20), Mohd Ubaidullah (23), Mohd Arib (25), Mohd Kashif (25), Mohd Kaif (23), Mohd Adnan (37), Sameer Husain (40), Mohd Athar (20), Shah Nawaz Alam (55), Mohd Imran (28), Mohd Imran alias Raju (36), Mohd Affan (20), Mohd Adil (20), Mohd Aamir Hamza (22) and Mohd Ubaidullah (26).

"On Friday night, we arrested three people involved in stone-pelting. So far, we have arrested 16 people. Further investigation is underway," Additional Commissioner of Police (Central) Nidhin Valsan said.

A large number of police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed in sensitive pockets to maintain law and order, while senior officers are supervising arrangements on the ground for Friday prayers.

The police are also conducting drone surveillance and extensive CCTV monitoring to keep a tight vigil in the area, officials said, adding that the situation is peaceful and under control.

As part of the investigation, the police have identified 10 social media influencers for allegedly circulating misleading or unverified information related to the incident. Officials said one social media influencer, Aimen Rizvi, is yet to join the investigation de-

spite being summoned.

Meanwhile, Rizvi told PTI that she has not received any summons from the police so far.

"The entire incident happened on January 6 around 12.30 am. I was attending a wedding and posted the video around 4 am. In the video, I did not ask anyone to mobilise near the mosque. I only shared information that something had happened in the vicinity of the mosque," she said.

Describing herself as a social worker, Rizvi said she had not been contacted by the police till now. "If I receive any summons or call, I will cooperate and join the investigation," she added.

She also said the police were present only to maintain law and order and asserted that pelting stones at police personnel is a crime, which she did not support.

The police said summons are yet to be sent to another influencer, Salman, whose role is being examined in connection with the circulation of certain messages on social media platforms.

The role of a Samajwadi Party MP is also under scrutiny, the police said. "We are checking his role. We may send him a notice. All his statements are being scanned and examined as part of the probe," a senior officer said.

Investigation into the stone-pelting incident is progressing on multiple fronts, including examination of digital evidence, identification of those involved in spreading misinformation, and questioning of suspects linked to the violence, the police said. (PTI)

## ED raids on I-PAC: Bengal govt files caveat in SC

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** The West Bengal government has filed a caveat in the Supreme Court seeking that no order should be passed without hearing it in connection with Enforcement Directorate raids against political consultancy firm I-PAC. A caveat is filed by a litigant in the high courts and the Supreme Court to ensure that no adverse order is passed against it without it being heard.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted searches on the premises of I-PAC and its director Pratik Jain in Kolkata as part of a money laundering probe into an alleged multi-crore rupee coal pilferage scam.

According to the agency, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee entered the raid sites and took away "key" evidence, including physical documents and electronic devices. Banerjee has accused the central agency of overreach. The ED on Friday approached the Calcutta High Court, seeking a CBI probe against Banerjee, alleging that she, with the aid of the police, took away incriminating documents from the agency's custody during the raid at Jain's home. (PTI)

## Four injured in blast at firecracker manufacturing unit in Bengal

**KOLKATA, Jan 10:** Four people were seriously injured in a blast at a firecracker manufacturing unit in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district on Saturday, police said. The explosion occurred around 1 pm at the factory in Champahati and caused severe damage to the facility and adjacent houses, a senior officer of the Baruipur Police District said.

Three of the four injured have been identified as Gaur Gangopadhyay, Kishan Mondal and Rahul Mondal, while the identity of the other is yet to be confirmed, he said. "They suffered burn injuries and were immediately admitted to hospitals in Baruipur and Kolkata for treatment," the officer said. Several fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the fire caused by the explosion, he said. Locals claimed that the blast was deafening and so severe that the asbestos roof of the factory was blown off.

"The cause of the explosion is yet to be ascertained. A probe has been initiated," the officer said, adding that samples from the site were collected for forensic examinations. A preliminary investigation suggests that mishandling of explosive materials by unskilled workers might have triggered the blast, he said.

The firecrackers were reportedly being manufactured for wedding purposes, the officer added. An explosion had occurred at a firecracker manufacturing unit in Champahati in December 2024, creating panic among locals. (PTI)

## Incredible opportunities ahead for India and US: Sergio Gor

India-US ties have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** US ambassador-designate Sergio Gor, known to be a key member of President Donald Trump's inner circle, has arrived in New Delhi amid an unprecedented estrangement in ties between the two countries.

Gor, 38, was sworn in as the US envoy to India in mid-November. "Great to be back in India! Incredible opportunities ahead for our two nations!" he said on social media after landing in the national capital on Friday night.

His arrival in India came as a fresh row erupted between the two sides following US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's claim that the proposed trade deal between the two countries couldn't be sealed last year as Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not make a telephone call to President Donald Trump.

New Delhi on Friday rejected the claim and described Lutnick's remarks as "inaccurate". Gor was serving as the White



House personnel director when President Trump named him in August to be the next US envoy to New Delhi.

The India-US ties have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent additional duty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

Apart from tariff, the relations witnessed a downturn on a number of other issues, including Trump's claim of ending the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year and Washington's new immigration policy.

The US Senate confirmed Gor in October to serve as the US' next ambassador to India.

"I'm trusting Sergio to help strengthen one of our country's

most important international relationships and that's the strategic partnership with India," Trump had said after Gor's oath ceremony.

Gor had described his new role as "an honour of a lifetime" and said he looks forward to "enhancing" the relationship between the US and India.

He played a major role in the political action committee (PAC) of Trump's campaign in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election, and his influence increased manifold after he was tasked with vetting political appointees in the new administration.

In January last year, the then US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, stepped down from the post paving the way for the Trump administration to appoint its new envoy.

Gor had visited India for six days in October, days after his appointment was confirmed by the Senate. He had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during the visit. (PTI)

## Homebuyers' 'fraud': ED attaches land parcels worth ₹ 585 crore in Haryana, UP

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday said it has attached hundreds of acres of land in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh worth more than Rs 580 crore in a money laundering case against a Delhi-NCR-based real estate company which allegedly duped numerous homebuyers.

The probe is against ADEL Landmarks Ltd. (formerly Era Landmarks Ltd.) and its promoters Hem Singh Bharana and Sumit Bharana, the agency said in a statement.

An order was issued on Friday under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for provisional attachment of 340 acres of land located in Gurugram, Faridabad, Palwal and Bahadurgarh in Haryana and Meerut and

Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, it said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said the total value of these plots is ₹ 585.46 crore.

The money laundering case stems from 74 FIRs and chargesheets filed by Haryana and Delhi police against the company and its promoters on the charge of cheating "numerous" homebuyers by failing to deliver promised flats and units even after a delay of 12-19 years.

The ED said the realty company launched several residential group housing projects in Gurugram, Faridabad and Palwal in Haryana and collected ₹ 1,075 crore as advance booking amount from 4,771 customers across eight projects -- Cosmocourt, Cosmocity-I, Cos-

moscity-III, Skyville, Redwood Residency, Era Green World, Era Divine Court and ADEL Divine Court.

These projects, launched in 2006-2012, remain "incomplete" till today, the agency said.

The promoters "diverted" "substantial" funds collected from homebuyers to their group companies as advances for purchase of land parcels and other purposes, instead of utilising them for the completion of the promised housing projects.

According to the ED, the aggrieved customers sought refunds due to non-delivery of flats and were issued cheques by the company, many of which were "dishonoured" for various reasons. (PTI)

## India will one day have hijab-clad woman as PM, says Owaisi

**MUMBAI, Jan 10:** AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi has said a hijab-clad woman would one day become India's prime minister as the country's Constitution accords equal status to people from all communities unlike that of Pakistan, which restricts top constitutional posts to a single community.

His remark drew a sharp reaction from the ruling BJP, which said that through his "irresponsible" statement, the Hyderabad MP was presenting half-truth as Muslim women don't want to wear hijab.

Addressing a public meeting on Friday in Maharashtra's Solapur ahead of the January 15 civic polls, Owaisi said, "India's Constitution accords equal status to people of all communities, unlike Pakistan's Constitution which restricts the country's top constitutional posts to members of a single community."

He added that he may not be alive to see it, but the day would come in future when a woman wearing a hijab would become India's prime minister. (PTI)

## Minor 'gangraped' in abandoned factory in West Bengal's Hooghly, 2 held

**KOLKATA, Jan 10:** A girl was allegedly gangraped at an abandoned factory in Hooghly district, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

Two people have been arrested in connection with the incident, the officer said.

The 16-year-old girl had entered the closed Hindmotor factory premises on Thursday evening with a friend.

"It is alleged that the accused, along with their associates, sexually assaulted the minor inside the premises," the officer said.

"Statements of the arrested accused are being recorded, and the case is being investigated from all angles," he said, adding that further investigation is underway.

Police have slapped charges under the POCSO Act in the case, he said.

One of the arrested accused has been identified as Dipankar Adhikari, also known as Sonai, reportedly a Trinamool Congress youth leader in the local-

ity, he said.

The other person arrested is the girl's alleged boyfriend, who is also a minor, the officer said. "We are looking for two more associates of the accused. They are on the run, and search operations are underway to trace them. A Test Identification (TI) parade will be conducted on Saturday as part of the investigation," the officer told PTI.

"We do not know whether any of the arrested accused has any political connection or not," he added.

"The girl is 16.5 years old, while her friend is 17 years old. He has been sent to the Juvenile board. We have received her medical report, and the necessary probe is on," the IPS officer told PTI.

Later, a local Trinamool Congress leader, who identified himself as Nitai Dasgupta, said that the arrested accused was with their party.

"This person, if found guilty, should be punished. I would de-

mand that the party's highest authority remove him from the party," Dasgupta said.

Another party leader in the district, Ajay Shankar, said, "We do not support any such criminal activity. If found guilty, then he must be punished."

When contacted, BJP party leader and MLA Agnimitra Paul lashed out at the TMC government and demanded strict action against the culprits.

"This is an unfortunate incident. But we have got used to such criminal activities in Bengal. It's a shame that we are having a woman chief minister and yet the women are not secure here."

"The people of Bengal need an immediate change in the regime, and we are hopeful that once the BJP forms a government after the ensuing elections, the safety and security of the women will definitely be addressed," Paul told PTI when contacted. (PTI)

## Why does ED step up action against opposition leaders during elections, asks Sibal

**NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** Independent MP Kapil Sibal on Saturday wondered why the Enforcement Directorate (ED) acts against opposition leaders only when elections are underway and asked the Supreme Court to hear the review petitions pending before it on the jurisdiction of probe agencies. Addressing a press conference here, he alleged that the only motive behind the ED action in West Bengal seems to be harassment of opposition leaders and cited examples of probe agency action against Hemant Soren in Jharkhand and Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav in Bihar during the assembly polls. He also asked what the ED was investigating after raids against I-PAC in West Bengal, saying the probe agency cannot take away all the documents.

On Thursday, the ED carried out raids at the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC and the residence of its chief in Kolkata in connection with a coal smuggling case.

Its officials faced objections during the raids, with the ED claiming that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee entered the premises and took away "key" evidence related to the probe. Sibal, a former Union minister, said the UPA government did not prosecute any political party or leader based on false information. Between 2004 and 2014, when the UPA was in power, the ED was never given such a free hand, he said. "When the Enforcement Directorate was constituted, we did not know that it was an omnipresent prosecuting agency which could go anywhere, anytime in the country. It can also attack the federal structure, like troubling opposition leaders and making their governments fall, justified or not," he told reporters. Noting that he was pained at the developments in West Bengal, Sibal said, "I do not want the unity and integrity of our coun-

try to be disturbed." Asked if the Centre can impose President's rule in the state in view of the happenings, he said, "If someone takes an arbitrary decision without any basis, then that would have consequences too. If they are winning by two-thirds majority, then there will be a victory by three-fourths." The Rajya Sabha MP sought to blame the Supreme Court for not hearing the review petitions pending before it on the jurisdiction of probe agencies. "The time has come for all issues to be looked into by the Supreme Court. Otherwise, the federal structure would break down, and this would not go down well with people." He said what is happening is that wherever an FIR is registered, the ED reaches there, as it feels that it has the right to investigate everywhere.

"It is also interesting that the ED acts only where elections are held. One would recall Jharkhand when the ED reached there during the elections. The same was done in Bihar, when the ED reached there during elections, and the court started the process so that Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav had to come to Delhi, and their election schedule was disturbed."

"Now the ED has reached West Bengal as the elections are to be held there," the former Union minister said.

Asked about the ED's allegation that the West Bengal chief minister caused hindrance during raids on I-PAC, Sibal said, "The ED should first tell what they were investigating. If they wanted documents related to the coal scam, at least that is what newspapers report, then they should have asked for access to computers... We will not take anything and ask for information relating to the coal scam." (PTI)

## ED to soon file case to probe ₹ 2,000 crore Rajasthan mid-day meal 'scam'

**JAIPUR/NEW DELHI, Jan 10:** The Enforcement Directorate is set to register a money laundering case to probe alleged irregularities worth ₹ 2,000 crore in the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme in Rajasthan under the previous Congress government, official sources said on Saturday.

The Rajasthan Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on January 7 filed an FIR in the case and named 21 accused, including certain retired officials of the Rajasthan Cooperative Consumer Federation Ltd (CONFED), some private persons and firms under various sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act, Indian Penal Code and the Rajasthan Transparency in Public Procurement Act.

The 22-page FIR reviewed by PTI states that the case emerges from a reference sent by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in 2024 into the alleged irregularities and corruption in providing dry ration packets containing pulses, cooking oil and spices to eligible schoolchildren in the state.

More than 3 crore students studying in classes 1-8 were stated to have been provided dry ration packets in five phases between 2020-23 and the Rajasthan government spent ₹ 2,023.91 crore on this, according to the ACB FIR.

The federal probe agency sent the reference to the ACB under Section 66(2) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), under which it is empowered to share information regarding an offence with police or a designated law enforcement agency.

The ED, in its communication, claimed to have unearthed evidence related to alleged corruption of

more than ₹ 2,000 crore in the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme in the state between 2020-23.

The sources said the ED had registered an ECIR (enforcement case information report, which is equivalent to a police FIR) in this case during 2023, but the state police closed the primary case against the accused, leading to the closure of its PMLA case.

The central agency then sent the evidence it had collected to the ACB in 2024 and now the state agency has filed an FIR.

A fresh money laundering case will soon be registered so that the "scam" can be unearthed, potential proceeds of crime can be attached and accused persons can be prosecuted under the anti-money laundering law, the sources said.

Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee president Govind Singh Dotasra on Friday refuted allegations of wrongdoing in this case by the former Ashok Gehlot-led government.

Dotasra accused the BJP-led state government of creating a "false narrative" to malign the bureaucracy and "divert attention" from its own failures.

According to the ACB FIR, the entire procurement process for the mid-day meal food packets -- from decision-making delays, inflated pricing, delayed supplies, non-existent quality control, and payments without delivery -- was carried out through "deliberate" collusion between officials of the concerned government department, CONFED and private suppliers, resulting in a wrongful loss of an estimated ₹ 2,000 crore to the state exchequer. (PTI)

## 'Swadeshi', 'Swabhasha' should be encouraged: Amit Shah

**JODHPUR, Jan 10:** Emphasising the need to encourage 'Swadeshi' and 'Swabhasha', Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged people to make and use local products and converse in their mother tongue at home.

Shah said that language is key to preserving any society, culture and religion. While any language can be learnt or spoken as required to progress in the world, only Hindi and local languages must be used for conversation with children at home, as it will help strengthen their connection with their roots, he stressed.

The minister was addressing the Maheshwari Global Convention at Jodhpur, where members from the Maheshwari community have converged from various parts of the country and abroad.

"If you talk in your language with the children at home, they will be automatically connected to their history, to their state of Rajasthan... It is the language only which keeps the society alive, religion alive and takes the culture



forward," said Shah.

"Speak in any language as is needed at other places, even if it is a foreign language, but speak only in the mother tongue with children at home," the minister said. Emphasising the need to work towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', Shah termed Swadeshi as the only mantra to attain the goal in order to make India a leading nation in every field by 2047.

"If we have to reach the top, 'aatmanirbhar' is the only option and to make it successful, the only mantra is 'Swadeshi'," said Shah, calling upon businesses to venture into manufacturing at least one product which is not being made in country yet, along with what they have already been producing, in order to make 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

Recognising the role of the

community, the minister said that right from the era of the freedom struggle to the developing and evolving India post-independence, the Maheshwari community has played a crucial role.

"They have a very big role in the cultural renaissance of the country," said Shah.

Termining such conventions of communities a binding force for the country, Shah said that they "strengthen the nation, not divide them".

"Our communities never divided the country. This does not symbolise narrowness, but unity and power. Unity is important not only for the community but for the nation as well," he said.

"If every community takes care of its poor, the entire country's poor will be taken care of. If every community becomes independent, the entire nation becomes independent," he said.

On the occasion, Shah also released a stamp recognising the contribution of the Maheshwari community in the development of the country. (PTI)

# Khandu calls indigenous traditions living symbol of Arunachal's identity

Chief Minister attends Aka community's Sarok festival golden jubilee

**ITANAGAR, Jan 10:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday described indigenous traditions as a living symbol of the state's heritage and identity while attending the golden jubilee celebration of the Sarok festival of the Aka community at Bana in Bichom district.

Calling the occasion a proud moment, Khandu in a social media post said, "Proud to celebrate 50 years of the Sarok Festival, celebrated by the Aka community at Bana, a living symbol of heritage and continuity."

He described the festival as a reflection of deep-rooted traditions that connect generations through shared values and beliefs.

The chief minister said indigenous faiths across communities may differ in names and rituals, but their essence remains the same.

"Our indigenous faith traditions share a common spirit; respect for nature, ancestors and moral balance. Names and rituals may differ, but the core beliefs remain deeply connected," he said in a post on X.

Emphasising the need to protect and promote traditional belief systems, Khandu said preserving in-



igenous faith is essential for safeguarding identity and passing values to future generations.

"Preserving indigenous faith means safeguarding our identity, passing values to future generations and respecting these traditions as complete and living belief systems," he added.

Khandu said he was looking forward to engaging with local residents and reviewing development works in the area.

"Looking forward to interacting with the people and reviewing development initiatives in the area,"

Khandu said, reiterating the government's commitment to inclusive development while respecting cultural heritage.

The chief minister was accompanied by state Home Minister Mama Natung and MLA Mohesh Chai. (PTI)

# Itanagar Corporator meets Governor to discuss ward development

HT Correspondent

**ITANAGAR, Jan 10:** Gora Lotak, Corporator of Ward No 11 of the Itanagar Municipal Corporation, called on the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar on Saturday. The Corporator sought the Governor's guidance and support for the holistic development of his ward, particularly as Lok Bhavan itself falls within Ward No 11.

Lotak briefed the Governor on challenges related to cleanliness, waste disposal, hygiene, sanitation and the status of public and private structures and essential services in his area.

The Governor congratulated Lotak on his election and urged him to remain committed to public service and work with dedication for the welfare of his constituents. He highlighted that Ward No 11, hosting Lok Bhavan, should set



high standards in cleanliness, planning and civic discipline, serving as a model for other wards.

Emphasising urban governance, the Governor stressed the need for cleanliness, orderliness and aesthetic enhancement across all areas under the Municipal Corporation. He encouraged Corporators to undertake avenue plantation drives in coordination with the Department

of Environment and Forests, highlighting the environmental and aesthetic benefits.

The Governor also advised Corporators to act as social facilitators by engaging with citizens, fostering community ownership and motivating residents to actively participate in cleanliness, conservation and overall development initiatives.

# Api Kombo elected Zilla Parishad Chairperson of Upper Siang



HT Correspondent

**YINGKIONG, Jan 10:** The first official meeting of the newly elected Zilla Parishad Members (ZPMs) of the 9th Upper Siang Zilla Parishad was held on Saturday at the DC Office Conference Hall, Yingkiang, marking the formal commencement of their tenure.

Deputy Commissioner-cum-Presiding Officer Talo Jerang administered the oath of office to all 10 ZPMs. Api Kombo, ZPM-1 from Yingkiang, being the lone candidate for the post of Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC), was declared elected unopposed, becoming the 5th ZPC of Upper Siang and only the second woman to hold the position.

The meeting was attended by all

newly elected ZPMs, including Yaping Zinzong, Karsing Pertin, Katem Tateh, Pilot Panggeng, Oriki Tali, Jompi Peyang, Tendy Lamo, Ning Tayeng Doming and Oki Boko. An introductory session was later held at the DC Bungalow, attended by MLA and Advisor to the Chief Minister, Alo Libang, along with Heads of Departments.

Addressing the ZP leaders, Libang congratulated them and urged the Deputy Commissioner to provide first-hand training to ensure they are well-equipped to perform their duties effectively. He emphasised collective efforts for the district's overall development, highlighting Upper Siang's status as an underdeveloped district and the need for proactive governance.

Newly elected ZPC Chairperson

Api Kombo expressed her gratitude and assured cooperation with all stakeholders. Deputy Commissioner Talo Jerang also congratulated the members and encouraged the adoption of innovative solutions to drive progress in the district.

Cultural programs were presented and ZPC and ZPMs were felicitated in a cordial atmosphere. Simultaneously, the first meeting-cum-election of Gram Panchayat Chairpersons of Upper Siang District was conducted at the Tourist Lodge Auditorium, Yingkiang. Seven Gram Panchayat Chairpersons were declared elected, marking the formal functioning of the new Gram Panchayat leadership in the district.

# Governor extends Sarok Festival Day greetings

HT Correspondent

**ITANAGAR, Jan 10:** The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), has extended his warm greetings to the people of the State and especially to the Hrusso community of East Kameng district, on the auspicious occasion of the Sarok Festival.

In his message, the Governor said that Festivals and traditional ceremonies are the soul of human culture. They reflect our collective wisdom, values and way of life, nurtured and preserved by indigenous communities since time immemorial. Such celebrations bring people together across generations, strengthening bonds of unity, mutual respect and social harmony. Sarok is a vibrant expression of the Hrusso (Aka) tribe's rich cultural heritage, deeply rooted in tradition, faith and harmony with nature. I sincerely hope that this joyous celebration invokes the blessings of the revered deities for the well-being, peace and prosperity of the community and society at large, he said.

May the Sarok Festival usher in happiness, harmony and renewed hope for all and may it further strengthen the rich cultural fabric of our great State, the Governor wished in his message.

# Leki Gombu re-elected Zila Parishad Chairperson in Tawang



HT Correspondent

**TAWANAG, Jan 10:** The first official meeting of the newly elected Zila Parishad Members (ZPMs) and Gram Panchayats of Tawang district was held on Saturday at Kalawangpo Convention Hall, marking the beginning of a new chapter in grassroots governance. MLA Lungla and Advisor to the Minister of Planning and WCD, Tsering Lhamu, attended as Chief Guest.

During the meeting, elections for 87 Gram Panchayat Chairpersons and the Zila Parishad Chairperson were conducted. In a unanimous decision, Leki Gombu, ZPM from Jang Thingbu Block, was re-elected as Zila Parishad Chairperson for a second consecutive term.

The In-charge Deputy Commissioner, Tawang, Rinchin Leta, administered the oath of office to the newly elected ZPMs and Zila Parishad Chairperson, while Additional Deputy Commissioner, Jang, Hakraso Kri, administered the oath to the Gram Panchayat Chairpersons. The 308 Gram Panchayat Members took their oath from their respective Member Secretaries.

Addressing the gathering, MLA Tsering Lhamu extended New Year greetings and congratulated

all newly elected PRI members. She urged them to work with dedication for the development of their jurisdictions, ensure quality execution and timely completion of projects, actively monitor welfare schemes and strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions through decentralisation of responsibilities and resources. She also called for regular Gram Sabhas and proactive measures for plastic waste management and maintaining a clean environment.

Zila Parishad Chairperson Leki Gombu expressed gratitude to the voters and fellow ZPMs, pledging to work with renewed commitment to ensure development reaches the last person in the queue, in line with the vision of Mission Viksit Bharat 2047. "There is no use in holding a chair if one cannot perform," he remarked.

The programme was attended by Superintendent of Police Dr D W Thongon, Additional Deputy Commissioners Tashi Dhondup and Hakraso Kri, Member Secretaries and representatives of various political parties. The event concluded on a positive note, reflecting collective resolve towards inclusive development, accountable governance and sustainable progress in Tawang district.

# Tamat Tatak elected Chairperson of Siang Zilla Parishad

HT Correspondent

**SIANG, Jan 10:** The first meeting-cum-election of the newly constituted Zilla Parishad and Gram Panchayats of Siang District was held on Saturday in accordance with the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act and notifications issued by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the State Election Commission.

During the meeting, the election of the Chairperson of the Zilla Parishad, Siang District, as well as the Chairpersons of the respective Gram Panchayats under Siang Dis-



trict, was conducted. Tamat Tatak was elected as the Chairperson of the Zilla Parishad, Siang District, along with other elected Chairpersons of the respective Gram Panchayats.

The process included the oath-taking of the newly elected Zilla Parishad and Gram Panchayat members, followed by nomination, election and declaration of results. The entire election process was conducted peacefully and smoothly in accordance with the prescribed rules and procedures.

The oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected Chairpersons of both the Zilla Parishad and Gram Panchayats was also successfully held, marking the formal commencement of the new term of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Siang District.

# Bamang Yayu elected Zilla Parishad Chairperson of Papum Pare after Tie



HT Correspondent

**YUPIA, Jan 10:** The election for the post of Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC) of Papum Pare district was successfully conducted on Saturday at the ZPC Hall, Yupia. Bamang Yayu, Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM) from III-Kimin representing the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), was declared elected after a draw of lots against Tang Yado, the elected ZPM from I-Gorum representing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In the Zilla Parishad, the BJP had eight ZPMs, while the PPA had six and the Indian National Congress (INC) had two. With the support of the two INC members, both the PPA-INC alliance and the BJP-led side were locked in a tie, necessitating the draw of lots to decide the winner.

Simultaneously, elections to 98 Gram Panchayat Constituencies (GPCs) were also successfully conducted by the respective Returning Officers. The entire ZPC election process was carried out smoothly under the supervision of Tame Yajum, ADC, who served as DPDO-cum-Presiding Officer.

The proceedings were witnessed by MLA of 14-Doimukh, Nabam Vivek and MLA of 13-Itanagar, Techu Kaso, ensuring transparency and fairness throughout the process.

# Discovery highlights rich and underexplored fungal biodiversity in the state

# First record of Pleated Inkcap mushroom documented in Arunachal Pradesh

HT Correspondent

**LONGDING, Jan 10:** A small saprophytic mushroom, identified as 'Parasola plicatilis' (Curtis) Redhead, Vilgalys & Hopple, commonly known as the Pleated Inkcap, has been recorded for the first time in Arunachal Pradesh. The specimens were first observed and collected by Dr Tilling Tayo at the experimental farm of ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Longding.

The identification was confirmed by Dr Deep Narayan Mishra, Subject Matter Specialist in Plant Pathology, based on characteristic features including a strongly pleated grey cap, slender fragile stipe, and non-deliquescent gills. Parasola plicatilis is a delicate saprotrophic mushroom with a life span of less than 24 hours, playing an important ecological role by decomposing leaf litter and organic residues. This activity enhances nutrient mineralisation, carbon turnover and the availability of essential nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, supporting soil microbial communities and indicating healthy soil fertility.



Although the species has been reported from other parts of India and abroad, there are no documented records from Arunachal Pradesh, making this the first field-level record. The discovery

underscores the rich yet underexplored fungal biodiversity of the state and highlights the importance of systematic documentation during routine field observations and surveys.

# Ruth Tabing Boko takes oath as ZPC of East Siang



HT Correspondent

**PASIGHAT, Jan 10:** In the first meeting of all Zilla Parishad Members (ZPMs) of East Siang district, Ruth Tabing Boko from Runne village, Bosing II, was unanimously elected unopposed as the new Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC) of East Siang. The meeting was presided over by DEO-cum-DC East Siang, Sonalika Jiwani, at the DC's Conference Hall.

Following the oath of office, the DC urged the newly elected ZPC and ZPMs to focus on shaping grassroots development in the predominantly rural district, ensuring full implementation of welfare and development schemes. She emphasised innovative initiatives, including setting up e-libraries for students that could also serve as e-service hubs for rural residents.

East Siang now has 13 Zilla Parishad members. ADC (hq)-cum-DPDO Pebika Lego highlighted the critical roles and responsibilities of ZP members in local development.

37-year-old Ruth Tabing Boko, who holds a Master's degree in History and a BED, expressed her commitment to working wholeheartedly for the district's progress, supported by her newly elected team.

# Whatever is written in my destiny, no one can take that from me: Shubman Gill

**VADODARA, Jan 10:** Left out of next month's T20 World Cup, India's ODI and Test captain Shubman Gill on Saturday said he respects the selectors' decision and remains focused on giving his best whenever the opportunity arises.

The 26-year-old was not considered for next month's T20 World Cup despite leading India in the longer formats. He has played 36 T20Is for India, scoring 869 runs at an average of 28.03 with a strike rate of 138.59.

"My belief is that in my life, I am right where I have to be and whatever things are written in my destiny, no one can take those things from me," Gill told reporters ahead of the first ODI against New Zealand here on Sunday.

"Obviously as a player, you have a belief that if you play in the World Cup, you will win (it for) your team, (and) you will win (it for) your country."

"Having said that, I respect the selectors' decision and (I am) wishing the T20 team all the very best and I really hope that they win the World Cup for us."

Asked if his exclusion could have an adverse mental impact, Gill said it's important to keep it simple.

"Being a sports person, it's all about being in the present, the more (in) the present you are, even when you are on the field, more you are not thinking about what's going to happen, or what has happened in the previous moment, it



gives you more chances of succeeding," he said.

"I try to look at what I need to do now and what is important. The more we can be in the present moment, it makes our life more simpler, and if you make your life more simpler, it's a much peaceful and a happier space that you would want to be in."

The New Zealand series is only his second assignment since becoming India's full-time captain in ODIs. In November, Gill had missed the second Test against South Africa and the ensuing ODI series due to a neck injury sustained on the second day of the opening Test in Kolkata.

"(It is) never easy, especially whenever you get injured, watching your team play and you feel

like you're missing out on all those games, especially when you've just been named the captain," he said.

"There are so many things that you want to do and when you sit out there, it's definitely very frustrating."

Gill also dismissed the suggestion that senior players had chosen an "easier format" to continue representing India.

"The Indian cricket team hasn't won a World Cup since 2011, so if it was that (easy), we would be winning (the) World Cup every second year (edition)," he said.

"It's easy to say (that) but I don't think any format is easy. It requires a lot of resilience, a lot of persistence, and a lot of determination to be able to win big ICC tourna-

ments."

Gill said he has been particularly insistent in his discussions with the BCCI on having more preparation time ahead of Test series.

"One of the suggestions that I was very keen on is, if you would see in the last two Test series that we played, we didn't have that much time to prepare," he said.

"It's not easy playing in India, and playing another match in a different country on the fourth day, especially when you are travelling on long tours."

Gill said this position won't have changed even if India had beaten South Africa because he believes the Test team did not get enough time to prepare before the two home series this season.

"Even if we would have won the series against South Africa, it still wouldn't have made that much of a difference, because we know we need to prepare well to be able to win Test matches all over the world," he said.

"Preparation for me is really big, and I didn't think that we had that much time to prepare when we came back from Australia, or even after the Asia Cup when we played the West Indies series."

He added, "It's important to at least have some bit of preparation especially changing from white-ball format to red-ball. I think we'll take some action and we'll keep it in mind to be able to prepare well before the start of any red-ball series." (PTI)

# Sindhu loses to Wang in semifinals



**MALAYSIA OPEN**

faltered at the net.

Both players struggled for length after the restart with the scores locked at 13-13 and several points squandered at the backline.

From 15-14, Wang upheld the pressure with relentless attacking shots that cramped Sindhu, mixing them with well-judged lifts that floated just beyond reach.

She surged to 18-14, conceded one point in a fierce rally, then earned four game points and closed out the opener as Sindhu went wide.

The second game saw Sindhu slip to 1-3 after two unforced errors but she regrouped quickly, constructing rallies with authority to move ahead 6-3.

Wang steadied herself to narrow the gap, yet Sindhu dominated the mid-phase by pushing her opponent to the corners with sharp angles, opening up an 11-6 lead at the break.

Wang came out firing after the resumption, engaging in brisk rallies but Sindhu countered with near-perfect net shots to stay ahead at 13-9.

Once again, Wang fought back as Sindhu sprayed shots wide and into the net, drawing level at 13-13 before seizing the initiative.

A deft net exchange gave the Chinese player a 16-13 cushion.

Sindhu then missed the backline twice and a backhand net error handed Wang five match points.

The contest ended when Sindhu pushed another shot wide, sealing Wang's place in the final. (PTI)

**KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 10:** Ace Indian shuttler P V Sindhu's impressive run came to an end after a straight-game defeat to China's Wang Zhiyi in the women's singles semifinals of the season-opening Malaysia Open Super 1000 here on Saturday.

The two-time Olympic medallist could not sustain the pressure against the world number two, committing too many unforced errors in a 16-21, 15-21 loss, which brought down curtains on India's campaign in the tournament.

Playing her first tournament after recovering from a foot injury that kept her on the sidelines since October last year, Sindhu also let slip an 11-6 lead in the second game.

"I think 11-6, I took a break, maybe I should have taken 2-3 points there, but I think even though I was leading, there were a couple of small errors. In a match these things happen where you're leading, you can't expect that

you're going to win it easily," said the 30-year-old, who will next play at the India Open Super 750 tournament next week in Delhi.

"I think it was a good tournament for me and I think it's important for me to rest now and get going for the Indian Open," she said.

"I think it's important that I do my best and it's not going to be easy. I think first round I'll be playing against the Vietnam girl, so yeah, I hope I do well."

Sindhu took the fight to her higher-ranked opponent early, hitting hard and using her reach effectively.

She produced her trademark cross-court smashes to race to a 5-2 lead before Wang's subtle touch helped her draw level with a run of points.

A few misses from Wang allowed Sindhu to edge ahead 9-7 but the Chinese player clawed back once again to take a slender one-point lead at the interval as Sindhu

## Horen Engti pursues AFC 'B' coaching licence at KASA Stadium

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 10:** Before blowing the whistle from the sidelines, Horen Engti once guarded the goalposts. The seasoned 1990s goalkeeper and current Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) Football Secretary is now back in the "classroom" at the KASA Stadium, undergoing the final phase of the rigorous AFC 'B' Diploma coaching course.

From his days as a star goalkeeper for White Dove Society to leading Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC to two Assam State Premier League (ASPL) titles, Engti's journey has been closely tied to the growth of football in Karbi Anglong.

He is among 23 candidates from across the Northeast—and one of only six from Assam—seeking to upgrade from an AFC 'C' licence to the prestigious 'B' licence.

The KASA Stadium is currently abuzz with intense learning as Module 2 of the course, which began on January 7, marks the final hurdle for the aspiring coaches. The 20-day programme, divided into two modules, will conclude on January 17.

Engti described the schedule as "hectic", with candidates balancing detailed theoretical sessions and demanding on-field practical examinations. The curriculum includes advanced tactics, player psychology and modern football concepts such as counter-pressing and set-piece analysis.

"There are vast areas of subjects included, and we have to cover them within a very short span," Engti said, referring to the challenge of securing the high scores required for the licence.

The course is being led by Salim Pathan, an AFC 'A' licence holder with over a decade of experience in top-tier Indian football.

As the AIFC-appointed educator, Pathan is guiding candidates in developing distinct playing philosophies, advanced match analysis and high-performance team preparation.

For Engti, the course represents more than a qualification. His coaching résumé includes guiding the Assam senior women's team to the National Games finals in Shillong, coaching Assam teams at the Northeast Games (2024-25), and mentoring young players through the KASA Football Coaching Centre (KASAFCC).

The programme is organised by the All India Football Federation (AIFC) and hosted by the Assam Football Association (AFA) in collaboration with KASA. As the course concludes on January 17, the district keenly awaits whether one of its most committed football figures will return with an AFC 'B' licence.



## Gujarat Giants post 207 for 4 against UP Warriorz in WPL



**NAVI MUMBAI, Jan 10:** Captain Ashleigh Gardner struck a scintillating 65 before Georgia Wareham played a late cameo of 27 not out off just 10 balls as Gujarat Giants posted an impressive 207 for 4 in their Women's Premier League match against UP Warriorz here on Saturday.

Coming at the fall of opener Sophie Devine (38) in the sixth over, Gardner stitched 103 runs with Anushka Sharma (44 off 30 balls) for the third wicket to take her side past the 170-run mark. She struck six boundaries and three sixes in her 41-ball effort.

The Australian was out in the 18th over off the bowling of Sophie Ecclestone, but Wareham's stunning blitzkrieg, which had one four and three sixes, took Gujarat Giants past the 200-run mark.

Bharti Fulmali also remained not out on 14 off seven balls with the help of two sixes.

Ecclestone was the pick of the UP Warriorz bowling with figures of 2 for 32, while Shikha Pandey and Deandra Dottin got one wicket each.

Star Indian all-rounder Deepti Sharma went wicket-less and conceded 32 runs in her three overs.

**Brief Scores:** Gujarat Giants: 207 for 4 in 20 overs (Ashleigh Gardner 65, Georgia Wareham 27 not out; Sophie Ecclestone 2/32). (PTI)

## Diu to remain permanent venue for KIBG till next host is announced

**DIU, Jan 10:** Diu will continue to serve as the permanent home of the Khelo India Beach Games in the January window until a new venue is announced, with the Sports Ministry confirming that the coastal town will also host the 2027 edition.

Akshay Kotalwar, nodal officer of the Khelo India Beach Games 2026, said the decision was taken after the successful conduct of the first two editions and the improved planning this year.

"Having organised the first multi-sport beach games on our own in 2024 with success, the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs gave us the responsibility to organise the first-ever Khelo India Beach Games last year," Kotalwar told PTI.

"It happened against the backdrop of the Pahalgam terrorist attack and Operation Sindoor and we had very little time for preparation. There were some logistical challenges, but we still managed to pull it off successfully," he added.

With KIBG now firmly placed on the calendar, Diu is set to become its long-term base.

"We had clearance from SAI and the ministry, so there was advance coordination. The dates were announced one month ago. There have been no major issues so far and the technical conduct has been perfect."

The January slot has also worked perfectly for both sports and tourism also boosting the local employment, he further said.

"The timing is just perfect as it coincides with the New Year holiday period and there has been an influx of tourists."

"By making it an annual fixture, people will now plan in advance



and it will give a big boost to local employment and the tourism sector here," he added.

On the logic behind the winter window, Kotalwar said, "The first edition was not at the right time... It was our first Games. The right time is January as the weather is just perfect, it is a regional tourist hub, there is the New Year crowd and the January 14 Uttarayan-Makar Sankranti festival. Tourists and players will enjoy the weather."

He further confirmed that Diu will host the third edition as well.

"The Honourable Union Sports Minister Dr Mansukh Mandavaya has announced that till the next venue is announced, Diu will remain the permanent venue. So we will have the third edition in 2027 at the same location and at the same time."

The Games, he said, have also helped change Diu's image.

"Till now, Diu was only known

for Ghoghla and Nagoa beaches and used to be known for its party culture. But with KIBG, tourism has got a big fillip. We have received a very good response and tourists are also enjoying themselves in the evenings. The kite festival is also being held."

The organisers have also blended sport with culture.

"We are also inviting famous regional artists. Geeta Rabari performed at the opening ceremony."

"Because of the winter and New Year period, there are a lot of tourists here, so people are enjoying their holidays as well as coming to watch the Khelo India Beach Games 2026. The response has been really overwhelming."

"Till the announcement of the next venue, Diu will continue to host the Khelo India Beach Games. So we will host the next KIBG in 2027 as well, at the same venue and at the same place." (PTI)

## England midfielder Georgia Stanway says she will leave Bayern Munich at end of season



**MUNICH, Jan 10:** England midfielder Georgia Stanway has announced she will leave German club Bayern Munich at the end of the season.

The 27-year-old Stanway is in her fourth season with Bayern and has scored 26 goals in 106 games overall so far, winning three straight Frauen-Bundesliga titles.

"The decision to leave Munich and my team was incredibly difficult," Stanway posted on Instagram on Saturday. "I want to say goodbye to the club and the fans at the end of the season with as many titles as possible."

Stanway has been a midfield standout for several years, helping the England women's team win back-to-back European Championships, in 2022 and 2025, and scoring two goals in both editions of the tournament.

A hat trick against China in a friendly last November took her international tally to 29 goals in 83 matches.

Stanway pledged to "give everything" for Bayern until she leaves but did not hint at her future destination.

She won the Women's Super League and three FA Cups with former club Manchester City before joining Bayern in 2022. (AP)

# SA20 turns 4: Social healer, job creator and a new lucrative option for players around globe

**CAPE TOWN, Jan 10:** A drive from Cape Town International airport to Newlands through Langa is dotted with modest row dwellings on either side of the road, a regular sight but with a disturbing history.

They stood as an untold barrier between people with different skin colour, the most visible signposts of a nation that once lived in two halves.

The discomfiting undertones might still be there, but they have a new unifying force — SA20.

It's just a four-year child in a world that has 18-year IPL and 10-year BBL.

But in its nascent existence itself the T20 league has underlined its potential to bring people from all sects together and create new jobs, breeding a whole new cricketing ecosystem.

Across Newlands, Kingsmead and Centurion, several families, friends and neighbour circles now flock to the stadium to enjoy a cricketing carnival.

It's the community building that happens now through the common thread of cricket.

Former South Africa skipper Graeme Smith, the SA20 Commissioner, acknowledged the increasing footprint of

the league across the society's divisions in multiple ways.

"I think a lot of our marketing and strategy is around bringing people into the stadiums and have a great time, falling in love with cricket and go from there. We've seen a lot of people come to cricket for the first time in our stadiums, and that's fantastic," said Smith.

Smith then delved deeper into the impact of SA20 on the community as a whole.

"We have our social partners like Laurens where we're investing in communities. And, you know, I think the most important thing is that we're also delivering money back to Cricket South Africa (CSA), which flows into growing the game. We, as SA20, have invested in our own development programmes as well. So, we have SA20 schools, which benefits girls and boys in over 700 schools," said Smith.

The 44-year-old also highlighted SA20's role as a job creator, and giving back to the nation's economy.

"From an economic perspective, we brought, last year, over ZAR 4 billion to the economy, creating 8,500 jobs. So, those are some really great metrics in a



very young product. We're delivering almost a world event every year in this country.

"So, you know, from that perspective, I think being just around four years old now, I think we've done some amazing work around the social aspect of South Africa," said Smith.

The rise of young pacer Nqobani

Mokoena, who was raised in village built during Apartheid days, validates Smith's words.

Raised by a single mother, the 19-year-old Mokoena is now being viewed as the next big thing in South African cricket, and contract with Paarl Royals has given his family the much-needed financial security. "He's been throwing the ball in

some of the most high-pressure moments as a young man. I think credit to our franchises to get behind the youth programme and the rookies have started to come now in the U23.

"I think, IPL franchises are good at attracting youth and backing them. We see it here as well. Over 10 years, you know, the player salaries will probably be close to a billion rand, if you take it over the 10-year period. And that's a huge, huge uplift in the South African cricket ecosystem for players," he said.

Former SA all-rounder Lance Klusener, who is now coaching Durban Super Giants, too supported Smith's view.

"It's been amazing in just four years. The players that's produced, players that are now feeding into the national team in that first three-year cycle. So it's extremely exciting."

"It gives our provincial players the opportunity to play under the bright lights and the big crowds. IPL is a sterling example of that, and I'm sure SA20 will be right behind that," said Klusener.

But even the established South African stars now feel more connected to their home fans through their respective SA20

teams.

Pretoria Capitals spinner Keshav Maharaj explained it.

"Yeah, look, this is my home. Kingsmead is always close to me because I have played all my life over here. It now feels even better to have a franchise that you and the fans connect easily, and South African cricket will be all the more strong for it," said Maharaj.

But the SA20 is gradually growing on international stars too as a viable career and financial option apart from the respective country's central contract or an IPL deal.

West Indian batters Shai Hope and Roston Chase and New Zealand star Kane Williamson are currently involved in the SA20 as players.

"If they're not playing international cricket, they want to be here. I think that's the message we're getting back from them (players). That they really love coming here, it's highly competitive cricket. Obviously, it's a great place to be over the summer, and there's crowds, and it's fun," Smith weighed in.

"Welcome to Incredible!" is the SA20 tagline, and, by all metrics, it has clearly gone beyond a catchy phrase. (PTI)