

**6** WORLD

● Russia puts death toll from Ukrainian strike on occupied village at 27

● At least 7 reported killed during widening protests in Iran sparked by ailing economy

**8** NATION

● After a year of multiple setbacks, Cong hopes for revival in 2026

● Rajnath flags 'alarming trend' of educated people indulging in anti-national activities

Ministry of Rural Development Government of India

**All-weather roads to every village**

Under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in last 11.5 years 82,000+ roads of total length 4.06 lakh Kms have been constructed

Nation Building through Rural Development

CBC 35101/13/0049/2526

Constitution of probe panel to look into crisis in Tezpur University welcomed

## Stakeholders not to withdraw stir completely

**TEZPUR, Jan 2:** Students, teachers and other stakeholders of Tezpur University have welcomed the constitution of an enquiry committee by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to look into all matters pertaining to the ongoing situation in the varsity, including allegations against the vice-chancellor.

They, however, added that the movement in the varsity will not be withdrawn completely until the findings of the committee "conclusively uphold justice and until the outcomes turn in favour of the stakeholders".

The Central university, located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in Sonitpur district of Assam, has been witnessing sustained protests since mid-September against irregularities allegedly committed by Vice-Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh. The protesters pursued a 24-hour hunger strike on Monday on the completion of 100 days of their agitation.

The MoE, in an order issued on Wednesday, asked Singh to proceed on leave and ordered an enquiry panel to probe into allegations against him.

The stakeholders - Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA), Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association



(TUNTEA), and the students - in a statement, have expressed their gratitude to the MoE for taking a decisive step towards addressing the prolonged crisis.

They expressed "strong hope and cautious optimism that the enquiry process will be conducted in a fair, transparent, and comprehensive manner, free from any political interference, external pressure, or institutional bias".

They maintained that the inquiry must objectively examine all allegations and circumstances surrounding the crisis and must ultimately lead to justice and removal of the

VC.

The stakeholders assured full cooperation to the enquiry committee, and also conveyed their willingness to welcome the newly appointed Pro VC to the campus.

Amrendra Kumar Das from IIT Guwahati's Department of Design has been named as Pro VC of Tezpur University by the MoE.

"However, the stakeholders have categorically stated that while this resolution marks an important milestone, the movement will not be withdrawn in its entirety until the findings of the enquiry committee conclusively uphold justice and until the outcomes turn in favour of the stakeholders," the statement said.

The three-member enquiry committee has been asked to submit its report within a maximum of three months. The situation in Tezpur University had been tense since mid-September, with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg, even as the state was mourning his death.

Apart from fiscal irregularities, the varsity community is also protesting the alleged deforestation and ecological destruction at the picturesque campus (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM takes swipe at Cong's application fee practice

₹ 3-4 cr being charged for poll candidature in 'Miya-Muslim' majority seats: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday alleged that the Congress is charging ₹ 3-4 crore from party members seeking candidature from constituencies with 'Miya-Muslim' (Bengali-speaking Muslims) majority for the Assembly election.

He took a swipe at Congress's practice of taking an application fee from aspiring candidates, claiming that the opposition party's "system" is based on money.

"For the seats with 'Miya-Muslim' majority, the Congress will take ₹ 3 to 4 crore from its candidates. It took a similar amount of money in the last elections also," Sarma alleged, while talking to reporters on the sidelines of an official programme in Sonitpur district. "Miya" is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, and the non-Bengali-speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. Around 25 seats in the 126-member Assam Assembly can be considered 'Miya-Muslim' majority ones after the delimitation process, which was carried out in 2023. "Some of the candidates have paid an advance also," the chief minister claimed. No response came on the accusation from the opposition party till the filing of this report.

Sarma also criticised the Congress for taking an application fee of ₹ 50,000 from every applicant.

"The party did not even refund the application fees to its members in seats where the opposition allies contested last time. Their system is based on money. But in the BJP, we take no money or fees from our members for applying for a party ticket," Sarma said.

The Congress on Friday started its application process for the Assembly elections, likely to be held in March-April this year.

Applicants will have to deposit an amount of ₹ 50,000 through a bank draft. The filled-up forms will be received at the state party headquarters from January five to 20, Congress sources said. (PTI)

## Assam govt launches scheme to provide financial aid to celibate monks of 'satras'



**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday launched a scheme to provide a monthly financial assistance of ₹ 1,500 to celibate monks residing in 'satras', the Vaishnavite monasteries, in the state.

At least 620 'Udasin Bhakats' (celibate monks) will benefit from the welfare initiative, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a statement.

"Today, HCM Dr. @himantabiswa launched a new welfare initiative for 'Udasin Bhakats' of recognised 'satras', honouring their enduring contribution to preserving Assam's spiritual and cultural legacy," the CMO said in a post on

X.

With 620 'Bhakats' to receive the monthly assistance, "the initiative reaffirms the Assam government's commitment to dignity, care and respect for those who uphold Assam's civilisational heritage," the CMO added.

Sarma, also in a post on the social media site, said the scheme honours the 'Bhakats' who dedicate their lives to the 'satras'.

"Assam's 'satras' breathe life into our culture and have held our ethos and values for years. It was only befitting that we protected the 'satras', upgraded them and looked after their 'Udasin Bhakats' who dedicate their lives to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Strict enforcement of traffic rules brought down fatalities on New Year's Eve: CM

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** Strict enforcement of traffic rules on New Year's Eve has brought down fatality to one this time from 12 four years ago, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

He said the target now will be to ensure zero deaths next year.

"No bigger satisfaction than saving precious lives! 4 years back, we started a mission to strictly enforce road safety measures on New Year's eve to reduce accidents & save lives," Sarma said in a post on X.

"The result? Just 1 unfortunate fatality on 31 Dec 2025," he said.

The state police have been conducting intensified checks during the year-end celebrations since 2022 to reduce road accident cases.

Sarma stated that the number of road accident fatalities in 2022 was 12, which decreased to six in 2023 and five in 2024.

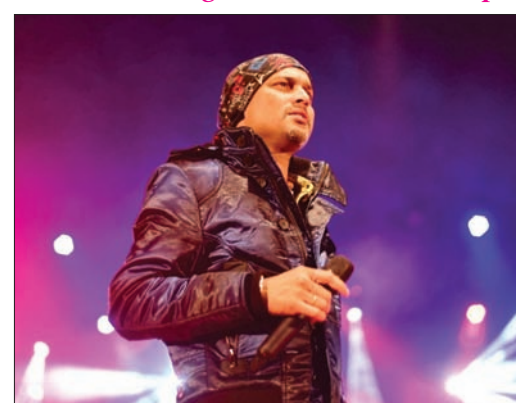
Meanwhile, Guwahati's Joint Commissioner of Police Ankur Jain said no accidents were reported in the city on December 31.

Addressing a press conference, he said (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Garima announces creation of trust in Zubeen's name

Will safeguard Zubeen creative legacy, ideals, says singer's family

● Kharghuli's residential property to be donated to trust



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** Garima Garg, wife of late Zubeen Garg on Friday announced the formation of a trust in the name of the cultural icon of Assam to preserve and carry forward his artistic, social and cultural legacy, even as they reiterated their hope for the early delivery of justice in the case related to his murder.

Addressing reporters here, Garima Garg along with the singer's family members and associates said she prays that the coming year brings peace and positivity for everyone and expressed confidence that justice would ultimately prevail.

She said Zubeen Garg's ideals, creativity and lifelong dedication to the people of Assam would continue to live on through collective efforts.

"Zubeen dedicated his life to the people of Assam. It is now our responsibility to uphold his values and take

his work forward by following the path he showed," Garima said.

She informed that after nearly three-and-a-half months of consultations, the family, along with close friends and well-wishers, has decided to formally establish the Zubeen Garg Trust.

As part of the initiative, the family's property at Kharghuli will be handed over to the trust to serve as a centre for social, cultural and creative activities that were close to the late icon's heart.

Garima Garg also thanked chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the state government for the steps taken so far in the investigation, while urging the authorities to expedite the probe to ensure timely justice.

According to the family, the trust will operate through three dedicated wings.

The Kalaguru Foundation will focus on socio-cultural initiatives, while Abhinaya Performing Arts — an institution earlier founded by Zubeen Garg in his sister's name — will work to promote theatre and performance arts, particularly among young people.

A separate research wing will document and study Zubeen Garg's life, creative works and his contributions to Assam's cultural and social landscape, including the preservation of his intellectual property.

In a press note, the family said Zubeen Garg remains deeply embedded in the hearts of the people of Assam and stressed the need to preserve not just his memory, but also his discipline, ideals and dreams for future generations.

The trust will work in the areas of society, culture, nature conservation and youth welfare. The initiative has received (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Akhil deliberately ignoring Assam's progress: BJP

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** The Assam Pradesh BJP on Friday alleged that Rajjor Dal president and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi is deliberately ignoring the developmental progress made by Assam under the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, despite official data recognising the State as one of the fastest growing in the country.

In a press release issued from the party's state headquarters at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, BJP spokesperson Jayanta Kumar Goswami said that while the Reserve Bank of India has acknowledged Assam's rapid growth during the period 2020-25, claims by the Congress and Akhil Gogoi that there has been no development in the State amount to a deliberate act of feigned blindness.

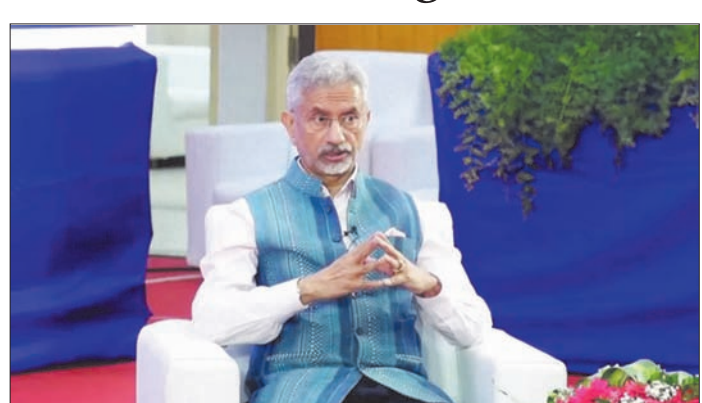
Responding to what he termed the "so-called economic post-mortem report" released by Akhil Gogoi, Goswami said the Rajjor Dal leader had attempted to negate Assam's development and, in the process, exposed his own intellectual bankruptcy. He asserted that both the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'How we exercise that right is up to us' India has every right to defend its people when it comes to 'bad neighbours': Jaishankar

**CHENNAI, Jan 2:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said India has every right to defend its people when it comes to "bad neighbours" and asserted that a neighbouring country cannot ask New Delhi to share water if it continues to spread terrorism in the country.

At the same time, he said with "good neighbours", India invests, helps and shares, whether it was vaccines during COVID-19 pandemic, fuel and food support during the Ukraine conflict, or the USD 4 billion assistance to Sri Lanka during its financial crisis.

Without naming Pakistan, Jaishankar said India has every right to defend its people when it comes to "bad neighbours" and nobody can tell the country how to exercise that



right.

"...people make it sound as diplomacy is rocket science. It is common sense...now, what do you do in common sense with a neighbour? If you have a neighbour who is good

hello...you will try to build friendships, bonding, etc. And that's what we do as a country," he said in a fireside chat at IIT Madras here.

"So, when you look around our neighbourhood, wherever actually there is a sense of good neighbourliness, I think you have seen India invests, India helps, India shares. Now, when you have bad neighbours, and if a country decides that they will deliberately, persistently, unrepentantly continue with terrorism, we have a right to defend our people against terrorism. We will exercise that right. How we exercise that right is up to us.

"You know, nobody can tell us what we should do or not. We will do whatever we have to do to defend ourselves. That's a common sense (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Police fire in air to control crowd after villagers detain suspected cattle thieves in Dibrugarh

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 2:** A night patrol organised by villagers to prevent cattle theft led to a tense confrontation with police in the Majjan Natun Gaon area of Dibrugarh, where police fired shots in the air to disperse an agitated crowd in the early hours of Friday.

According to villagers, incidents of cattle theft had been reported in the area for more than a week, prompting local youths to keep vigil at night during the New Year period.

At around 4 am, villagers noticed a suspicious vehicle moving through the locality.

When they attempted to stop it, the occupants allegedly tried to flee. After the road was blocked, the vehicle stopped, but those inside reportedly refused to come out, following which the villagers informed the police.

Tensions escalated after the police arrived and allegedly allowed



the vehicle to leave without questioning the occupants.

This angered the villagers, who accused the police of shielding cattle thieves and began protesting at the spot.

As the situation intensified and some villagers advanced towards the police, officers fired blank rounds in the air to disperse the crowd.

Additional police personnel were later deployed to bring the situation under (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Nifty hits record intra-day high

## Sensex jumps 573 points on gains in metal, banking stocks

**MUMBAI, Jan 2:** Equity benchmark index Nifty hit its lifetime peak before closing 182 points higher on Friday, and the BSE Sensex jumped 573 points, powered by strong buying in power, banking and metal stocks.

Unabated capital infusion by domestic institutional investors amid a sharp rally in Asian peers also supported the domestic stock market, traders said.

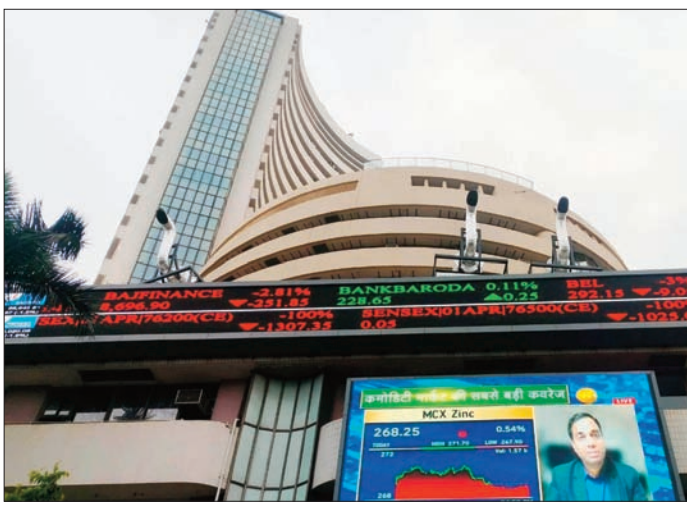
Charting out a firm trend, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 573.41 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at 85,762.01. During the day, it jumped 623.67 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 85,812.27.

A total of 2,772 stocks advanced, while 1,449 declined and 150 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70 per cent, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73 per cent, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340.

"After the New Year holiday, the global markets initiated 2026 on a positive note, while strong domestic automobile sales helped Indian equities to touch a fresh all-time high. Investor sentiment remains broadly constructive as attention turns to Q3 earnings, which are expected to guide near-term market direction," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 286.25 points or 1.09 per cent.



From the 30-Sensex firms, NTPC, Trent, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Bharat Electronics were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Titan Company, Axis Bank and Bharti Airtel were the laggards.

"Select index heavyweights provided additional support, enabling the market to sustain its upward momentum despite the absence of strong global triggers, as several overseas markets remained closed due to holidays. Meanwhile, continued weakness in tobacco-related stocks weighed on the FMCG space following recent tax-related developments," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Shares of cigarette and tobacco product makers ITC, Godfrey Phillips and VST Industries

(1.46 per cent) and auto (1.04 per cent).

On the other hand, BSE FMCG emerged as the only loser.

"Broad-based buying, led by metals, banks and auto stocks, kept market breadth positive, while steady domestic institutional inflows helped offset persistent foreign selling. Optimism around an improving earnings outlook, healthy auto sales, positive bank business updates and expectations of reforms and a potential US trade deal further buoyed sentiment," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,268.60 crore on Thursday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 1,525.89 crore, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended significantly higher. China's Shanghai index and Japan's Nikkei remain closed for a holiday.

Markets in Europe were trading higher in mid-session deals.

US markets were closed on Thursday for the New Year's Day holiday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.36 per cent to USD 60.63 per barrel.

On Thursday, the Sensex dipped 32 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 85,188.60. The Nifty went up marginally by 16.95 points or 0.06 per cent to end at 26,146.55. (PTI)

## Govt announces ₹ 7,295-cr export package to improve exporters' access to credit

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** The government on Friday announced a ₹ 7,295-crore export support package, comprising a ₹ 5,181-crore interest subvention scheme along with a ₹ 2,114-crore collateral support, to improve exporters' access to credit.

Both measures will be rolled out over a period of six years (2025-31).

Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry Ajay Bhadoo said that these interventions will address the trade finance issues of exporters.

Under the interest subvention scheme, exporters will get a subsidy on pre- and post-shipment export credit.

This is the second component of the ₹ 25,060-crore export promotion mission (EPM) approved in November 2025.

The first component - market access support with an outlay of ₹ 4,531 crore was rolled out on December 31, 2025.

The subvention scheme will help exporters from identified sectors to avail of rupee export credit at competitive rates at a time when global trade is facing headwinds.

Under the scheme, the government will provide subsidy benefits in the range of 2.75 per cent to eligible MSME exporters.

According to the commerce ministry, the subvention rates will be reviewed bi-annually in March and September based on domestic and global benchmarks.

The annual benefit is capped at ₹ 50 lakh per firm.

The detailed guidelines of the scheme will be released

by the RBI, which is the implementing agency, along with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).

A pilot roll-out will be undertaken, with scope for refinement based on implementation feedback, it said.

The government has also announced a ₹ 2,114-crore collateral support for export credit.

Under this, credit guarantee support will be given to MSMEs for export-linked working capital loans.

Up to ₹ 10 crore collateral guarantee per firm will be provided under this support measure.

The guarantee coverage up to 85 per cent will be available for micro and small exporters, and up to 65 per cent for medium exporters.

According to the DGFT, interest subvention and collateral support apply only to exports from a selected positive list of products.

Defence and SCOMET (Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies) products are covered in these measures.

However, restricted items, waste and scrap, and PLI (production-linked incentive) covered items will be out of the purview of these measures.

This intervention complements existing credit-guarantee mechanisms and is designed to increase bank lending for export-oriented MSMEs, the ministry said.

Guidelines will be notified by CGTMS (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises), followed by a pilot phase and subsequent integration into a comprehensive revision of export-promotion frameworks, it added. (PTI)

## Foxconn, Dixon, Samsung among 22 projs cleared for electronics components mfg scheme

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** Foxconn, Dixon, Tata Electronics and Samsung are among the 22 new proposals approved by the government under the ambitious Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), with a projected investment of ₹ 41,863 crore and production worth ₹ 2,58,152 crore.

The approvals - third set of clearances under the scheme - are expected to generate 33,791 new jobs, reduce India's import dependence for critical electronic components, and accelerate the build-out of high-value manufacturing capabilities in the country.

Taken together with previous ECMS tranches and ongoing semiconductor initiatives, the latest clearances underline India's firm resolve to emerge as a major hub in global electronics supply chains.

According to sources, a large chunk of investments and employment will come from Apple's new vendors, who are now joining its global supply chain. Some of them will be exporting to Apple's international locations.

Notably, Motherson Electronic Components, Tata Electronics, ATL Battery Technology India, Foxconn (Yuzhan Tech India's), and Hindalco Industries are five vendors from Apple's ecosystem.

The approved projects are spread across eight states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and reflect the government's focus on geographically balanced industrial growth and expansion of electronics manufacturing across the country, according to the IT Ministry.

At a briefing announcing the new set of investment proposals approved by the government, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav underlined the Centre's focus on big reforms, enabling policies, and efficient and speedy execution of projects and initiatives.

"The results are clearly visible sector after sector," Vaishnav said.

The minister asked the industry to prioritise setting up design teams and nudged players to go for Six Sigma to be globally competitive.

In the latest batch, the maximum investments are set to come in the category of enclosures (mobile enclosures are structural housings that protect and support internal electronic components, widely used in smartphones and handheld devices), where three projects will attract ₹ 27,166 crore worth of investments.

Nine projects fall in the PCB space (commonly used in consumer electronics, industrial controls, and automotive systems, among others) and would involve an investment of ₹ 7,377 crore, while ₹ 2,922 crore investment would go into a lithium-ion cell project.

Li-ion cells are rechargeable energy storage components used to power portable consumer electronics, including smartphones, notebooks, tablets, power banks, and audio accessories.

Of 11 products, 5 are bare components, such as PCBs, capacitors, connectors, enclosures, and Li-ion cells; 3 pertain to sub-assemblies, such as camera modules, display modules, and optical transceivers; and 3 are supply chain items like aluminium extrusion, anode material, and laminate.

As per a background note circu-

## Rupee slips past 90/USD level, settles 22 paise down at 90.20 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Jan 2:** The Indian rupee slipped below the 90-mark and settled the day lower by 22 paise at 90.20 against the US dollar on Friday, amid disappointing macroeconomic data and strengthening of the American currency in overseas markets.

Forex traders said persistent foreign fund outflows and strong dollar demand from importers further dented investor sentiment.

However, weak crude oil prices and a surge in the domestic equities cushioned the downside, they said, adding that any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 89.95 against the dollar, and touched an intra-day low of 90.25 and a high of 89.92 during the session.

At the end of Friday's trading session, the rupee was quoted at 90.20 against the greenback, down 22 paise from its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 10 paise to close at 89.98 against the US dollar.

"Indian rupee fell on Friday, breaching the 90-mark once again amid disappointing macroeconomic data and a positive US dollar index... FII outflows too weighed on the rupee.

However, weak crude oil prices and a surge in the domestic equities cushioned the downside. RBI reportedly sold dollars via state-owned banks, which also prevented the pace of fall," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Commodities, Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's manufacturing sector activity witnessed the weakest improvement in two years in December, driven by softer expansions in new orders.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) - an indicator of sector performance - fell from 56.6 in November to 55 in December. In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent higher at 98.38. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.58 per cent lower at USD 60.52 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex jumped 573.41 points to settle at 85,762.01, while the Nifty surged 182 points to 26,328.55. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Stakeholders not to

carried out under Singh's administration. The VC abstained from the campus after the university witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words between him and students on September 22, leading to a situation where Singh had to nearly flee from the spot. At least 11 faculty members and senior officials have either resigned from their posts or the university itself since the protests began in September. (PTI)

## Assam govt launches

the 'satras.' Sarma said. The chief minister maintained that it was a matter of satisfaction to be "able to reverse historical injustices and serve the ones who dedicate their lives to upholding our values and culture".

"With Gurujona's blessings, it is the honour of a lifetime to be able to support the 'Udasin Bhakats' with a monthly assistance of Rs 1,500 to help them in their path of Bhakti," he said.

"These blessings inspire me to drive forward with our agenda to work for Assam's Jati, Mati, Bheti." Sarma added, referring to community, land and roots. (PTI)

## Strict enforcement of

over Rs 50.21 crore was collected in fines in traffic rule violation cases in the city last year.

A total of 1,026 accidents were reported in the city in 2025, a decrease from 1,218 cases in 2024, he said. Sharing data, Jain said the total number of cases registered in the city last year was 5,786, a dip from 7,412 in 2024 and 9,393 in 2023. The number of cases pending at the end of the year was 2,882, which was a sharp reduction since the beginning of 2021, when 35,396 cases were pending, he said.

The rate of filing of charge sheet improved to 68.34 per cent in 2025, from 42.56 per cent in 2024 and 19.13 per cent in 2023, he added. "The conviction rate also increased from 4 per cent in 2021 to 28.5 per cent in 2025," he said. In cases registered under the BNS, the conviction rate was 86.08 per cent, he said.

Jain said that last year, 1,854 cases were registered under crime against property, lower than 2,804 in 2024.

The number of cases of vehicle theft was 553 in 2025 against 1,118 in 2024, he said.

The officer said 203 cases of mobile theft were reported, with an equal number of arrests made, while 1,159 stolen mobile phones were recovered.

Jain said 406 cases related to drugs were registered and 555 persons arrested in 2025. The market value of the seized contraband items was Rs 28.86 crore. (PTI)

## Police fire in air

control. Speaking to media persons at the site, Gurav, Superintendent of Police, confirmed the sequence of events. He said the incident occurred around 4 am when locals stopped a vehicle suspecting cattle thieves inside, and police resorted to firing in the air to control the crowd while rescuing three individuals from the spot.

The SSP said the three individuals were taken to Dibrugarh Police Station for questioning.

"So far, we have found no evidence to suggest that they were cattle thieves. Further interrogation is continuing. Lawful action will also be taken against those who attempted to take the law into their own hands," he said. He added that the Additional Superintendent of Police has been directed to monitor and investigate the entire incident.

Meanwhile, a local resident alleged that cattle thieves frequently arrive in different vehicles and steal cattle directly from cowsheds, claiming that due to perceived police inaction, villagers were compelled to organise night patrols themselves.

He further alleged that instead of addressing their concerns, the police resorted to firing to control the crowd.

## Akhil deliberately ignoring

Central and State governments have brought about transformative changes in Assam's development over the past few years.

Highlighting improvements in tourism and conservation, the BJP spokesperson said that before 2016, Kaziranga National Park witnessed frequent incidents of rhino poaching, which adversely affected tourist inflow.

After the BJP came to power in 2016, rhino killings were curbed, and in 2025 not a single rhino was killed. He added that during October, November and December 2025 alone, up to December 27, Kaziranga recorded visits by 1,39,458 domestic tourists and 6,699 foreign tourists, reflecting a positive development environment in the State. Goswami further alleged that instead of acknowledging such developments, Akhil Gogoi selectively quoted portions of the RBI's Handbook of Statistics on Indian States, 2024-25, to criticise the government.

Out of the 446-page report, Gogoi had reportedly picked data from only about 40 pages to mislead the people at the very beginning of the new year.

Referring to Table 7 of the RBI report, which deals with economic activities, the BJP spokesperson said Assam's Net State Value Added stood at 2,83,152 in 2019-20 and had nearly doubled to 5,00,314 in 2024-25, indicating rapid economic growth. Citing Table 10, he added that per capita Net State Domestic Product, which was 50,642 in 2015-16 during the Congress regime, increased to 81,127 in 2024-25, underscoring improved economic conditions under the present government.

Goswami also recalled that Assam's maternal mortality rate stood at 229 per lakh in 2015 and challenged Akhil Gogoi to present a fact-based comparative analysis of the State's economy during the Congress regime and the present period, if he had the courage to do so.

## Trust to be formed

support from Zubeen Garg's friends from his student days, members of Assam's cultural, administrative and media circles, and the Zubeen Fan Club, which the artist fondly referred to as his "army".

Meanwhile, the family also said the trust will also focus on public health and welfare, noting that health camps have already been organised in remote areas in Zubeen Garg's name.

## India has every

proposition," he said. The Union Minister said many years ago, we (India and Pakistan) agreed to a water sharing arrangement. "...but if you had decades of terrorism, there is no good neighbourliness. If there is no good neighbourliness, you don't get the benefits of that good neighbourliness. You cannot say Please share water with me, but I will continue terrorism with you. That is not reconcilable."

The Union minister said it is important to communicate with other countries to avoid a situation where India's intentions are misread. "How to prevent people from misreading you is to communicate. If you communicate well, clearly and honestly, other countries and other people respect it and accept it.

A lot of people across the world are proud of their culture, tradition and heritage. I see no reason why we should not be," he said. He pointed out that there are "really very few" ancient civilisations that have survived to become major modern nation states, and India is one of them.

"We have a sense of our past which very few countries have... It was our decision to opt for a democratic political model, which made the very idea of democracy as a universal political concept.

"Had we not gone that way, the democratic model, as we know it, would have been regional and narrow... Partnership with the West is also important, and that is how we shape the world," he added.

Jaishankar noted that he was in Bangladesh just two days ago to represent India at the funeral of former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

"But more broadly, our approach to the neighbourhood is guided by common sense. With good neighbours, India invests, helps and shares - whether it was vaccines during COVID, fuel and food support during the Ukraine conflict, or the USD 4 billion assistance to Sri Lanka during its financial crisis," he said.

The Union Minister said countries have advanced by growing at home and then engaging abroad, leveraging the international environment in a way that contributes to the growth and also gains from it.

"When we say 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', the term is we have never considered the world as an inimical or hostile place from which we have to defensively protect ourselves. We have limitations on our resources. With limited resources, how do you have maximum impact? That is actually the problem that has to be solved," he underlined.

"What we try to do in Indian foreign policy and diplomacy today is solve that problem. We try to do that partly using our competitiveness and strengths and leveraging other institutions and possibilities," he added.

Responding to a question about a recent incident where a woman from Arunachal Pradesh was detained by Chinese Immigration Officials at Shanghai Airport.

"Arunachal Pradesh is and always will be a part of India. These kinds of tactics are not going to change anything on the ground... India will protect its people and its security, without any pressure," Jaishankar said.

Jaishankar also launched 'IITM Global Research Foundation', a landmark international initiative of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras aimed at positioning the institute as a globally-networked hub for education, research, innovation and entrepreneurship. (PTI)

**ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION**

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/89 of 2025 (Item No. 1, 2 & 3), Dated: 31-12-2025. E-Tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN:1: Brief Description of Item:** Construction of new double storey 08 units Type-II qtrs. in replacement of dilapidated Assam Type Qtrs (Nagaon = 4 units & Barlangfer = 4 units) Total = 8 units. Tender Value: ₹3,06,56,995.90/-; Earnest Money: ₹3,03,300/-; **SN:2: Brief Description of Item:** Construction of new double storey 08 units Type-II qtrs. in replacement of dilapidated Assam Type Qtrs (Habirgaon = 6 units & Nagaon = 2 units) Total = 08 units. Tender Value: ₹3,06,56,995.90/-; Earnest Money: ₹3,03,300/-; **SN:3: Brief Description of Item:** Construction of 16 units Type-II DS quarters under ADEN/Jagiroad. Tender Value: ₹5,00,03,368.63/-; Earnest Money: ₹4,00,000/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 27-01-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 28-01-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 27-01-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W)/Lumding  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Sewage Treatment Plant & Sump

Residents blame neglect under former UPPL-led BTC regime

## Haraputa bridge collapse sparks outrage

HT Correspondent

**GOSSAIGAON, Jan 2:** The collapse of a dilapidated wooden bridge over the Haraputa river at Abed Ali Ghat under the 3 No Srirampur BTC constituency in Kokrajhar district has once again highlighted what residents describe as years of administrative neglect during the previous UPPL-led BTC government. Four passengers were injured after an e-rickshaw plunged into the river when the ageing bridge gave way while connecting 2 No Bhomrabil and Haraputa villages.

Soon after the incident, leaders of the BPF-led Council, including Srirampur constituency TLCB president and advocate Mokhesur Rahman, Bhomrabil VCDCC president Anwar Hussain Khan and several party workers, visited the spot and interacted with the affected residents.

Local people strongly criticised the former UPPL-led BTC administration, alleging "criminal indifference" to repeated warnings about the dangerous condition of at least five wooden bridges over the Haraputa river in the Srirampur area, a neglected region along the Assam-Bengal border. They claimed that despite several accidents and repeated public representations, no steps were taken for permanent construction or even



basic repairs.

Residents also recalled that during the 2020 by-election to the Gossaigaon Assembly constituency, several top leaders, including Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, former Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro and former MCLA Sajal Kumar Singh had publicly promised to replace the dilapidated wooden bridges with permanent structures. According to locals, those assurances remained confined to election platforms, while the UPPL-led BTC government failed to act.

Addressing the issue, TLCB president Mokhesur Rahman said the bridge was vital for daily movement of villagers across the constituency. He stated that despite repeated appeals, the deteriorating condition of the bridge was ig-

nored, forcing residents to risk their lives daily. He added that patients, students and daily commuters were compelled to travel nearly five kilometres extra due to the unsafe crossing.

Rahman said the latest incident, in which an e-rickshaw was completely damaged and four passengers seriously injured was a direct result of prolonged official apathy. With traffic through the bridge now completely disrupted, he assured that immediate steps would be taken for temporary restoration and that initiatives would be launched to ensure permanent construction of key bridges, including the Bhomrabil Bazar-Serfarguri connecting bridge, Goladangi Chandighat bridge, Majim Dewani Ghat bridge and several bridges in the Jamduar constituency.

## 2 Lat Mandals suspended in Jorhat for land settlement anomalies

HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Jan 2:** Two Land Record Assistants (LRA), formerly known as Lat Mandals, Animesh Saikia and Munin Bora of Jorhat West Revenue Circle, have been suspended from service for their alleged involvement in government land allotment anomalies.

Jorhat District Commissioner Jay Shivani said that during a routine checking of records a few months back, he suspected anomalies in a digital correction of the land records, which showed settlement of government land to a person by the revenue department.

Subsequently, Shivani ordered an enquiry by the then ADC (Revenue) and Circle Officer West, during which it was found that the settlement order of government land in the sita bahi (land records book) was not done as per procedure.

The DC said that following this, he sent a report in this regard to the Director of Land Records and Survey, after which both Saikia and Bora were suspended.

Shivani added that he had issued show cause notices to both LRAs and departmental proceedings have been initiated against them.

## Hojai district conducts peaceful forest eviction drive

Over 1,000 encroaching families removed from Jamuna Maudanga Reserved Forest

HT Correspondent

**HOJAI, Jan 2:** The Hojai district administration initiated a peaceful eviction drive on Friday morning in the Jamuna Maudanga Reserved Forest, falling under the Doboka revenue circle. The operation was meticulously planned and executed with the presence of Additional District Commissioner Bonny Inam Shadab, Senior Superintendent of Police Rakesh Reddy, District Forest Officer Nayan Jyoti Rajbongshi and other senior officials. A substantial force of police and CRPF personnel was deployed to maintain order and ensure smooth conduct of the drive.

The Jamuna Maudanga Reserved Forest covers about 8,000 bighas, of which 6,000 bighas are being cleared of encroachments. A total of 1,258 families were found occupying the forest land; however, 152 cases remain under litigation at the Guwahati High Court and have been temporarily exempted from eviction. The remaining 1,098 families are being removed after completing all necessary legal procedures. Over



1,500 personnel from the forest department, police and CRPF were mobilised to prevent any untoward incidents during the operation.

Additional District Commissioner Bonny Inam Shadab highlighted that local residents cooperated fully with most vacating the forest area by January 1, 2026. Senior Superintendent of Police Rakesh Reddy stated that the eviction is being carried out across five blocks and has re-

mained peaceful.

During the operation, AIUDF leader Bilaluddin raised concerns regarding the felling of betel nut trees, engaging in arguments with district administration and forest officials. Officials clarified that betel nut trees are not classified as reserved forest trees and were legally removed.

As of the report, the eviction drive continues peacefully, with no reports of any untoward incidents from the area.

## NFR introduces LHB coaches on key Northeast trains



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has introduced modern LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) coaches on two important train services – the Agartala-Dharmanagar-Agartala Passenger and the Silchar-Agartala-Silchar Express – as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance passenger safety, comfort and travel experience in the region.

The upgraded LHB rake of the Agartala-Dharmanagar-Agartala Passenger Train (No 55675/55676) was ceremonially flagged off on January 1, 2026, at Agartala Railway Station by Rajya Sabha MP Rajib Bhattacharjee and MLA Mina Rani Sarkar. Similarly, the Silchar-Agartala-Silchar Express (No 15664/15663) was flagged off at Silchar Railway Station by Rajya Sabha MP Kanad

Purkayastha, Lok Sabha MP Parimal Suklabaidya and MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, in the presence of senior railway officials.

The introduction of LHB coaches marks a significant upgrade from conventional ICF coaches. These coaches feature advanced safety mechanisms such as anti-climbing devices, superior braking systems and improved suspension for smoother rides. Passengers also benefit from enhanced seating arrangements, modern interiors and better maintenance standards, ensuring a safer and more comfortable journey.

This move is part of Indian Railways' broader initiative to modernise rolling stock and provide world-class passenger services. The upgraded coaches are expected to benefit daily commuters, long-distance travellers and tourists alike, while strengthening rail connectivity between Tripura, Assam and adjoining regions.

NFR reaffirmed its commitment to continuous improvement in passenger amenities, operational efficiency and service reliability, aligning with Indian Railways' vision of a modern, safe and passenger-centric railway network.

## ABSU pays tribute to Kanakeswar Narzary on birth anniversary

Founder general secretary remembered with day-long programme in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 2:** The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) paid rich tributes to its founder General Secretary Kanakeswar Narzary on his 83rd birth anniversary on Friday, observing the day with a series of programmes in Kokrajhar.

Kanakeswar Narzary, a former Chief Executive Member of the now-defunct Bodoland Autonomous Council is regarded as one of the prominent leaders of the Bodoland statehood movement. A noted social thinker and writer, he hailed from Tengaigaon village near

Serfarguri in Kokrajhar district and passed away on October 12, 2003. Popularly known as Khungkra Narzary among the Bodos, he was widely respected for his bold leadership, intellectual depth and creative contributions to social thought.

The birth anniversary of the ABSU founder General Secretary was observed in a befitting manner at Ramfalbil Athiabari in Kokrajhar. As per the programme schedule, ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the organisational flag, followed by the offering of floral tributes by Hirabai Narzary, wife of late

Kanakeswar Narzary.

Among those present on the occasion were ABSU general secretary Khanindra Basumatary, Kokrajhar District Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Bijuel Kumar Basumatary, local intellectuals and a large number of ABSU members.

Speaking on the occasion, ABSU president Dipen Boro recalled the immense contributions of late Kanakeswar Narzary in shaping the future course of the students' union. He emphasised the need to build a strong and healthy society free from violence, drugs and other anti-social activities to ensure lasting peace and security in the region.

He said the students' union and the Bodo community were remembering Narzary as a pioneer leader of his time, who worked relentlessly for the welfare and uplift of the Bodo community as well as other downtrodden sections of society. He added that the ideology and philosophy of late Narzary would continue to inspire future generations, noting that Narzary always envisioned an integrated and harmonious society.

Recalling his legacy, Dipen Boro said Kanakeswar Narzary dedicated his entire life to the uplift and development of Bodo society and urged the younger generation to keep alive his ideals and values in contemporary society.

## USMA fixes new river sand rate at ₹ 17,000 per truck

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Jan 2:** The United Sand Mahaldar Association (USMA), with its head office at Amlokhi, Dillai, has announced a new rate for river sand, fixed at ₹ 17,000 per truck (₹ 42.50 per cft x 400 cft), inclusive of O Form, Green Cess and loading charges, effective from January 6, 2026.

In a press release, the association stated that the new rate was determined after meaningful discussions with all stone and sand buyers and sellers associations. It was clarified that all payments, including the sand price, must be made in full at the association office in Amlokhi, Dillai.

The association further emphasised that only Mahal Permit holders will be allowed to carry sand outside the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) jurisdiction. Private Permit holders with O Forms will not be permitted to transport river sand to Dimapur or beyond the KAAC limits.

USMA warned that strict action, including penalties will be imposed on any party found violating the new guidelines, stressing adherence to the recent decisions agreed upon in the discussions.

## Khatkhati Police seize opium, 2 arrested

HT Correspondent

**KHATKHATI, Jan 2:** In a major crackdown on narcotics smuggling, Khatkhati Police seized a significant consignment of illicit drugs during a routine naka check on Friday morning and apprehended two individuals from Punjab in connection with the case.

The operation was carried out at the SBI naka point under the Bokajan subdivision when a police team intercepted a truck bearing registration number PB13-AR-9275 travelling from Dimapur towards Bokajan. Acting on suspicion, the police conducted a thorough search of the vehicle and recovered 2.07 kg of illicit opium concealed inside two black plastic bags. Following the seizure, the two occupants of the truck were immediately detained. They were identified as Shirmjit Singh, son of Bhajan Singh and Balwinder Singh, son of Major Singh, both residents of Bhutia Delhon in Ludhiana district of Punjab. The accused are currently in police custody as further investigation is underway to ascertain the source and intended destination of the contraband. The successful operation was conducted under the leadership of Surya Kumar Bora, Officer-in-Charge of Khatkhati Police Station with assistance from Sub-Inspector Debasish Bora, Sub-Inspector Gobin Kakati and other police personnel of the station. The seized narcotics were formally documented in the presence of Bokajan Sub-Divisional Police Officer Rustam Raj Brahma and independent witnesses to ensure legal compliance.

## DC distributes tablets under Arohan scheme

Class IX students and CRCCs receive devices at Morigaon

HT Correspondent

**MORIGAON, Jan 2:** Morigaon District Commissioner Anamika Tewari formally distributed tablets to students of Class IX under the Arohan scheme and to 142 Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators (CRCCs) at the Inspector of Schools' premises on Friday. The initiative aims to strengthen digital learning and academic support across schools in the district.

During the programme, the CRCCs Juba Sarma, Raju Medhi, Nahrin Sultana and Marami Saikia received the tablets from the District Commissioner on behalf of the coordinators. The distribution marks a significant step towards enhancing the use of technology in school education and academic monitoring.

Besides the CRCCs, tablets under the Arohan scheme were also presented to selected students for their academic excellence. The recipients included Jyotishmoi Bardoloi of Morigaon Higher Secondary and Multipurpose School, Rishnu Kunal Hokai Bardoloi of Morigaon Town Higher Secondary School, Parthana Bora of Morigaon Girls Higher Secondary School and Rimpi Das of Morigaon Shankar-Madhav Secondary School. Officials present at the event highlighted that the scheme is intended to support students and educators by providing access to digital resources, thereby improving learning outcomes in government schools across the district.

## Paddy procurement centre opens at Demow Dehajan

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, Jan 2:** The Sivasagar District Agriculture Department started a paddy procurement centre at Demow Dehajan on December 31, marking the first such centre in Sivasagar district. The Demow Paddy Procurement Centre began procuring paddy at the Government-declared Minimum Support Price of ₹ 2,559 per quintal for the 2025-26 season.

Under the programme, the government is purchasing paddy directly from farmers through the Assam Food and Civil Supply Corporation Ltd in coordination with the Department of Agriculture, Assam. The initiative aims to ensure fair prices for farmers while strengthening the paddy procurement mechanism in the district.

The centre witnessed an encouraging response from farmers on the inaugural day, with a total of 198.40 quintals of paddy procured. Initiating the programme, District Agricultural Officer of Sivasagar, Asif Bora, expressed satisfaction over the strong turnout and urged more paddy farmers to come forward to avail themselves of the government's procurement scheme. Assistant Director of Agriculture, Sivasagar, Amrit Saikia, District Agricultural Information Officer Gonesh Pohuchungi, along with officials from the Assam Food and Civil Supply Corporation Ltd, were present during the inauguration programme.

## Cachar's Lakhipur block pineapple gets fresh push towards zero-waste innovation

NITI Aayog grants ₹ 1.64 crore to enhance pineapple value addition and create jobs, promoting sustainable farming

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** In a significant push for agri-based innovation and sustainable livelihoods in Cachar district, NITI Aayog has approved a grant of ₹ 1.64 crore for the "Lakhipur Zero Waste Pineapple Innovation" project under the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) and Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP).

The approval was granted during the 47th Meeting of the Empowered Committee of Secretaries for the Aspirational Districts and Blocks Programme, held on November 20, 2025, under the chairmanship of the CEO, NITI Aayog, through video conferencing. The decision was formally communicated on January 2, 2026, by the Under Secretary to the Government of India (Aspirational Districts and Blocks Programme).

The sanctioned proposal focuses



on Lakhipur Block in Cachar district, Assam and envisions establishing a Zero Waste Pineapple Innovation Hub over a project period of one year and three months. With a total outlay of ₹ 1.64 crore, the initiative aims at value addition, employment generation and environmental sustainability, en-

suring optimal use of pineapple produce and its by-products with minimal waste.

The project is expected to strengthen the local pineapple value chain through processing, innovation, and skill development, while creating new livelihood opportunities for farmers, women

self-help groups and rural youth in Lakhipur Block. By adopting a zero-waste approach, it aligns economic growth with ecological responsibility.

Welcoming the approval, District Commissioner Cachar, Mridul Yadav, IAS, described the sanction as a milestone for the district's agrarian economy. He noted that the grant will enhance value addition of locally grown pineapples, generate employment and empower farmers and entrepreneurs. He also affirmed Cachar district's commitment to implementing the project in line with NITI Aayog's vision.

With this approval, Lakhipur joins other Aspirational Blocks leveraging targeted central support to unlock local potential, reinforcing the broader national goal of inclusive, sustainable and outcome-driven development.

## Student dies during picnic at Baghmora, Jorhat



HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Jan 2:** A tragic incident at Baghmora on the banks of the Brahmaputra has shaken the town of Jorhat. According to reports, a college-going student met with an untimely death on Friday while on a picnic at the Baghmora picnic spot.

The deceased student has been identified as Pragy Shri Phukan from Bangalpokhuri, Jorhat.

It is reported that a group from Jorhat had gone on a picnic today. During the outing, the student accidentally fell into a nearby water body at the picnic site under unknown circumstances. She was rescued and immediately taken to Jorhat Medical College Hospital, but doctors declared her dead.

It is noteworthy that earlier too, several people have lost their lives after boats capsized at the same picnic spot. Local residents have alleged that the picnic spot continues to operate without any proper safety arrangements. Union Minister of State (MoS) for Textiles and External Affairs Pabitra Margherita visited JMCH and expressed grief at the death of the young girl, the only child of her parents.

## Alleged rice embezzlement by fair price shop owner surfaces in Namdang Tea Garden

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, Jan 2:** Allegations of widespread irregularities have surfaced against a fair price shop owner in Namdang Tea Garden under the 83rd Margherita Assembly Constituency in Tinsukia district, where government rice is alleged to have been embezzled in the name of a deceased beneficiary for nearly two years.

According to allegations made by the victim's family, the fair price shop owned by Birendra Sharma Thakur in the old line area of Namdang Tea Garden continued to draw government rice in the name of Aruna Bhujij's deceased son. Aruna Bhujij, a resident of the area, stated that she had been receiving 20 kg of government rice regularly from the shop for many years. However, her only son passed away on June 1, 2023.

She alleged that from July 2023 onwards, the fair price shop owner arbitrarily deducted 5 kg from her entitled 20 kg of rice every month, without any official explanation, while continuing to record the full quantity in the ration card. The deduction, she claimed, has continued for the last two years.

Aruna Bhujij further alleged that the shop owner did not inform the Food and Civil Supplies Department about her son's death and continued to show distribution of 20 kg rice in official records. She also claimed that Birendra Sharma Thakur repeatedly threatened her not to disclose the matter, warning that her rice quota would be reduced further if she spoke out.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

A people free to choose will always choose peace.  
-Ronald Reagan

## Turmoil in B'desh and its implications

Bangladesh has been going through a massive political crisis since the resignation of the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina-led government last year. This volatile situation has caused regional tensions. A series of riots, arson attacks, and political unrest hit across Bangladesh from December 18 to 20, 2025, following the assassination of Osman Hadi, the spokesperson for the Inqilab Moncho. Hadi was shot on December 12 and died on December 18. Over the past year, India has faced challenges stemming from Dhaka's weakened security cooperation. This instability was tied to deep-rooted historical anti-India sentiment. Recent political unrest in Bangladesh has significant regional implications, potentially destabilising neighbouring countries such as India, China, and Pakistan, and affecting regional security and economic stability. Diplomatic ties between Delhi and Dhaka have hit a critical juncture with Dhaka suspending visa and consular services at its missions in New Delhi and Agartala. India has also suspended visa services at its Chittagong centre in Bangladesh following widespread violent protests. New Delhi and Dhaka summoned each other's envoys earlier last week in a tit-for-tat move to express concern over the situation.

India's security concerns about the instability in Bangladesh are raising fears of conflict with China and Pakistan. This also increases the risks of illegal migration and communal violence, complicating India's diplomatic negotiations and projects in the region. Across the border in India, the ramifications of Dipu Chandra Das's killing have intensified anti-Bangladesh sentiments, making regional stability and diplomatic relations more fragile. Civil society activists are criticising the interim government for failing to address the unrest. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is organising a big rally to welcome back Tarique Rahman, the son of the Zias, amid this political turmoil; he is expected to be the Party's prime ministerial candidate. Overall, Bangladesh's ongoing instability heightens the risks of conflict with neighbouring countries and complicates India's diplomatic efforts in the region, especially after a Hindu group protested outside Indian diplomatic premises. The Yunus government has declared that there is "no place for such violence in the new Bangladesh." The government has assured that individuals involved in the recent killing will face accountability and that no one will be exempt from consequences.

Overall, Bangladesh's ongoing instability increases risks of conflict with neighbouring countries and complicates India's diplomatic efforts in the region, as it objected to a Hindu group's protest outside its diplomatic premises in Delhi, calling it "unjustifiable". In the future, the elections should be fair and free. Violence should be controlled so that people can go and vote. All parties should have a level playing field. The Yunus government should also ensure there is no post-poll violence. A peaceful election would also help improve the economy. Only when normalcy returns can Bangladesh hope to regain its development.

## Nature of religion: Service or selfishness?

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

For centuries, India has been considered a land of religion, faith, and spirituality. Here, religion has not been limited to worship or rituals, but has been a guiding force in every aspect of life. Faith has provided strength to individuals in difficult situations, keeping them connected to morality and humanity. However, with changing times, it is becoming clear that the very nature of faith is gradually becoming distorted. Religion, once a means of spiritual peace, is in many places becoming a tool of fear, superstition, and commerce.

Today's reality is that a large part of religious traditions has deviated from their original purpose. Rituals that were meant to provide spiritual balance to humans have now become associated with financial transactions and ostentation. Pilgrimage sites, once centers of penance, sacrifice, and meditation, have often become mere commercial activities. The financial situation of the devotee is increasingly prioritized over his or her feelings.

The foundation of faith is belief—in God, in life, and in oneself. This belief stems not from fear or greed, but from inner satisfaction. When faith becomes based on fear, it degenerates into hypocrisy. Unfortunately, many religious activities today are driven by this fear. People are led to believe that if they do not follow a particular tradition or donate a certain amount, disaster will occur. Thus, religion, which used to be reassuring, is becoming a source of fear.

Traditions are the hallmark of any society. They evolve through experience and knowledge passed down from generation to generation. However, traditions are only useful as long as they are in keeping with the times, wisdom, and humanity. Accepting traditions as set in stone hinders social progress. Today, there is a need to reconsider traditions—to understand their purpose and their relevance in the present.

Service has been an important aspect of religion. Service means selflessly helping others. However, when a price is attached to that service, its nature changes. Charity is only considered charitable when it is given voluntarily. When it is given out of pressure, fear, or social prestige, it loses its sanctity. Unfortunately, today, charity is being levied as a compulsory fee in many places.

This situation affects ordinary and emotional people the most. In times of grief, sorrow, or crisis, a person is mentally vulnerable. Exploiting their faith during such times is not only immoral but also inhumane. The purpose of religion is to protect humanity from breakdown, not to burden it further.

The greatest danger of hypocrisy is that it gradually breeds distrust of religion. When people are repeatedly deceived and their emotions exploited, they either turn away from religion or begin to view every tradition with suspicion. This situation is detrimental to society, as a healthy form of religion plays a vital role in maintaining social balance.

In today's educated and aware society, it is expected that individuals should test everything through logic and reason. Faith and reason are not in conflict. True faith is that which is in harmony with reason. If a tradition goes against humanity, morality, and compassion, changing it should be considered a righteous step.

The role of religious institutions and those involved in religion is also crucial. They must understand that their responsibility extends beyond simply performing rituals, but also guiding society in the right direction. If religious leadership itself is driven by greed and self-interest, it is futile to expect morality from the public. The need of the hour is to transform religion into a medium of service, not a business.

Society's responsibility is no less. Hypocrisy will never end until people become self-aware. Asking questions isn't unrighteous. Understanding and reflecting on the purpose of every tradition is a sign of intellectual maturity. Blindly accepting everything is neither faith nor religion.

The role of the media and educational institutions is also crucial in this context. A balanced, rational, and sensitive discussion of religious issues will increase social awareness. The purpose of education is not just employment, but also the creation of rational citizens—citizens who can distinguish between faith and superstition.

Today, we need to strive to return religion to its original form. A religion that offers peace, not fear; one that protects, not exploits; and one that preaches unity, not division. Faith must be transformed into a strength of the soul, not a means to self-interest.

Ultimately, it's clear that the future of religion depends more on our thinking than on traditions. If we base our faith on conscience, compassion, and self-respect, hypocrisy will begin to disappear. True religion is one that transforms humans into better human beings. This is the greatest need and the greatest religion in today's times.

# Social Decay and the silence of the intellectual community

When we observe the current social structure of Assam, one fact becomes evident: we are passing through a profound and terrifying crisis, where the erosion of values and the decay of morality are shaking the very foundation of our national life. The stability of a society is not measured solely by economic progress; rather, the advancement of a society depends on the mindset of its people, their integrity, and the transparency in mutual relationships. Unfortunately, in the environment that prevails around us today, extreme opportunism and corruption have taken the place of honesty and dedication. In this state of societal rot, the role of those individuals who were supposed to carry the torch of light and show the way—writers, thinkers, professors, and senior citizens—has become truly shameful and disheartening. A large section of this so-called intellectual community has become so engrossed in protecting their personal interests that they have turned their backs on the burning problems of society and adopted a mysterious and opportunistic silence. This silence is not merely a matter of keeping quiet; it is a kind of tacit consent to injustice, which has given further courage to the negative forces in society to raise their heads. When the people regarded as the conscience of society surrender their own conscience for temporary gains or kneel before power, a major question arises: on whom can the common people of that society place their trust? This decline and escapist attitude of the intellectual community is leading the future of Assam toward a dark abyss, from which returning is gradually becoming more difficult.

The nature of the social decay occurring in our society is highly diverse, and it has permeated every level of society. In today's world, money and power have become the yardstick of a person's respect, where knowledge or character has almost no value. In such a situation, it was the responsibility of the intellectual community to build a strong public opinion against these wrong notions and to teach society true values. But in reality, we see the complete opposite picture; a major portion of our intellectuals have surrendered themselves to this current of consumerism and have become participants in this corrupt system. When injustice occurs in society, when the poor are oppressed, or when attacks are made on our cultural heritage, these intellectuals speak out only when some political or personal interest of theirs is involved. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the intellectual community of today lacks the courage to speak the truth neutrally. At the root of this lack of courage lie fear and greed—fear of incurring the wrath of rulers and greed for government favours or awards and honours. This fear and greed have broken the backbone of our thinkers. They have forgotten that the duty of a true intellectual is to speak the truth without hesitation against all forms of power. But in the present context, it appears that a large number of intellectuals maintain a kind of "safe distance"; they discuss or write only on topics where there is no possibility of displeasing anyone. This opportunistic character has deeply disappointed the younger generation of society, because they feel the absence of people they can consider as ideals.

Educational institutions are called the factories that shape the character of a society, and the teachers or professors associated with them are regarded as the guides of society. But the kind of commercial mindset and moral decline seen in the education sector at



present is cause for concern. A large part of our intellectual community is connected with this educational world, but instead of teaching students to become true human beings, they are more interested in moulding them merely as instruments to score marks in examinations

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

and secure good jobs. It was the responsibility of the teaching community to give students a clear understanding of various events occurring in society and to teach them to stand against injustice, but when they themselves become involved in various corruptions or nepotism, the students learn the same. The kind of competition and career-centric mindset that today's intellectual community has created in the name of education has led to the disappearance of qualities such as empathy, responsibility, and humanity from society. University or college professors spend more time on political bargaining and lobbying for their own promotions than on research or scholarly pursuits. In such an environment, building a healthy and strong society is impossible. This decline of the intellectual community not only destroys the sanctity of education but also paves the way for creating a spineless citizenry for the future, which is suicidal for a nation.

In the fields of media and literature-culture as well, the silence and role of the intellectual community have come under question. At one time, literature and newspapers were the mirrors of society, pointing out its flaws and warning the ruling side. But in the present day, an unholy alliance has developed between the media and a section of intellectuals. Often, it is seen that our writers and intellectuals speak in newspapers or on television only to gain cheap popularity. Instead of conducting deep study or analysis of society's profound problems—such as unemployment, economic exploitation, or cultural aggression—they merely offer emotional and superficial comments and consider their duty done. As a result, the true nature of the problems does not register in the minds of the public, and they become confused. The same situation prevails in the field of language and literature; at a time of crisis for our language, the kind of intellectual leadership that was needed is not visible. Rather, a tendency is seen among some to create emotions in the name of language and maintain their own leadership. They educate their own children in English medium while inciting others' children to agitate for Assamese medium. This

duplicity has destroyed the credibility of the intellectual community. When a writer fears to reflect the real picture of society in his writing, or when a journalist suppresses the true news, it must be understood that the intellectual death of that society has occurred. This lack of intellectual honesty has left our language and literature behind in the global arena and weakened our cultural foundation.

In the spheres of politics and social policy, the indifference of the intellectual community is considered the most damaging for society. In a democratic system, the role of intellectuals in determining the course and nature of politics is immense. Even if they do not directly participate in politics, their writings and opinions can keep political parties in check and help the public choose the right candidates or parties. But in the context of Assam, it is seen that our intellectual community has become puppets of partisan politics. Instead of giving neutral or independent opinions, they behave like mouthpieces of a particular political party. Some are blind supporters of the ruling side, while others are irrational supporters of the opposition. This division has brought society to a stage where there is no scope for healthy debate or discussion. When an intellectual supports even the wrong policies of the government in the hope of gaining official benefits, he betrays society. Similarly, the mindset of opposing merely for the sake of opposition is equally harmful to society. Often here, it is seen that even in cases of serious social crimes or corruption, intellectuals speak out only after considering the political identity of the culprit. If the guilty person belongs to their preferred party, they remain silent. This biased behaviour has disappointed the common people and created in their minds the notion that there are no such things as principles or ideals, that everything is merely a game of power and money. This notion has eroded the moral foundation of society.

The driving force of any society is its youth power. To show them the right path, society needs idealistic individuals whose words and actions align. But today's youth of Assam see only hypocrisy and deception around them. They see that the person who speaks of ethics on stage abandons principles in the dark for personal gain. As a result, a kind of rebellion and despair has arisen in the minds of the younger generation. They have begun to consider easy ways of earning money and seizing power as the sole aim of life, because they see that as success in society. The intellectual community has taken no practical steps to prevent this misguided tendency of the youth.

Rather, they consider their duty fulfilled by merely blaming or criticising the youth. The criticism levelled against today's youth for moving away from work culture is also the responsibility of our senior generation and intellectual community. Because we have failed to teach them the dignity of labour. We have taught them that sitting in a chair and giving orders is honourable work, and manual labour is for lesser people. This feudal mindset is kept alive by our intellectual community itself. Consequently, a vast unemployed force has emerged that is creating disorder in society. Our thinkers have not provided any intellectual planning or guidance to channel this force into productive work, which is a major failure for us.

The society of Assam was built on the ideal of harmony between Shankardeva and Madhava, where all ethnic communities have lived in amity. But in recent times, it is seen that some evil forces are continuously trying to sow seeds of division among people. People are being incited in the name of religion, language, and community to destabilise society. In this crisis, the kind of strong protest and message of harmony that should have come from the intellectual community has not materialised. Rather, in many cases, it is seen that a section of intellectuals secretly fuel or support these divisive forces. They try to become cheap leaders by pitting people of their own community or religion against others. Even those intellectuals who claim to be liberal often remain silent out of fear of public wrath. This silence has made communal forces stronger. For the sake of preserving societal peace and harmony, the intellectual community must rise above caste and religion and speak of humanity. But sadly, the thought and practice of today's intellectual community has become very narrow. Instead of thinking about the greater Assamese society, they prefer to remain confined within their own small circles. This narrowness has weakened our national life and pushed us toward an environment akin to civil war.

In conclusion, it can be said that when the intellectual community or thoughtful individuals in a society fail to fulfill their responsibilities, the downfall of that society becomes inevitable. At the root of the ongoing social decay in present-day Assam lies our moral decline and the opportunistic silence of the intellectual community. To escape this situation, our intellectuals need to engage in self-criticism once again. They must abandon the allure of government awards, positions, or personal gains and stand as vigilant guardians of society. Understanding the suffering of ordinary people and speaking on their behalf is the mark of a true intellectual. Their duty does not end merely by writing articles in newspapers or giving speeches on television; they must establish an ideal in society through their own conduct and actions. What is needed today is a new intellectual movement that can remove the impurities of society and show the new generation a dream of a healthy and beautiful future. For this, courage, honesty, and sacrifice are required. If our intellectual community still does not stir and does not break its silence, then one day they will be found guilty in the court of history. If we lose this last opportunity to save society, then our identity and existence will one day vanish into the abyss of time. Therefore, let us unite to build an alert and active intellectual community that can dispel the darkness of society and show the path of light. This is the demand of the time and this is our duty. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## Targeted as Outsiders: Hate crimes and India's internal migration

By: Satyabrata Borah

India has witnessed a troubling surge in violence directed at internal migrants, often fueled by the persistent narrative of "infiltration" from neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh. This bogey, amplified through political rhetoric and social media, has transformed suspicion into lethal mob action, targeting individuals based on their language, appearance, or regional origin. What begins as whispered accusations of being "Bangladeshi" or "foreigner" escalates into brutal assaults, lynchings, and a climate of fear that undermines the very fabric of India's unity and constitutional guarantees of free movement and equality.

The closing weeks of 2025 marked a grim escalation in this pattern. In Palakkad, Kerala, a state long celebrated for its progressive ethos and reliance on migrant labor, Ram Narayan Baghel, a 31-year-old worker from Chhattisgarh, was lynched by a mob on December 17. Accused of theft, he was repeatedly questioned about his identity, with attackers allegedly demanding to know if he was Bangladeshi before beating him to death. Forensic reports described a body ravaged by unrelenting blows, a testament to the ferocity of mob justice. Kerala, which depends heavily on migrants for construction and agriculture, prides itself on high literacy and law enforcement standards, yet this incident exposed vulnerabilities even in unlikely places.

Just a week later, in Sambalpur, Odisha, 20-year-old Juel Sheikh from West Bengal's Murshidabad district met a similar fate. A daily wage laborer sharing beedis at a tea stall, he was confronted by a group demanding identity documents and accusing him of being an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant. The assault left him dead and two companions critically injured. All victims were Indian citizens, yet the label "Bangladeshi" proved fatal. Odisha had seen prior attacks on Bengali-speaking migrants, with humiliation and evictions, but this marked a deadly turning point.

These were not isolated events. In Dehradun, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura was killed amid racist taunts, highlighting prejudice against northeastern Indians often mistaken for foreigners. In Tripura itself, Angel Chhakma faced mob violence rooted in superstition and xenophobia. Across states, migrants from West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and the northeast bore the brunt, their Bengali accents or facial features triggering suspicion.

This wave of violence traces back to a broader narrative of infiltration that has dominated political discourse. The term "Bangladeshi infiltrator" has been weaponized, often conflating legitimate internal migration with illegal border crossing. Bengali-speaking Muslims, in particular, face compounded

risks due to religious and linguistic profiling. Reports from human rights organizations document how this rhetoric, peaking during elections, portrays Muslims as demographic threats or outsiders, invoking fears of "population jihad" or cultural erosion.

In 2024 and 2025, hate speech incidents surged dramatically. One monitoring group recorded a 74 percent increase in hate speech targeting minorities in 2024 alone, with much of it invoking the infiltrator trope. Explicit calls for violence accompanied 22 percent of speeches labeling people as Bangladeshi. Political campaigns, especially in border states like Assam and West Bengal, centered on expelling "illegal immigrants," with leaders pledging to detect and deport them. A central government directive in May 2025 urged states to identify and push back suspected Bangladeshi and Rohingya, leading to raids, detentions, and pushbacks that ensnared Indian citizens. Human Rights Watch documented hundreds of unlawful expulsions, where Bengali Muslim migrants were rounded up, their documents destroyed, and forcibly sent across borders. Many proved their citizenship later and were readmitted, but the trauma lingered. In BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh, verification drives disproportionately targeted poor Muslim workers, echoing the National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam, where millions feared disenfranchisement.

Internal migration is the lifeblood of India's economy. Over 450 million people move within the country for work, filling labor shortages in booming sectors. States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Maharashtra rely on migrants from poorer regions like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Odisha. These workers build infrastructure, harvest crops, and staff factories, contributing immensely yet living precariously in slums or makeshift camps, often without proper documentation due to poverty or bureaucracy.

Yet, economic anxieties fuel resentment. Job competition, wage suppression, and cultural differences breed hostility. Rumors spread via WhatsApp like child lifting, theft, beef consumption ignite mobs before facts emerge. Superstition plays a role too, as seen in witch hunts or accusations against outsiders. In Punjab, conspiracy theories about demographic genocide through migration led to vilification campaigns.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated tensions, with reverse migration highlighting migrants' vulnerabilities. Post-pandemic recovery saw renewed inflows, but so did nativist sentiments. Regional parties demand domicile protections, mirroring restrictions in northeastern states or Himachal Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, isolated attacks on northern migrants sparked industry fears of exodus.

Critics argue that political expediency drives this bogey.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has made anti-infiltration a poll plank, especially ahead of assemblies in Assam and West Bengal. Opposition leaders accuse it of polarizing voters by demonizing minorities. Even in non-BJP states, local grievances manifest violently. Police responses vary but impunity persists for hate speech inciters. The human cost is staggering. Families lose breadwinners; communities live in fear. Migrant boards in states like West Bengal report dozens of attacks annually. Children and elderly are not spared. Broader reports tally nearly 950 hate incidents in one year post-2024 elections, many linked to ruling party affiliates.

This trend erodes India's secular foundations. The Constitution guarantees freedom of movement and residence anywhere in the country. Article 14 ensures equality before law; Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, or place of birth. Yet, vigilante justice overrides these, with mobs assuming roles of judge and executioner. Social media amplifies misinformation, turning rumors into riots. Platforms host unchecked hate, with minimal content removal despite violations. Education and integration efforts lag, leaving cultural gaps unbridged.

Addressing this requires multifaceted action. Political leaders must unequivocally condemn violence and hate speech, regardless of electoral gains. Strict enforcement against mob attacks, coupled with fast-track courts, could deter impunity. Institutional mechanisms to track hate crimes against minorities, similar to those for Scheduled Castes, are overdue. Economic policies should formalize migrant labor such as portable rations, voting rights, and welfare schemes. Interstate coordination via bodies like the Migrant Workers Welfare Board could ensure protections. Community dialogues, media literacy programs, and school curricula promoting diversity might counter prejudice.

Civil society plays a vital role. Intellectuals, artists, and farmer groups have condemned migrant vilification, emphasising shared contributions. Protests and candlelight marches signal public outrage. India's strength lies in its diversity and mobility. Migrants are not infiltrators but integral threads in the national tapestry. Allowing the bogey of infiltration to fester risks unraveling this. As 2026 dawns, with elections looming and demographic debates raging, the nation stands at a crossroads. Rejecting mob rule and embracing inclusive citizenship is not just a moral imperative but essential for social harmony and progress. The victims like Ram Narayan, Juel Sheikh, and countless others were ordinary Indians chasing better lives. Their deaths underscore an urgent truth: suspicion unchecked becomes savagery. India must choose unity over division, law over lynching, before more lives are lost to fabricated fears.

# Choosing a career? In a fast-changing job market, listen to your inner self – counsellor

By: Kobus Maree

The world of work today, in the 21st century, is far more unpredictable than it was in the 20th century. Jobs come and go, roles change constantly, and automation and digital disruption are the only constants. Many young people will one day do jobs that don't yet exist or did not exist a few years ago. Change is the new normal.

In this world, career counselling focuses on navigating repeated transitions and developing resilience. It is about employability and designing meaningful work-lives – not about finding a single "job for life". It recognises that economic activity is part of wider social realities.

At its heart is the search for a sense of purpose. As a career counsellor and academic, I've been through decades of innovation, research, and practice in South Africa and beyond. I have found that the work of US counselling psychologist Mark Savickas offers a useful way to understand how people build successful and purpose-filled careers in changing times.

His career construction theory says that rather than trying to "match" people to the "right" environment, counsellors should see their clients as authors of their own careers, constantly trying to create meaning, clarify their career-life themes, and adapt to an unpredictable world.

In simple terms, this means in practice that career decisions are not just about skills or interests,

but about how we make sense of our lives. They are about our values and how we adapt when the world shifts.

In my own work I emphasise that career counselling should draw on people's "stories" (how they understand themselves) as well as their "scores" (information about them). This is why I developed instruments that blend qualitative and quantitative approaches to exploring a person's interests.

I also think career counselling should be grounded in context – the world each person lives in. For example, in South Africa, young people face multiple career-life transitions, limited opportunities and systemic constraints, such as uneven and restricted access to quality education and schooling, lack of employment opportunities, and insufficient career counselling support. My work in this South African context emphasises (personal) agency, (career) adaptability, purpose, and hope.

This goes beyond "what job suits you best", into a richer, narrative-based process. Clients recount their career-life story, identify "crossroads", reflect on their values and purpose, and design their next career-life chapters. Essen-

tially, this approach helps them listen to themselves – to their memories, dreams, prospects, values, and emerging self- and career identities – and construct a story that really matters to the self and others.

Tips for career builders  
Adaptability is a central theme in current career theory. It has four dimensions:

- concern (about the future)
  - control (over your destiny)
  - curiosity (exploring possibilities)
  - confidence (in your capacity to act).
- When you develop these capacities, you are better equipped to manage career-life transitions, redesign your career appropriately and promptly, and achieve a meaningful work-life balance.
- I have found that in practice it's helpful to:
- reflect on key "turning points" in your career-life and earliest memories
  - integrate self-understanding with awareness of what's happening in an industry, technology and the economy
  - draw on "stories" (subjective information about yourself) and "scores" (objective data)
  - develop a sense of mission (what the job means for you personally) and vision (your contribution to society, not just your job title).

I invite you to reflect deeply on your story, identify the key moments that shaped you, clarify your values, and decide what contribution you want to make. Then (re-)design your way forward,

step by step, one transition at a time.

If it's possible, a gap year can be a good time to do this reflection, learn new skills and develop qualities in yourself, like adaptability.

One of the best pieces of advice for school leavers I've ever seen was this: "Get yourself a passport and travel the world."

How a counsellor can help

One of the key tenets of my work is the belief that career counselling should be beneficial not only to individuals but also to groups of people. It should promote the ideals of social justice, decent work, and the meaningful contribution of all people to society.

For me, the role of practitioners is not to advise others but to enable them to listen to their inner selves.

To put it another way: in a world of uncertainty, purpose becomes a compass; a North Star. It gives direction. By helping you find the threads that hold your life together and your unique career story, a counsellor helps you take control of your career-life in changing contexts.

There's also a shift of emphasis in career counselling towards promoting the sustainability of societies and environments on which all livelihoods are dependent.

Career counselling is more vital than ever – not a luxury. It's not about providing answers but about helping people become adaptive, reflective, resilient and hopeful.



I also believe that career counsellors should try to help people deal with their disappointments, sadness and pain, and empower them to heal others and themselves.

## Assam Police Recruitment 2026 – 2350 SI, Constable, Driver, Safai Karmachari & Other Posts

State Level Police Recruitment Board (SLPRB), Assam has released five (5) employment notifications for the recruitment of 2350 posts of Sub Inspector (AB), Sub Inspector (UB), Assistant Jailer, Constable (UB), Constable (AB), Safai Karmachari, Driver Constable, Driver, etc in the Assam Police, Assam Commando Battalions, F & ES, DGCD & CGHG, Forest Department and Prison Department.

Interested and eligible candidates may read this advertisement and apply online here against these recruitment notifications. All applicants are requested to bookmark this page for future updates.

Name of post/s: Constable (Armed Branch and Unarmed Branch), Sub Inspector (Unarmed Branch and Armed Branch), Driver Constable, Sub Inspector of Police (Communication), Station Officer, Squad Commander, Assistant Jailer, Safai Karmachari

No of posts: 2350 posts  
Name of department: Assam Police, Assam Police Radio Organization (APRO), Fire & Emergency Services, Forest Department, Prison Department, and Assam Commando Battalions.

Name of recruiting agency: State Level Police Recruitment Board (SLPRB), Assam Department / Organization Post

Assam Police	Constable (UB)	1052
	Constable (AB)	663
	Driver Constable	127
	Safai Karmachari	96
	Sub Inspector (UB)	48
Assam Commando Battalions	Sub Inspector (AB)	47
	Constable (AB)	3
	Safai Karmachari	3
APRO (Assam Police Radio Organization)	Constable (Messenger)	20
	Constable (Dispatch Rider)	14
	Sub Inspector (Communication)	4
	Constable (Handymen)	3
Fire & Emergency Services (F & ES)	Driver	90
	Station Officer	6
	Squad Commander	5
	Safai Karmachari	5
	Driver Operator	4
Forest Department	Driver	106
	Driver Constable	7
Prison Department	Assistant Jailer	39
DGCD & CGHG	Safai Karmachari	8
	Total	2,350 posts
	Pay Scale	Grade Pay
Constable (AB & UB),		
Driver Constable	Rs. 14000-70000/-	Rs. 5600/-
SI (AB & UB),	Rs. 14000-70000/-	Rs. 8700/-
Station Officer, Squad Commander, Assistant Jailer	Rs. 14000-70000/-	Rs. 8700/-
Constable (Dispatch Rider/ Messenger/ Handymen), Driver/ Driver Operator in F & ES, Driver in Forest Department	Rs. 14000-70000/-	Rs. 5200/-
Safai Karmachari	Rs. 12000-52000/-	Rs. 3900/-

State Level Police Recruitment Board (SLPRB), Assam has released a helpline for the aspirants of Assam Police. Candidates may call/ email following helplines for any queries.

Phone: +91 9707336765

Email: slprbassam2526@gmail.com

Timing: 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM on all working days

Nationality: Applicant must be a Citizen of India and Permanent Resident of Assam. Selected Applicants will have to submit Proof of Residence after publication of the Final Select List. However, Applicants belonging to SC, ST, OBC/MOBC are exempted from submitting such Certificates.

Local Language Proficiency: Candidates must speak Assamese or any other State language fluently.

Employment Exchange Registration: Candidates must register his/ her name with a local Employment Exchange in Assam.

Age Limit: Post wise age limit as on 1st January is as mentioned below.

\* Constable (UB & AB): The age of the Applicant must be between 18-25 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2001 and not later than 1 January 2008).

\* Driver Constable, Constable (Dispatch Rider/Messenger/Handymen) in APRO, Driver and Driver Operator in F&ES, and Driver Constable in Forest Department: The age of the Applicant must be 18-25 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2001 and not later than 1 January 2008).

\* Driver in Forest Department: The age of the Applicant must be 18-40 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 1986 and not later than 1 January 2008).

\* Sub Inspector (UB) and Sub Inspector of Police (Communication): The age of the Applicant must be 20-26 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2000 and not later than 1 January 2006).

\* Station Officer and Squad Commander: Age must be 20-24 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2002 and not later than 1 January 2006).

\* Assistant Jailer: The age of the Applicant must be 21-40 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 1986 and not later than 1 January 2005).

\* Sub Inspector (AB) in Commando Battalions: The age of the Applicant must be 20-24 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2002 and not later than 1 January 2006).

† Constable (AB) in Commando Battalions: The age of the Applicant must be 18-21 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 2005 and not later than 1 January 2008).

† Safai Karmachari: The age of the Applicant must be 18-40 years as on 1 January 2026 (born not before 1 January 1986 and not later than 1 January 2008).

Note: The age of the Applicants will be calculated on the basis of the Matriculation/HSLC Admit Card/HSLC Passed Certificate issued by a recognized Board/Coun-

cil. No other document shall be accepted in lieu thereof for this purpose.

Category	Age Relaxation in Years
OBC/MOBC	3
SC	5
STP	5
STH	5

Constable (UB): Candidates must be H.S. or Class XII passed from Govt. recognized Board or Council.

Constable (AB): Candidates must be H.S.L.C or Class-X passed from Govt. recognized Board or Council.

Sub Inspector (UB) & Assistant Jailer: Applicant must be a graduate in Arts/Science/ Commerce or equivalent stream from a recognized College/Institution affiliated to a recognized University.

Station Officer & Squad Commander: B.Sc. with Physics, Chemistry & Mathematics from a recognized College/Institution affiliated to a recognized University.

Sub Inspector of Police Communication: B.Sc. (Electronics Science/ IT/ Computer Science) (10+2+3 duration)

or 3-year Diploma from State Polytechnic in Electronics and Tele Communication, or Electronics or Information Technology, or Instrumentation or Computer Engineering or Computer Science or equivalent with 2 years work experience in the field of Electronics, Telecom, IT or allied environment.

or 3-year Diploma from State Polytechnic in Electronics and Tele Communication, or Electronics or Information Technology, or Instrumentation or Computer Engineering or Computer Science or equivalent and 2 years additional course/courses in Telecommunication /IT /Computer Science/ Computer Engineering or equivalent.

or Master of Computer Application (MCA)

or B.E./ B. Tec. in E & TC or Computer or Instrumentation or IT or equivalent qualification in same discipline.

Sub Inspector (AB): The Applicant must be a graduate in Arts /Science/Commerce or equivalent stream from a recognized College/Institution affiliated to a recognized University.

Driver Constable, Constable (Dispatch Rider/ Messenger/ Handymen), Driver, Driver Operator, Driver Constable:

# HSLC or equivalent examination passed from a recognized Board or Council.

# For the post of Driver Constable in Assam Police, Constable (Dispatch Rider), Constable

(Messenger) & Constable (Handymen) in APRO and Driver and Driver Constable in Forest Department, Applicant must possess valid driving license for LMV or MMV or HMV.

# For the post of Driver and Driver Operator in F & ES, Applicant must possess valid driving license for HMV.

Safai Karmachari: Minimum Class VI passed from a recognized School or Institution and maximum qualification will be HSSLC or Class XII passed from recognized Board or Council.

Note: Applicants having educational qualification of Higher Secondary and above may apply for both Armed Branch & Unarmed Branch. In such cases, Applicant has to clearly mention his/her preferences for the posts.

Candidates must maintain minimum following physical standard to be eligible for Assam Police Recruitment. Following is the minimum physical standard for Constable (AB) and Constable (UB) posts under Assam Police. For other posts, pl visit official notifications carefully.

1. Height	Category	Male	Female
	General/OBC/MOBC	162.5 cm	154 cm
	SC	162.5 cm	154 cm
	ST (P)/ ST (H)	160.0 cm	152.0 cm

2. Chest (Only for men)	Category	Normal	Expanded
	General/OBC/MOBC	80 cm	85 cm
	SC/ST (P)	80 cm	85 cm
	ST (H)	78 cm x	83 cm

General Health: Applicant must be in good mental and bodily health. They must be free from any physical deformities and free from diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hernia, piles, respiratory diseases, knock-knee, flat foot or any other physical deformity that is likely to interfere with the efficient performance of duties. Applicants should not be colour blind or be squint eyed.

Eye Sight: The distance vision should be 6/6 for at least one eye and not poorer than 6/9 for the other without correction. Near vision should be normal.

Varicose Vein: Varicose vein shall be considered as temporary disqualification.

Application Fee: No application fee is to be paid by candidates.

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy by visiting official SLPRB Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply online.

# Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

# Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "New Registration".

# In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.

# Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.

# At the end, submit the form.

# Don't forget to take a print out of the application form .

Candidates need to upload following documents in Assam Police Online Application Portal during the submission of online application form .

Documents	Doc. Format	Max. File Size
Passport Size Photograph	JPG/PNG	450 KB
Signature	JPG/PNG	100 KB
Age Proof	PDF	200 KB
Caste Certificate	PDF	200 KB
Employment Exchange Registration Card	PDF	200 KB
Mark Sheet of HSLC/ Other exam	PDF	200 KB
Pass Certificate of HSLC/ Other exam	PDF	200 KB
# Starting Date of online application submission:		16th December 2025
# Last Date of online application submission:		16th January 2026

## IOCL Non Executive Recruitment 2026 – Apply Online for 394 Posts

Last Date: 09/01/2026.

Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 394 Non Executive posts in Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL). Total no of posts in Assam is 130. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

1. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV (Production) (Post Code 201)

No of posts: 232  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Chemical Engg./ Chemical Technology/ Chemical Technology (Fertiliser)/ Petrochemical Engg. / Petrochemical Technology/Refinery and Petrochemical Engg. OR B.Sc (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry or Industrial Chemistry) from recognized Institute/ University with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST candidates against reserved positions.

2. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV (P&U) (Post Code 202)

No of posts: 37  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Mechanical Engg./ Mechanical (Production) Engg. or Diploma in Electrical Engg./ Electrical and Electronics Engg./ Electrical Power System/Electrical Engg. (Industrial Control) OR B.Sc (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry or Industrial Chemistry) from recognized Institute/ University

Boiler Competency Certificate (BCC) with Second Class OR National Apprenticeship Certificate (NAC) in Boiler Attendant under the Apprentices Act, 1961 with due endorsement of equivalence to the Second-Class Boiler Attendant Certificate of Competency, by the Competent Boiler Authority of the State of the Refinery Unit for which the candidate has applied for.

4. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV (P&U-O&M) (Post Code 203)

No of posts: 22  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Electrical Engineering / Diploma in Electrical and Electronics Engineering. / Electrical Power System/Electrical Engg. (Industrial Control) from recognized Institute/ University with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST candidates against reserved positions.

5. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV/ Junior Technical Assistant-IV (Electrical) (Post Code 204)

No of posts: 12  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Electrical Engg. / Diploma in Electrical and Electronics Engg. / Electrical Power System/Electrical Engg. (Industrial Control) from recognized Institute/ University with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST/PwBD candidates against reserved/identified for PwBD positions.

6. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV/ Junior Technical Assistant-IV (Mechanical) (Post Code 205)

No of posts: 14  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Mechanical Engineering/ Mechanical (Production) Engg from recognized Institute/ University with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST/PwBD candidates against reserved/identified for PwBD positions

7. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV/ Junior Technical Assistant-IV (Instrumentation) (Post Code 206)

No of posts: 6  
Educational Qualification: 3 years Diploma in Instrumentation Engg/Instrumentation & Electronics/ Instrumentation & Control Engg. / Applied Electronics and Instrumentation Engg./ Electronics and Electrical Engineering from a recognized Institute/University with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST/PwBD candidates against reserved/identified for PwBD positions.

8. Junior Quality Control Analyst (Post Code 207)

No of posts: 20  
Educational Qualification: B.Sc. (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry or Industrial Chemistry) with minimum of 50% marks in aggregate for General, EWS & OBC candidates & 45% in case of SC/ST/PwBD candidates against reserved/identified for PwBD positions.

9. Junior Engineering Assistant-IV (Fire & Safety) (Post Code 208)

No of posts: 51  
Educational Qualification: Intermediate (10+2) pass with Sub-Officers' Course from NFSC-Nagpur or from Government recognized Board/ University/Institute with Valid Heavy Vehicle Driving License.

Upper Age Limit: Category-wise Upper Age Limit in Years (as on 31-12-2025) is as mentioned below.

# UR/ EWS: 26 years

# SC/ ST: 31 years

# OBC-NCL: 29 years

# PwBD (UR/EWS): 36 years

# PwBD (SC/ST): 41 years

# PwBD (OBC-NCL): 39 years

Application Fee: General, EWS and OBC (NCL) candidates are required to pay Rs.300/- (Rupees Three Hundred only) as application fee (non-refundable) through online payment gateway only. The bank charges, as applicable, have to be borne by the candidate. SC/ST/PwBD/ExSM candidates are exempted from payment of application fee.

No of application/s: A candidate is allowed to apply for only one post in any of the Refinery units. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy by visiting official IOCL Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply online.

# Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

# Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "New User ? Register Here".

# In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.

# Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.

# Next, pay the application fee and submit the form.

# At the end, take a print out of the application form .

# Starting date for submission of online application: 20th December 2025

# Last date for submission of online application: 9th January 2026

# Russia puts death toll from Ukrainian strike on occupied village at 27

**MOSCOW, Jan 2:** Russian authorities said Friday that the death toll from a Ukrainian drone strike they said struck a cafe in a Russian-occupied village in Ukraine's Kherson region rose to 27 people. Kyiv denied attacking civilian targets.

Svetlana Petrenko, spokeswoman of Russia's main criminal investigation agency, the Investigative Committee, said in a statement that a Ukrainian drone strike on a cafe and hotel in the village of Khorly, where at least 100 civilians were celebrating New Year's Eve overnight into Thursday, killed 27 people, including two minors. A total of 31, including five minors, were hospitalised with injuries.

A criminal probe into the charges of carrying out an act of terrorism has been opened, Petrenko said.

Kyiv denied attacking civilians. Spokesman of Ukraine's General Staff, Dmytro Lykhovii, told Ukraine's public broadcaster Suspilne on Thursday that Ukrainian forces adhere to the norms of international humanitarian law and "carry out strikes exclusively against Russian military targets, facilities of the Russian fuel and energy sector, and other lawful targets."

Lykhovii said that the General Staff has published an explicit list of targets that the Ukrainian army struck on the night of New Year's Eve. The list did not include strikes on occupied parts of the Kherson region.

Lykhovii noted that Russia has repeatedly used disinformation and false statements to disrupt the ongoing peace negotiations.

The Associated Press could not independently verify claims made about the attack.

Russia's accusations against Ukraine come amid a US-led diplomatic push to end the nearly four-year war in Ukraine. Earlier this week, Moscow alleged that Kyiv launched a long-range drone attack against a residence of Russian President Vladimir Putin in northwestern Russia overnight from Sunday to Monday.



Kyiv has called the allegations of an attack on Putin's residence a ruse to derail ongoing peace negotiations, which have ramped up in recent weeks on both sides of the Atlantic.

In his New Year's address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that a peace deal was 90 per cent ready but warned that the remaining 10 per cent, believed to include key sticking points such as territory, would determine the fate of peace, the fate of Ukraine and Europe, how people will live.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said Wednesday that he, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner had a productive call with the national security advisers of Britain, France, Germany and Ukraine to discuss advancing the next steps in the European peace process.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russia conducted what local authorities called one of the most massive drone attacks at Zaporizhzhia overnight. At least nine Russian drones struck

the city, damaging dozens of residential buildings and other civilian infrastructure, head of the regional administration, Ivan Fedorov, wrote on Telegram on Friday. There were no casualties, the official said.

Overall, Russia fired 116 long-range drones at Ukraine last night, according to Ukraine's Air Force, which said that 86 drones were intercepted, while 27 more have reached their targets. The Russian Defence Ministry reported Friday that its air defences intercepted 64 Ukrainian drones overnight over multiple Russian regions.

Vyacheslav Gladkov, governor of Russia's Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine, on Friday also accused Ukrainian forces of carrying out a missile strike on the city of Belgorod. Two women were hospitalised with injuries, Gladkov said. The strike shattered windows in multiple residential buildings and damaged an unspecified commercial facility and a number of cars, according to the official. (AP)

# At least 7 reported killed during widening protests in Iran sparked by ailing economy

**DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, Jan 2:** Widening demonstrations sparked by Iran's ailing economy spread Thursday into the Islamic Republic's rural provinces, with at least seven people being killed in the first fatalities reported among security forces and protesters, authorities said.

The deaths may mark the start of a heavier-handed response by Iran's theocracy over the demonstrations, which have slowed in the capital, Tehran, but expanded elsewhere. The fatalities, two on Wednesday and five on Thursday, occurred in four cities, largely home to Iran's Lur ethnic group.

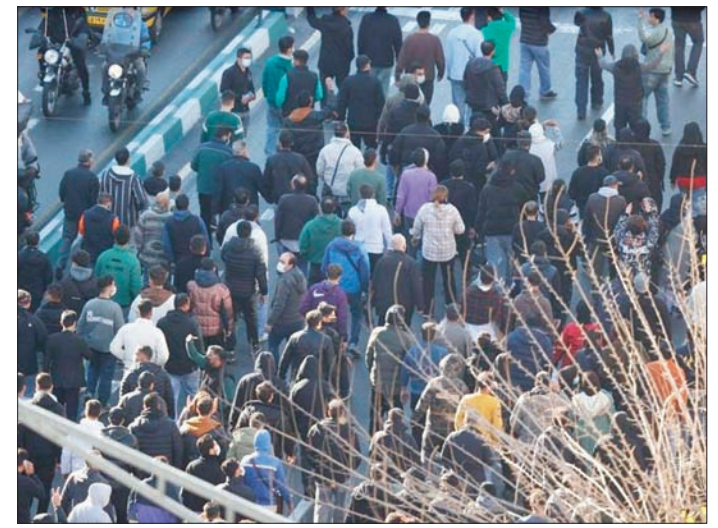
The protests have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations. However, the demonstrations have yet to be countrywide and have not been as intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

The most-intense violence appeared to strike Azna, a city in Iran's Lorestan province, some 300 kilometers (185 miles) southwest of Tehran. There, online videos purported to show objects in the street ablaze and gunfire echoing as people shouted: "Shameless! Shameless!"

The semiofficial Fars news agency reported three people had been killed. Other media, including pro-reform outlets, cited Fars for the report while state-run media did not fully acknowledge the violence there or elsewhere. It wasn't clear why there wasn't more reporting over the unrest, but journalists had faced arrest over their reporting in 2022.

In Lordegan, a city in Iran's Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, online videos showed demonstrators gathered on a street, with the sound of gunfire in the background. The footage matched known features of Lordegan, some 470 kilometers (290 miles) south of Tehran.

Fars, citing an anonymous official, said two people had been killed during the protests Thursday. The Washington-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran said two people had been killed there, identifying the dead as demonstrators. It also shared a still image of what appeared to be an Iranian police officer,



wearing body armor and wielding a shotgun.

In 2019, the area around Lordegan saw widespread protests and demonstrators reportedly damaged government buildings after a report said people there had been infected with HIV by contaminated needles used at a local health care clinic.

In Fuladshahr in Iran's Isfahan province, state media reported on the death of a man there Thursday that activist groups attributed to the police opening fire on demonstrators.

**'Protests due to economic pressures'**

A separate demonstration Wednesday night reportedly led to the 21-year-old volunteer in the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's Basij force.

The state-run IRNA news agency reported on the Guard member's death but did not elaborate. An Iranian news agency called the Student News Network, which is believed to be close to the Basij, directly blamed demonstrators for the Guard member's death, citing comments from Saeed Pourali, a deputy governor in Lorestan province.

The Guard member was martyred ... at the hands of rioters during protests in this city in defense of public order, he reportedly said. Another 13 Basij members and police officers suffered injuries, he added. The protests that have occurred are due to economic pressures, inflation and currency fluctuations, and are an expression of livelihood concerns," Pourali said. "The voices of citizens must be heard carefully and tactfully, but people must not allow their de-

mands to be strained by profit-seeking individuals.

The protests took place in the city of Kouhdasht, over 400 kilometers (250 miles) southwest of Tehran. Local prosecutor Kazem Nazari said 20 people had been arrested after the protests and that calm had returned to the city, the judiciary's Mizan news agency reported.

**Currency fall sparks protests**

Iran's civilian government under reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian has been trying to signal it wants to negotiate with protesters. However, Pezeshkian has acknowledged there is not much he can do as Iran's rial currency has rapidly depreciated, with \$1 now costing some 1.4 million rials.

Meanwhile, state television separately reported on the arrests of seven people, including five it described as monarchists and two others it said had linked to European-based groups. State TV also said another operation saw security forces confiscate 100 smuggled pistols, without elaborating.

Iran's theocracy had declared Wednesday a public holiday across much of the country, citing cold weather, likely as a bid to get people out of the capital for a long weekend. The Iranian weekend is Thursday and Friday, while Saturday marks Imam Ali's birthday, another holiday for many.

The protests, taking root in economic issues, have heard demonstrators chant against Iran's theocracy as well. The country's leaders are still reeling after Israel launched a 12-day war against the country in June. The U.S. also bombed Iranian nuclear sites during the war. (AP)

## Flash floods triggered by heavy rains in Afghanistan kill at least 17 people

**KABUL, AFGHANISTAN, Jan 2:** The season's first heavy rains and snowfall ended a prolonged dry spell but triggered flash floods in several areas of Afghanistan, killing at least 17 people and injuring 11 others, a spokesman for Afghanistan's national disaster management authority said Thursday.

The dead included five members of a family in a property where the roof collapsed on Thursday in Kabkan, a district in the Herat province, according to Mohammad Yousaf Saeedi, spokesman for the Herat governor. Two of the victims were children.

Most of the casualties have occurred since Monday in districts hit by flooding, and the severe weather also disrupted daily life across central, northern, southern, and western regions, according to Mohammad Yousaf Saeedi, a spokesman for Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority.

Hamad said the floods also damaged infrastructure in the affected districts, killed livestock, and affected 1,800 families, worsening conditions in already vulnerable urban and rural communities.

Hamad said the agency has sent assessment teams to the worst-affected areas, with surveys ongoing to determine further needs. (AP)

## Saudi warplanes strike UAE-backed separatists in southern Yemen

**ADEN (YEMEN), Jan 2:** Saudi warplanes have reportedly struck on Friday forces in southern Yemen backed by the United Arab Emirates, a separatist leader says. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

This comes as a Saudi-led operation attempts to take over camps of the Southern Transitional Council, or STC, in the governorate of Haramout that borders Saudi Arabia. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE rose after the STC moved last month into Yemen's governorates of Hadramout and Mahra and seized an oil-rich region. The move pushed out forces affiliated with the Saudi-backed National Shield Forces, a group aligned with the coalition in fighting the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.

Meanwhile, the Saudi ambassador to Yemen accused the head of the STC of blocking a Saudi mediation delegation from landing in the southern city of Aden.

**Strikes on Hamdrumout**  
The STC deputy and former Hamdrumout governor, Ahmed bin Breik, said in a statement that the Saudi-backed National Shield Forces advanced toward the camps, but the separatists refused to withdraw, apparently leading to the airstrikes.

Salem al-Khanbashi, the governor of Hadramout who was chosen Friday by Yemen's internationally recognised government to command the Saudi-led forces in the province, called the current operation peaceful.

This operation is not a declaration of war and does not seek escalation, al-Khanbashi said in a speech aired on state media. This is a responsible pre-emptive measure to remove weapons and prevent chaos and the camps from being used to undermine the security in Hadramout, he added.

The Saudi-led coalition now demands the withdrawal of STC forces from the two governorates as part of de-escalation efforts. The STC has so far refused to hand over its weapons and camps.

Escalating tensions



In his post on X, the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed al-Jaber, said the kingdom had tried all efforts with STC for weeks "to stop the escalation" and to urge the separatists to leave Hadramout and Mahra, only to be faced with continued intransigence and rejection from Aidarous al-Zubaidi," the STC head.

Al-Jaber said the latest development was not permitting the Saudi delegation's jet to land in Aden, despite having agreed on its arrival with some STC leaders to find a solution that serves everyone and the public interest. Yemen's transport ministry, aligned with STC, said Saudi Arabia imposed on Thursday requirements mandating that flights to and from Aden International Airport undergo inspection in Jeddah. The ministry expressed shock and denounced the decision. There was no confirmation from Saudi authorities. A spokesperson with the transport ministry told The Associated Press late Thursday that all flights from and to the UAE were suspended until Saudi Arabia reverses these reported measures.

Yemen has been engulfed in a civil war for more than a decade, with the Houthis controlling much of the northern regions, while a Saudi-UAE-backed coalition supports the internationally recognised government in the south. (AP)

## US lawmakers write to Indian envoy seeking fair and timely trial for activist Umar Khalid

**NEW YORK, Jan 2:** A group of US lawmakers has written a letter to Indian Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra, urging a fair and timely trial for activist Umar Khalid in "accordance with international law."

US Representatives Jim McGovern and Jamie Raskin are among eight lawmakers who have expressed concern regarding the "prolonged pre-trial detention of individuals charged in connection with the February 2020 violence in Delhi," including Khalid.

Khalid and a few others have been booked under the stringent anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) and provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

"The US and India share a long-standing strategic

partnership that has historically been rooted in democratic values, constitutional governance and strong people-to-people ties," the letter said, adding that as the world's largest democracies, both nations have an interest in protecting and upholding freedom, the rule of law, human rights and pluralism.

"It is in this spirit" that the lawmakers said they are raising their concerns regarding Khalid's detention.

The lawmakers claimed that human rights organisations, legal experts and global media have raised questions about the fairness of the investigation and legal process related to Khalid's detention.

He "has been detained without bail for five years for charges levied under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, which independent human rights experts have warned may contravene international standards of equality before the law, due process and proportionality." (PTI)

## Police in Finland arrest 2 in connection with damage to undersea telecom cable

**HELSINKI, Jan 2:** Finnish authorities have arrested two people in connection with damage to an undersea telecommunications cable in the Gulf of Finland that occurred earlier this week between the capitals of Finland and Estonia, police said on Thursday.

The damage was discovered early on Wednesday in Estonia's exclusive economic zone. The cable belongs to Finnish telecommunications service provider Elisa and is considered to be critical undersea infrastructure.

Helsinki police have opened an investigation into aggravated criminal damage, attempted aggravated criminal damage and aggravated interference with telecommunications.

Officials placed two other people under travel bans as a result of the ongoing investigation, Helsinki police said in a statement Thursday.

The individuals' connections to the ship were not immediately clear, and police would not release their nationalities or other details.

The ship, named the Fitburg, was flagged in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It had been travelling from Russia to Israel. 14 crew

members hail from Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and were detained by Finnish authorities.

Finnish National Police Commissioner Ilkka Koskim ki said earlier this week that the ship was dragging its anchor for hours when it was discovered in Finland's exclusive economic zone. He noted investigators are not speculating on whether a state-level actor was behind the damage.

Finnish Customs discovered structural steel in the cargo that originated in Russia and falls under sanctions imposed by the European Union, the agency said in a statement.

"Import of such sanctioned goods into the EU is prohibited under EU sanctions regulations," the statement said. Finnish Customs continues to investigate the sequence of events and the applicability of EU sanctions legislation to this case.

The undersea cables and pipelines that crisscross one of the busiest shipping lanes in Europe link Nordic, Baltic and central European countries. They promote trade and energy security and, in some cases, reduce dependence on

Russian energy resources.

Finnish authorities last year charged the captain and two senior officers of a Russia-linked vessel, the Eagle S, that damaged undersea cables between Finland and Estonia on Christmas Day in 2024.

The Finnish deputy prosecutor general said in an August statement that charges of aggravated criminal mischief and aggravated interference with communications were filed against the captain and first and second officers of the oil tanker. The officers, whose names were not made public, denied the allegations, the statement said.

The Kremlin previously denied involvement in damaging the infrastructure, which provides power and communication for thousands of Europeans.

The Eagle S was flagged in the Cook Islands but had been described by Finnish customs officials and the European Union's executive commission as part of Russia's shadow fleet of fuel tankers. Those are ageing vessels with obscure ownership, acquired to evade Western sanctions during the war in Ukraine and operating without Western-regulated insurance. (AP)

## We are all thinking of you: New York City Mayor Mamdani writes a note for activist Umar Khalid

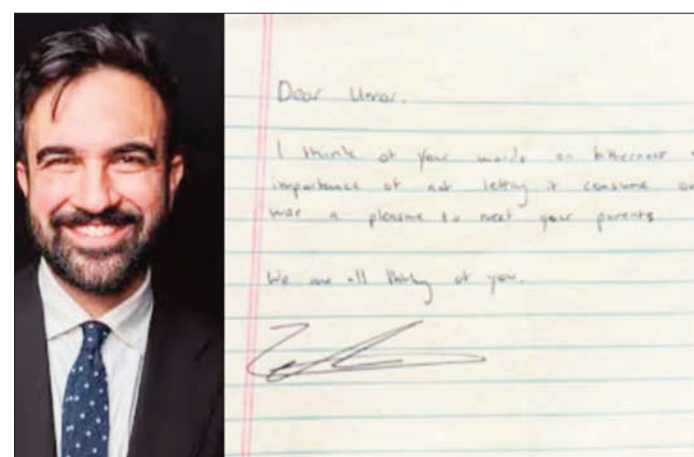
**NEW YORK, Jan 2:** New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has written a note for activist Umar Khalid, recalling his words on "bitterness" and the importance of not letting it consume one's self.

The note was posted on X by Khalid's partner Banojyotsna Lahiri. "When prisons try to isolate, words travel. Zohran Mamdani writes to Umar Khalid," the caption accompanying the note said.

"Dear Umar, I think of your words on bitterness often, and the importance of not letting it consume one's self. It was a pleasure to meet your parents. We are all thinking of you," the handwritten note signed by Mamdani said.

Khalid and a few others have been booked under the stringent anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) and provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

Meanwhile, a group of US lawmakers has written to Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra



urging that Khalid be granted bail and a "fair, timely trial in accordance with international law."

US Representatives Jim McGovern and Jamie Raskin are among eight lawmakers who wrote to Kwatra expressing "our continued concern regarding the prolonged pre-trial detention of individuals charged in connection with the February 2020 violence in Delhi," including Khalid.

"The US and India share a long-standing strategic partnership that has historically been rooted in

democratic values, constitutional governance and strong people-to-people ties," the letter said adding that as the world's largest democracies, both nations have an interest in protecting and upholding freedom, the rule of law, human rights and pluralism.

"It is in this spirit" that the lawmakers said they are raising their concerns regarding Khalid's detention.

The lawmakers claimed that human rights organisations, legal experts and global media have

raised questions about the fairness of the investigation and legal process related to Khalid's detention.

He "has been detained without bail for five years for charges levied under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, which independent human rights experts have warned may contravene international standards of equality before the law, due process and proportionality." The US Representatives further added that they understand that these matters are presently under consideration before the Supreme Court of India and welcomed the news that Khalid received temporary bail to attend his sister's wedding.

They urged that Khalid be granted bail and released for the duration of the court's proceedings. "With respect for India's democratic institutions and its role as a key partner of the US, we request that your Government share the steps being taken to ensure that the judicial proceedings against Khalid and those of his co-accused who remain in detention comport with international standards," the lawmakers said. (PTI)

# 'Vidyajyoti' schools successful in Tripura, says CM Manik Saha



**AGARTALA, Jan 2:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said the move to introduce Vidyajyoti Schools has been successful in the state. The Vidyajyoti Schools are the state's initiative introduced in 2021 to change the education system through modern infrastructure, a holistic approach, and a commitment to empowering students.

Addressing a programme in Gomatipur district's Udaipur, the chief minister said the move to transform 125 institutes into Vidyajyoti schools has become successful in the state. Under the Vidyajyoti programme, CBSE curriculum in English has been introduced in 125

government-run schools to impart quality education. "The opposition who are active in fault finding slammed when the government transformed 125 state government-run schools into Vidyajyoti Schools. But today, the decision appeared beneficial and successful," he said. The pass percentage of Vidyajyoti schools in Madhyamik (class 10 board exam) has increased from 86 per cent in 2024 to 92 per cent in 2025. Similarly, the success rate in higher secondary level has risen from 55 per cent in 2024 to 77.76 per cent in 2025.

Saha said the present government has left no stone unturned to provide better facilities for ensuring quality education from the school level to colleges. Listing a number of schemes, he said, "Several initiatives were introduced for the students. To encourage girl students, the government has distributed 1.22 lakh bicycles free of cost." "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been introduced in 1,384 schools, while smart classes are made available in 1,210 schools and tinkering laboratories were set up in 367 schools," he said. Lauding the New Education Policy, Saha said, "The NEP gives more flexibility to the students to change their course or streams. Even if a particular student leaves any course midway, he or she will get a certificate." (PTI)

# NFR advances rail modernisation with LHB coaches on key Northeast trains

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 2:** The North-east Frontier Railway has introduced modern LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) coaches on two important train services—the Agartala-Dharmanagar-Agartala Passenger and the Silchar-Agartala-Silchar Express—in a move aimed at enhancing passenger safety, comfort and overall travel experience in the region.

According to an official statement, the upgraded LHB rake of the Agartala-Dharmanagar-Agartala Passenger train (No 55675/55676) was ceremonially flagged off on January 1 at Agartala Railway Station by Rajib Bhattacharjee, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), and Mina Rani Sarkar, MLA.

Similarly, the Silchar-Agartala-Silchar Express (No 15664/15663) with LHB coaches was flagged off at Silchar Railway Station by Kanad Purkayastha, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Parimal Suklabaidya, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), and Dipayan Chakraborty, MLA, in the presence of senior railway officials.

The introduction of LHB coaches marks a significant upgrade from conventional ICF



coaches, incorporating advanced safety features such as anti-climbing devices, superior braking systems and improved suspension for smoother rides.

The new coaches also offer better seating, enhanced interiors and improved maintenance standards, contributing to a safer and more comfortable journey for passengers. This upgradation forms part of Indian Railways' broader initiative to modernise rolling stock and deliver world-class passenger serv-

ices. The move is expected to benefit daily commuters, long-distance travellers and tourists, while strengthening rail connectivity between Tripura, Assam and adjoining regions.

Northeast Frontier Railway reaffirmed its commitment to the continuous improvement of passenger amenities, operational efficiency and service reliability, in line with Indian Railways' vision of a modern, safe and passenger-centric railway network.

# Siang River holds vast potential as adventure, eco-tourism hub: Mein



**ITANAGAR, Jan 2:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowma Mein on Friday said the Siang River holds immense potential as a hub for adventure sports and eco-tourism in the state, stressing that such initiatives must be rooted in sustainability and community participation.

Mein made the remarks after a rafting expedition on the mighty Siang on Friday, welcoming the New Year where adventure meets nature. "Moments like these capture the true spirit of Arunachal Pradesh, its untamed landscapes, rich rivers, and growing potential as a destination for adventure sports and eco-tourism," the deputy chief minister said in a post on X. He added that tourism can play a key role in inclusive growth across the state. Reflecting on the experience, Mein said such initiatives clearly demonstrate the vast potential of the Siang River as a centre for adventure and eco-tourism.

"These experiences reinforce the state's commitment to promoting adventure sports, sustainable tourism and livelihood opportunities," Mein said, adding that responsible tourism can play a key role in local employment generation while preserving the state's pristine natural environment. (PTI)

# Speculation grows over formation of 'popular government' in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Jan 2:** Speculations have once again peaked in Manipur regarding the formation of what it called "popular government".

Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 2025. Reports said that Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and some top Manipur government officials are now in New Delhi meeting central leaders on the issues of Manipur. The reports also said that the Governor will update the Manipur situation with the central leaders. Ajay Kumar Bhalla and others left Imphal for Delhi on January 1.

Meanwhile, speculations are doing the rounds that one of the Governor's agenda of going to Delhi is in connection with the formation of a "popular government" in Manipur. Some quarters are also speculating that there is a strong possibility of the formation of a "popular government" by January.

It can be recalled here that since the imposition of President's Rule, most BJP MLAs, except the 10 Kuki-Zo legislators, have been urging the central leadership to reconstitute a popular government. On the other hand, the 10 Kuki-Zo MLAs, including seven from the BJP, have maintained their demand for a 'separate administration' before any new government formation.

In the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly, the BJP holds 32 seats, the NPP seven, JD(U) six, NPF five, KPA two, and the Congress five, along with three independents. (NNN)

# Arunachal CM meets gov, briefs him on recent engagements

**ITANAGAR, Jan 2:** Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu met Governor KT Parnaik on Friday and briefed each other on recent engagements.

Both leaders exchanged New Year greetings and reaffirmed their shared commitment to work together for peace, progress and the overall well-being of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, a statement said.

Parnaik briefed the chief minister on his recent engagements with Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, Chief of

Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, and discussions held during a high-level security review meeting at Lok Bhavan.

Khandu apprised the governor of ongoing development initiatives across various districts.

He also shared feedback from his recent district tours and participation in the Dong Sunrise Festival.

Chief Secretary Manish Gupta also met the governor separately during the day and exchanged New Year greet-

ings. Parnaik suggested closer monitoring of development projects through effective use of geospatial technologies, stressing transparency, timely execution and evidence-based decision-making.

The chief secretary briefed the governor on ongoing initiatives related to urban development, the status of hydropower projects, security in the eastern districts, and preparations for an upcoming meeting of the North Eastern Council. (PTI)

# Thadou Inpi Manipur seeks recognition of Thadou IDPs outside state as separate relief category

**IMPHAL, Jan 2:** Thadou Inpi Manipur (TIM), the apex body representing the Thadou community, said it once again submitted a formal memorandum to key authorities, including the Governor of Manipur, Justice Gita Mittal (Retd), Chairperson of the Supreme Court Appointed Committee on Manipur Violence, 2023, the Union Home Secretary, and the Chief Secretary of Manipur. TIM said in a statement on Friday.

The memorandum sought urgent recognition of Thadou internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing outside Manipur as a distinct third category eligible for relief, rehabilitation, and resettlement support amid the ongoing violence in the state.

This submission comes in response to the press release issued by the Chief Secretary of Manipur on December 30, 2025, regarding the government's initiatives for IDPs.

While appreciating the state and the central governments' sustained efforts, including the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Package announced in the Manipur Budget 2025-26, phased resettlement planning, security-led confidence-building measures, and robust monitoring mechanisms, Thadou Inpi Manipur expressed deep discontentment

over the consistent oversight of Thadou IDPs "who have been forced to seek shelter beyond Manipur's borders".

The memorandum highlighted that nearly two years and eight months of violence have forced many Thadou families to flee Manipur, not voluntarily but to protect their lives and livelihoods.

"These IDPs, now living outside the state, are wrongly assumed to be self-sufficient simply because they are not in government-designated relief camps. This misconception ignores the severe social, psychological, educational, and economic hardships they face, including loss of homes and land, disrupted education for their children, and exclusion from official relief mechanisms", TIM added. The memorandum then underscored the need to recognise Thadou IDPs residing outside Manipur as a distinct category, in addition to the existing classifications of IDPs living in relief camps within the State and those residing outside camps or already resettled, or in the process of resettlement, within Manipur.

It highlighted that the self-reliance demonstrated by these displaced families, often through borrowing, informal labor, or community support, should not be misconstrued as economic stability.

"Instead, it underscores the immense costs borne by these individuals, who remain invisible in official data and planning processes", TIM also stated.

Thadou Inpi Manipur also sought formal recognition of Thadou IDPs residing outside Manipur as a distinct third category, their inclusion in state and central policy processes, systematic assessment of their losses and present conditions, and equal access to relief, rehabilitation, resettlement, housing, livelihood, and education support without location-based discrimination. TIM also requested guidance from the Justice Gita Mittal Committee to ensure equity, inclusion, and humanitarian sensitivity in addressing this group.

The memorandum reaffirmed commitment to the government's assurances of dignified, inclusive, secure, and sustainable resettlement for all affected by the conflict. "Recognizing this overlooked group will uphold justice and equity and prevent the inadvertent exclusion of some of the most silently affected victims", TIM further said. Thadou Inpi Manipur then urged all stakeholders to give sympathetic consideration to the memorandum and to address this gap in relief efforts without delay. (NNN)

No.23/228/2021-2022/06 Dated Kokrajhar, the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2026

**SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Sealed tender subsequently to be drawn in F-2 form affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25p (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only are invited from the Registered PWD Contractor's under Class-I (A, B, C) of Assam PWD (Rural Roads), Class-II Roads and Class-III Roads category will be received for the following works up to 2-00 P.M. 16-01-2026 in the office of the Executive Engineer, PWRD Kokrajhar Rural Roads Division, Kokrajhar which will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 P.M in presence of the tenderers or their authorized agent.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (in Rs.) (Including G.S.T. L.W.C.)	Earliest Money (in Rs.) (ST, SC, OBC-1% & GEN-2%)	Cost of Tender Paper (in Rs.)	Time for completion in months
1	Recovery & Reconstruction of Kachugaon Sonkosh Road to Dumbazar road under NDRF (PDNA-2022) for the year 2025-26	9,99,600.00	1%- Rs. 9,996/- 2%- Rs. 19,992/-	Rs. 1000/-	3 (Three) months
2	Recovery & Reconstruction of Raimona to Dumbazar road under NDRF (PDNA-2022) for the year 2025-26.	11,99,500.00	1%- Rs. 11,995/- 2%- Rs. 23,990/-	Rs. 1000/-	3 (Three) months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 4.00 P.M. on all working days from 03-01-2026 to 06-01-2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment of cost of tender paper in the form of Banker Cheque/Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Executive Engineer, PWRD Kokrajhar Rural Roads Division.

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer, PWD,  
Kokrajhar Rural Roads Division

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3516

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT A. H. & VETERINARY OFFICER**  
**KARBI ANGLONG, DIPHU.**

No.KDVD/Ad & Interview Etc. /2/2023/513 Dated Diphu the 02/01/2025.

**CORRIGENDUM OF ADVERTISEMENT**

In reference to letter No.KDVD/Ad&Interview Etc./2/2023/511 Dated 30/12/2025, Applications are invited from eligible candidates registered in employment exchange in standard form for filling up the following vacant sanctioned **Grade-IV posts** in the Scale of **Pay Band-1, 12000-37500 + Grade Pay of Rs.3900/- plus** other allowances as admissible under rule as per State Govt. norms RoP, 2017 in A.H. & Veterinary Department, Karbi Anglong, Diphu as per details given below on or before **09/01/2026**.

Sl. No.	Department Name	Name of Post	No. of Post	Qualification
1	District Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department	Animal Attendant under SDVO, Hamren	1	Class-VIII passed
2		Poultry Attendant under Govt Pig cum Poultry farm, Diphu	1	
3		Semen Carrier under ICDP, Manja	1	
4		Animal Attendant BBP, Manja	1	
5		Peon under FDF, Manja & Govt. Poultry farm, Hamren- one each.	2	
<b>Total</b>		<b>Grade-IV- 6 Nos.</b>		

**TERMS & CONDITION**

- The candidates should not be less than 18 years and not be more than 40 years as on 01/01/2025. The upper age limit is relaxable as follows
  - By 5 years for SC/ST candidate, i.e upto 45 years.
  - By 3 years for OBC/MOBC candidate, i.e 43 years.
  - By 2 years for Ex-Servicemen i.e upto 42 years.
- Incomplete applicants shall be summarily rejected on the post.
- Application received either by post or by hand after the last date of submission of application will not be accepted under any circumstances.
- The selected candidate will be entitled with new pension scheme (NPS) 2005 as directed of Government.
- Self-Attested copies of all testimonials, certificate of educational qualification, Birth Certificate, Caste/Tribe Certificate, Current employment exchange registration number and two copies of recent passport size photographs.
- The authority reserves all rights to cancel/reject the application without assigning any reason thereof and no further communication will be entertained.
- Candidate willing to apply more than one post shall have to submit separate application form for each post.
- The complete application should be addressed and submitted to the District. A.H & Vety. Office, Karbi Anglong on or before 09-01-2026 during office hours except on holidays under NI Act. Candidates should indicate the name of the post applied for on the front cover of envelope.
- The eligible candidates shall apply in Standard form of application along with KAAC money receipt of Rs.10/- (Rupees ten) for ST/SC and Rs.20/- (Rupees twenty) for others candidates as application fees.
- Canvassing in any form will lead to disqualification.
- No TA/DA will be provided to any candidate from the department for the same.
- The competent authority reserves all rights to enhance or reduce the post and also to cancel/postpone the interview at any time without assigning any reason thereof and without any intimation to the candidate.
- The applicant shall write his or her preferred place of posting in the space given between "Department/Office and 1. Name in full (Block)" in standard form.
- The transfer on the employees shall be governed by the order No.KAAC/estt-675/P(B)/MISC/2025-26/15 Dated 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct. 2025.

**N. B.** Next working day will be counted for interview if some unavoidable holiday/Bandh Call arise.

Sd/-  
District A.H. & Vety. Officer  
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

## The road to power in Kerala is likely to be rough, given the party has multiple chief ministerial hopefuls in the race

# After a year of multiple setbacks, Cong hopes for revival in 2026

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** The Congress endured another gloomy year in 2025, as it posted one of its worst performances in Bihar and Delhi assembly polls, and battled internal factionalism in Karnataka, one of the only three states the party rules on its own.

Promising results in the Kerala local body polls offered a flicker of hope for the grand old party that looks for a revival in 2026.

Top Congress leaders, including organisation general secretary K C Venugopal, described the Kerala local body poll results as a sign of things to come in this year's state elections, where the Congress-led United Democratic Front will face off against the incumbent Left Democratic Front for power.

The Congress is equally banking on Assam to reverse its electoral fortunes, although it remains acutely conscious of the formidable opponent in Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP.

Elections apart, the principal opposition party continued to struggle on the organisational front, with seniors openly demanding strengthening the organisation at the grassroots. The demands cropped up towards the fag end of 2025, with a large section of the party convinced that frontal bodies have to step up for the parent organisation to revive.

Party veteran Digvijaya Singh



led the demand for organisational revamp, hailing the model of the ruling BJP's mothership RSS as a disciplined cadre force. Congress outlier Shashi Tharoor backed Digvijaya Singh. Going forward, the Congress will draw solace from its recent success in local body elections in Kerala, which gave a ray of hope to the party that has been out of power in the state for close to a decade.

The road to power in Kerala is likely to be rough, given the party has multiple chief ministerial hopefuls in the race, with Venugopal, a well-known Rahul Gandhi favourite, as the frontrunner. Insiders say the party's ability to manage competing ambitions will

matter in Kerala.

The factional wars in the Congress continued in other states also, with the battle between Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and his deputy DK Shivakumar surfacing routinely through November as the party completed its half-term in the state. Shivakumar's supporters have been awaiting a turn of power in the state, citing a promise that the chief minister's post would be rotated after half a term. Congress leaders have publicly rejected apprehensions of tension in Karnataka, but observers say the trouble could be real.

As the party negotiated tough terrains on multiple fronts in 2025, it moved into a permanent

home -- Indira Bhavan -- in central Delhi. The official inauguration of the plush headquarters took place on January 15, 2025, marking an end to the Congress' 50-year stay at the iconic 24, Akbar Road, bungalow.

The shift to a new abode was quickly followed by a major electoral drubbing for the Congress in Delhi, as it failed to win a single seat in the assembly for a second time in a row. The BJP trounced the AAP in the polls and returned to power in the city after 27 years. Later in the year, the party suffered yet another face loss, this time in Bihar.

The Congress posted its second-worst performance in electoral history, managing to win only six of the over 50 seats it contested in the state and losing deposits in most seats as its "vote chori" pitch failed to make any impact on the ground.

The party could manage to just finish ahead of Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM and Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM), each of which bagged five seats. In the bypolls held on various seats during the year, it was a mixed bag for the Congress. However, its loss in Punjab's Tarn Taran assembly bypoll to the ruling AAP has raised questions about the party's chances to come back to power in the state in 2027.

The year 2025 ended with

voices within the party growing on the weak organisational set-up and calls for strengthening it. Senior leader Digvijaya Singh created a row after he lauded the strength of the RSS-BJP organisation and called for strengthening the Congress at the grassroots.

While the Congress tried to set the political narratives for most part of the year with its continued attack on the BJP over the "change of Constitution" barb, its aggressive approach on the "vote chori" charge against the ruling dispensation and the Election Commission did not translate into votes as it had expected in Bihar.

Rahul Gandhi's 'Voter Adhikar Yatra', a consistent anti-Election Commission and anti-SIR narrative, and his appeals to 'Gen Z' to "restore democracy" had no takers in the politically sensitive state. While the election results of 2025 acted as a dampener for the party cadres, the victory in local body elections in Kerala is giving the party a ray of hope in the southern state. In 2026, it faces an emboldened BJP in a direct fight in Assam, a formidable rival in the CPI-M in Kerala, and Mamata Banerjee's TMC, which has been ruling West Bengal for the past 15 years. In Tamil Nadu, the Congress goes to the polls with its partner DMK, which faces anti-incumbency. (PTI)

## Rajnath flags 'alarming trend' of educated people indulging in anti-national activities

**UDAIPUR, Jan 2:** Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said that an alarming trend of white-collar terrorism is emerging in the country, wherein highly-educated people are engaging in anti-social and anti-national activities.

Singh pointed at the November 10 car bomb blast near the Red Fort in Delhi, where the perpetrators were found to be doctors.

"Today, an alarming trend of white-collar terrorism is emerging in the country. Highly-educated people are working against society and the country," Singh said at the 104th foundation day event of Bhalpal Nobles' University here. "The perpetrators of the (Delhi) bomb blast were doctors -- those who write 'Rx' on prescriptions, yet have RDX in their hands. This highlights the need for knowledge to be accompanied by values and character," the defence minister said.

"The purpose of education is not only professional success but also the development of morality, ethics and human character," he said.

The explosives-laden i20 car that detonated outside the Red Fort on November 10, killing 15 people, was driven by Dr Umar-un-

Nabi.

The probe unravelled a 'white-collar' terror module, leading to the arrests of three doctors -- Muzammil Ganai, Adeel Rafter and Shaheena Saeed -- among others.

Singh also said that many defence startups are doing remarkable work in the country.

"I am confident that in the next 15-20 years, India will become fully self-reliant in weapons," the defence minister said.

He also said that artificial intelligence, machine learning and other technologies are transforming people's lives and work, and they must be used positively to drive India's development.

India is the world's fourth-largest economy, which is on track to become the third-largest by 2030, Singh said, noting that universities have a big role to play in this journey.

He also emphasised the importance of understanding the delicate balance between self-respect and ego, and urged people not to cross the fine line between the two.

"While the feeling of self-respect is important, it should never transform into arrogance," Singh said. (PTI)

## MHA restores ₹ 100 crore project approval powers to Ladakh LG

**LEH/JAMMU Jan 2:** The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday restored the delegation of powers to the lieutenant governor of Ladakh for appraisal and approval of projects costing up to ₹ 100 crore under the delegation of financial powers rules (DFPRs).

In an official order of MHA, the ministry said it has approved "the delegation of powers for appraisal and approval of projects up to ₹ 100 crore under DFPRs, 2024, to the Administrators, LGs" of union territories without legislatures, including Ladakh.

"I am directed to refer to convey the approval of the competent authority for the delegation of powers for appraisal and approval of projects up to ₹ 100 crore under DFPRs, 2024, to the administrators and LGs of the union territories of Ladakh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep, (subject to the certain condition)" Under Secretary to the Government of India, MHA, Lendup Sherpa said in an order.

The order comes a month after the MHA had withdrawn the existing delegated powers of the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh to approve schemes and projects up to ₹ 100 crore, as well as the powers of Administrative Secretaries to approve projects up to ₹ 20 crore. As per the fresh order, the powers will be exercised by the Lieutenant Governor "in consultation with secretary (Finance), Financial Advisor equivalent of the respective union territory," and subject to the availability of adequate budgetary provisions. The ministry also clarified that "the delegated powers shall not be further re-delegated." It further said that details of all proposals approved under the delegated powers will have to be furnished to the Department of Expenditure through the MHA on a quarterly basis. (PTI)

## PM stays silent whenever poor die: Rahul blasts BJP over Indore water tragedy

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday targeted the BJP's double-engine government in Madhya Pradesh after at least 10 people died allegedly due to contaminated water in Indore and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is always silent whenever poor die.

Gandhi alleged that Madhya Pradesh has become the epicentre of misgovernance and cited various instances of casualties reportedly due to cough syrups, poor hygiene at government hospitals and now due to contaminated water.

"Not water, but poison was distributed in Indore, and the administration remained in deep slumber," he said in a post on X in Hindi. "Every home is filled with mourning, the poor are helpless - and on top of that, BJP leaders are making arrogant statements. Those who lost their lives and livelihoods needed solace; the government offered arrogance," he said.

Senior MP cabinet minister Kailash Vijayvargiya on Thursday triggered a controversy after he used an objectionable word on camera -- ghanta (loosely translating to nonsense) -- when questioned by a TV

journalist about the water contamination incident.

Gandhi, in his post, asked why complaints were not heard when people repeatedly complained about dirty, smelly water.

"How did sewage get mixed with the drinking water? Why wasn't the supply stopped in time? When will action be taken against the responsible officers and leaders?" the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha asked.

"These aren't trivial questions -- they demand accountability. Clean water isn't a favour, it's a right to life. And the BJP's double engine government, its negligent administration, and insensitive leadership are solely responsible for the destruction of this right," he said.

"Madhya Pradesh has now become the epicentre of misgovernance - deaths from cough syrup, rats killing children in government hospitals, and now deaths from drinking sewage-contaminated water. And whenever the poor die, Modi ji remains silent, as always," Gandhi alleged.

Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava on Friday said he has received information

about 10 deaths due to a diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated water in the Bhagirathpura area of the city.

However, local residents have claimed that 14 individuals, including a six-month-old infant, have died due to the health crisis. The health department has not confirmed this claim.

Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) Dr Madhav Prasad Hasani said on Thursday that laboratory test reports from a city medical college had confirmed that the drinking water from the locality was contaminated due to a leakage in a pipeline.

The CMHO, however, did not share the detailed findings of the report. Administrative officials have also been avoiding giving clear information about it. Officials said a leakage was found in the main drinking water supply pipeline near a public outpost in Bhagirathpura, at a spot over which a toilet has been constructed. They claimed the leakage led to contamination of the water supply.

More than 1,400 people have been affected by vomiting and diarrhoea in Bhagirathpura over the past nine days. (PTI)

## SIR in 12 states/UTs: Enumeration form collection 'much less' in urban areas

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** The collection of enumeration forms from electors in urban areas was "much less" as compared to rural areas in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voters' list in nine states and three Union Territories, EC officials said on Friday citing available trends.

They said most likely reason for electors not returning filled up enumeration forms is that electors are not available at home due to work or professional commitments. Constant migration was seen as another reason behind the lower form collection.

In rural areas, the enumeration form collection by booth-level officials was much higher as compared to urban areas.

Lucknow, Kanpur, Noida were among the cities that saw "much less" form collection, officials said quoting available trends from states where SIR is in progress.

They said a similar trend was seen in cities, including Patna, when the voters' clean up exercise took place in Bihar last year.

Phase II of SIR began in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal on November 4.

Except for Uttar Pradesh, draft electoral rolls have been published in all other states and UTs.

In Assam, a separate 'special revision' of electoral rolls is in progress. The last SIR in states will serve as the cut-off date, just as the 2003 voter list of Bihar was used by the EC for intensive revision. (PTI)

## ED arrests Gujarat IAS officer in bribery-linked money laundering case

**AHMEDABAD, Jan 2:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested IAS officer and former collector of Gujarat's Surendranagar district, Rajendrakumar Patel, in connection with a bribery-linked money laundering case, officials said on Friday. Patel, a 2015-batch IAS officer who last served as the collector of Surendranagar, was transferred without posting a week ago following the arrest of a deputy mamlatdar (revenue officer) Chandrasingh Mori from the latter's office by the ED in a money laundering case stemming from bribery.

"The ED has arrested Patel in a connection with a bribery-linked money laundering case," confirmed a senior police official. The central agency is investigating alleged money laundering involving Mori and others, following registration of an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Later, based on a complaint by the ED, the Gujarat Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) registered an FIR against Patel, his personal assistant Jayrajsinh Jhala, clerk Mayursinh Gohil, and deputy mamlatdar Chandrasingh Mori under the Prevention of Corruption Act. (PTI)

## Indore water contamination: Infant born after 10-year wait dies

**INDORE, Jan 2:** A child born after 10 years of fervent prayers and vows died within days due to water contamination that has claimed several lives in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city.

An eerie silence prevailed in an alley in the Marathi Mohalla of the Bhagirathpura area, where six-month-old Avyan Sahu lived with his family. A simple act of diluting packaged milk with water cost the baby his life and plunged the Sahu family into unbearable grief. The family claims it has rejected the government's compensation for the death of the child, who was born after 10 years of prayers and vows. The government has announced an ex-gratia of ₹ 2 lakh each to the families of the deceased persons. Residents have claimed that 15 people died due to the vomiting-diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated drinking water in Bhagirathpura over the last year, with Avyan being the youngest among them.

The health department, however, has not confirmed this claim and said only four deaths occurred in the outbreak. Talking to PTI on Friday, Avyan's grandmother, Krishna Sahu, said, "We have not taken any compensation from the state government so far. Our child is gone. Will the compensation bring him back to life? Money is not greater than a child."

According to the family, Avyan died on December 29. She said her daughter gave birth to Avyan after 10 years of prayers and vows. "The entire family prayed for his birth and made a vow at Hussain Tekri Dargah. My prayers were answered, but I never imagined that the baby would leave us so soon," she said in tears. Krishna Sahu said the child was healthy and had put on five kgs. "He played in his mother's lap. One day, he suddenly started suffering from diarrhoea and, on a doctor's advice, we started with medicines at home. His condition, however, worsened, and he was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead," she said. (PTI)

## India-UK trade pact expected to come into force by first half of 2026: British envoy

**KOLKATA, Jan 2:** The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is expected to be implemented in the first half of 2026, marking a new era in partnership between the two nations, British Deputy High Commissioner Andrew Fleming said.

Speaking to PTI, he described the pact as the most "comprehensive and ambitious" deal negotiated by both governments.

He noted that the agreement, which spans approximately 20,000 pages, is designed to offer opportunities for businesses of all sizes, particularly for exporters in West Bengal and the 12 states across East and Northeast India.

"This free trade agreement is the most comprehensive and ambitious agreement that my government has negotiated. I think the same probably would apply for the Indian government too," Fleming said, urging regional businesses to

begin preparations immediately to harness the upcoming benefits.

India inked the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the UK on July 24. It is the country's most ambitious trade agreement till date, covering 26 sectors from tariffs to technology. The pact is aimed at doubling bilateral trade in goods and services to USD 112 billion from USD 56 billion at present. Asked about the timeline for the roll-out of the agreement, Fleming stated, "I mentioned the first half of 2026 is our hope and expectation. So we're getting closer and closer."

Under the CETA, Indian exporters will gain duty-free access for 99 per cent of their products to the UK market, covering nearly 100 per cent of the trade value.

This includes labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, marine products, gems and jewellery, and toys, as well as high-



growth sectors like engineering goods, chemicals, and auto components. The agreement is also expected to benefit UK goods, such as whisky, through tariff rationalisation. Beyond goods, the pact addresses services—a core strength of

the Indian economy. India exported over USD 19.8 billion in services to the UK in 2023, and the new framework promises to expand this through enhanced mobility for professionals across the IT sector.

A unique feature of the CETA is

the inclusion of a first-of-its-kind chapter on women and gender.

The British deputy high commissioner to Kolkata highlighted that this provision is particularly significant for West Bengal, which accounts for the highest percentage of woman-led businesses in India at 23 per cent. This focus is expected to spur large-scale employment and empower artisans and MSMEs. The deal aligns with the "Vision 2035" roadmap for deeper ties, covering information technology, financial services, education, telecom, and engineering.

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has previously noted that the free trade agreement would serve as a catalyst for inclusive growth, benefiting farmers, artisans, and innovators while safeguarding India's core interests and accelerating its journey towards becoming a global economic powerhouse. (PTI)

## CDS Gen Anil Chauhan inaugurates upgraded runway at IAF base in Car Nicobar island



**SRI VIJAYA PURAM, Jan 2:** Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Friday inaugurated the upgraded runway at the Indian Air Force's (IAF) Car Nicobar air base in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The apron areas have been expanded for smooth aircraft movement, and the facility will help the IAF carry out long-range firing exercises in a minimal time, officials said.

The upgraded runway will also support the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN), improving civil air connectivity to remote island areas.

It will further enhance Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief capability by enabling swift mobilisation of resources during natural calamities and emergencies in the earthquake and tsunami-prone region and adjoining areas, the officials said.

Gen Chauhan arrived in Car Nicobar Island around 11.30 am and was welcomed by Vice Admiral Ajay Kochhar, Commander-in-Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), and several other senior officials.

"The CDS inaugurated the resurfaced and upgraded runway at the Indian Air Force's Car Nicobar Air Base," an official said.

Located nearly 535 km from Sri Vijaya Puram, Car Nicobar in Nicobar district suffered the maximum damage during the 2004 Tsunami.

"The upgraded runway will give more strength to the eastern front due to its direct strategic oversight of the Malacca Strait - a global maritime lifeline/passageway for international trade and energy supplies through ships. It will give the Indian Air Force (IAF) more ability for quick air operations," a senior official said.

The CDS also paid a visit to the Tsunami Memorial, he added.

"The visit of CDS highlights the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for national security and our focus on 'Act East' policy, and the Prime Minister's vision for security & growth for all in the region," a senior Command official said.

Later, Gen Chauhan interacted with senior officials and highlighted the geostrategic potential of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, while emphasising the critical role played by ANC towards nation building as well as for supporting military operations in the area.

He also reviewed the operational role of Andaman and Nicobar Command, ongoing infrastructure development, and the level of joint services integration among the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard.

The CDS emphasised the importance of seamless coordination to strengthen surveillance, deterrence and rapid response capability in the region. (PTI)

## Centre's unilateral decisions of 2019 haven't resolved Kashmir conflict: Mirwaiz Umar Farooq

**SRINAGAR, Jan 2:** Moderate separatist voice and Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Friday said the Centre's "unilateral" decisions in 2019 with regard to Jammu and Kashmir have not resolved the conflict in the region, which, he claimed, can erupt at any time.

He also said the "trust deficit" between the people of Kashmir and New Delhi "has widened, not shrunk".

The mirwaiz, who was put under house arrest on Friday and not allowed to lead the congregational prayers at the Jamia Masjid here, addressed people through a video posted on his X handle.

He said as another year begins, "painful memories of 2025 stay with us".

"It was a year marked by tragedy and uncertainty. The horrific Pahalgam attack shook us deeply. Unequivocally condemned by one and all in the valley, it led to a lot of anxiety among the people as they were targeted and homes demolished. This was followed by another India-Pakistan war and a stark reminder of how fragile peace in the region continues to be," he said.

He also referred to the blast near the Red Fort in Delhi in November.

"Despite making unilateral changes in 2019, the reality is that the Kashmir conflict continues to



keep the region in an unsettled state that can erupt anytime. That is why wars are paused, not ended, and dialogue finds no takers," the mirwaiz said.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre abrogated the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution on August 5, 2019, and bifurcated the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into Union territories.

The separatist-cum-religious leader said "not much has changed" for Kashmiris, who find themselves at the "receiving end of suspicion and attacks" in parts of India.

"The trust deficit between them (Kashmiris) and New Delhi has widened, not shrunk. Enforced silence is projected as acquiescence. Wounds remain open, problems unaddressed and an elected government of a Union Territory

complains of being powerless," he said. Referring to the banning of his Awami Action Committee, the mirwaiz said the AAC is a socio-political institution that reached out to people in need, advocating peace, dialogue and resolution.

The AAC, along with the Iti-hadul Muslimeen -- both part of the Hurriyat Conference -- were banned in March last year.

Pointing out to the removal of his designation as the "chairman of Hurriyat Conference" from his bio on his X handle, the mirwaiz said he was left with "little choice" to safeguard the minimal channel of communication available to him "or face the risk of complete silencing".

"With Hurriyat constituents banned, all offices sealed and institutions closed, leaders and activists either in jails or under constant sur-

veillance, social media remains the only platform that gives some voice and opportunity to connect with people and the outside world," he said.

He, however, asserted that his beliefs and convictions have not changed "not even by a comma".

"Some have criticised this move as a compromise. To them I say, how and for what? They make a strange argument -- for being provided security. But it was provided to me since the day of my father's martyrdom 35 years ago. If I did not compromise for it since then, why should I compromise now?" he added.

The separatist leader said his commitments to the people of Jammu and Kashmir "are non-negotiable -- rooted in principles and beliefs that stem from my convictions both as a Muslim and a responsible leader to people".

He said he sees himself as a channel of lasting peace, brotherhood and reconciliation for his people and the region.

"In the past, I have engaged with the leadership of the subcontinent and successive Indian leaders -- including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Shri L K Advani -- in sincere efforts of dialogue. My path remains the same," he said. (PTI)

## Satellite images claiming strikes on military infra in Punjab during Op Sindoor misleading: Sources

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** Some Pakistani elements are using social media to allegedly circulate "misleading and unverified satellite images", falsely claiming strikes on Indian military facilities in Punjab during Operation Sindoor with the aim to "resurrect a failed narrative", people familiar with the matter said.

Independent verification of the locations shown in these images "confirms that no destruction or damage is visible" at the alleged targets, they said on Friday. The latest social media push relies on unverified imagery and "recycled propaganda", which does not withstand independent scrutiny, they added.

India launched Operation Sindoor last year on May 7 in response to the Pahalgam terror attack, and engaged in a four-day military conflict with Pakistan. Indian officials and military officers during press briefings then had underlined that they had to also counter a "misinformation campaign".

In a desperate attempt to "resurrect a failed narrative", some Pakistani elements have "once again turned to social media to circulate misleading and unverified satellite images, falsely claiming strikes on Indian military facilities in Punjab, including areas around Amritsar, during Operation Sindoor," a person familiar with the matter said.

The facts, however, remain unchanged and there is no credible evidence to support claims of Pakistani strikes on Indian military facilities in Punjab during Operation Sindoor, they said.

Indian military facilities cited in the posts "remain intact, with no signs of blast impact, structural damage, or secondary effects that would be expected from a strike," another person familiar with the matter said. The sudden appearance of these visuals seven months later, "without verifiable timestamps, satellite-source details, or corroboration, suggests a post facto attempt to manufacture evidence rather than present genuine documentation," they added. (PTI)

## 3 students booked for woman's ragging, college professor for sexual harassment

**SHIMLA/DHARAMSHALA (HP), Jan 2:** Three students of a government college in Himachal Pradesh's Dharamshala have been booked for ragging and voluntarily causing hurt while a professor has been booked for sexual harassment of a 19-year-old woman who died on December 26, police said on Friday.

The woman student died during treatment at a Ludhiana hospital on December 26 and the case was registered on Thursday following a complaint by the father of the victim.

In his complaint, the deceased student's father alleged that his daughter was beaten by three seniors, Harshita, Aakriti and Komolika, on September 18, 2025, while a college professor, Ashok Kumar, indulged in obscene acts with her.

Due to the beating and harassment, the student was hospitalised and she died during treatment, the complaint said. The father of the deceased woman alleged that following these incidents, his daughter went into severe mental stress and fear, leading to a rapid deterioration in her health.

He said that a police complaint could not be lodged earlier as his daughter was traumatised and had to be hospitalised.

A case under sections 75 (sexual harassment), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 3 of the Himachal Pradesh Educational Institution (Prohibition of) Ragging Act 2009 has been registered and investigations are underway, the police said.

Confirming that a case has been registered, Kangra Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Ratan said that all the allegations are being thoroughly investigated. Medical records, video evidence and statements of all concerned are being examined, he said.

The case gained momentum after a video of the victim on her deathbed went viral on social media. In the video, the victim accused the professor of indecent acts, mental harassment and intimidation when she protested against his behaviour.

The police said that a complaint was initially received through the Chief Minister's Sankalp Seva Helpline and an investigation team but the student's statement could not be recorded as she was unwell at the time. The police later recorded the statement of the victim's father.

Preliminary investigations by the police pointed out that the deceased student was enrolled in the college in 2024. She allegedly faced ragging by some students and failed her



BA first-year examination.

She subsequently stopped attending college after the results were declared in July 2025. Her name was struck off the college rolls on August 21, 2025.

The student is believed to have visited the college again in September seeking admission, where she was informed that she would be admitted to the second year only if she cleared the re-evaluation, failing which she would have to re-enrol in the first year.

Meanwhile, the accused professor has denied all allegations levelled against him. Some teachers have come in support of the professor.

The professor said that the student had studied under him in a previous academic session and was not his student in the current session.

ABVP state secretary Nancy Atal said that the accused should be brought to book to ensure that such incidents do not occur in future.

A delegation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led by former mayor of Shimla Municipal Corporation, Sanjay Chauhan, on Friday submitted a memorandum to the director general of police here demanding an impartial inquiry into the case by a senior police officer.

Chauhan said that as the woman belonged to the Dalit community, the case should be probed from relevant aspects.

A social activist, Ravi Kumar Dalit, sat on a dharna at the Ridge here demanding a judicial inquiry into the case. Talking to reporters, he said that the law and order situation has deteriorated in the state.

Himachal Scheduled Caste Commission Chairperson Kuldeep Kumar told PTI that a report in this regard has been sought from Kangra SP.

Questioning the role of the police in the case and the "delay" in the investigation, he warned to sit on a dharna outside the chief minister's official residence if a judicial probe was not ordered in the case. (PTI)

## Vaishnav virtually witnesses final bullet train tunnel breakthrough in Maharashtra's Palghar

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Friday virtually witnessed the final breakthrough of a 1.5-km-long mountain tunnel of the bullet train project in Maharashtra's Palghar district from Rail Bhawan in New Delhi.

"A big milestone has been achieved today. This achievement is the breakthrough of the mountain tunnel 5," Vaishnav said, while speaking to mediapersons.

"This 1.5-km-long mountain tunnel is among the longest in Palghar district and is located between the Virar and Boisar bullet train stations. It is the second tunnel breakthrough in Maharashtra, as the first 5-km-long underground tunnel between Thane and BKC was completed in September 2025," a Railway Ministry press note said.

The 508-km railway project connecting Mumbai and Ahmedabad, which passes through Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, is India's only high-speed rail project designed to operate bullet trains at a speed of 320 kmph.

Once completed, the project will reduce travel time between Mumbai and Ahmed-



abad to just 1 hour and 58 minutes, connecting and integrating the economies of major commercial centres, according to Vaishnav.

The project is being executed with technical and financial assistance from the Japanese government.

Officials said it includes eight mountain tunnels, with seven tunnels in Maharashtra having a combined length of about 6.05 km, and one tunnel of 350 metres lo-

cated in Gujarat.

"The Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project has a total length of 508 km, with an overall tunnel length of 27.4 km, of which 21 km comprise underground tunnels and 6.4 km surface tunnels," the ministry said.

The corridor will connect major cities, including Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, Anand, Vadodra, Bharuch, Surat, Bilimora, Vapi, Boisar, Virar, Thane, and Mumbai, marking a "transformative step in India's transportation infrastructure", it added.

Vaishnav said the bullet train project is generating significant employment and will provide additional opportunities during operation.

Responding to a question on whether the E10 Shinkansen, Japan's next-generation high-speed bullet train, can operate on the 508-km Mumbai-Ahmedabad corridor, he said it can support the speed of E10 trains as well.

The E10 is capable of running at a speed of 360 kmph.

Vaishnav reiterated on Thursday that the first phase of the project will be completed in August 2027. (PTI)

No.ASRF Bn.II/Q/260/2007-25/3126

### AUCTION NOTICE

It is for general information to all concerned that the following Un-serviceable/ Condemned Clothing, Utensil, Furniture, Machinery equipments and Electrical items etc. of 30th Assam Police Battalion Karagaon, Karbi-Anglong, Assam will be sold in Public Auction on 06-01-2026 at 11-30 Hrs at 30<sup>th</sup> APBn. H.Qr. Karagaon. The intending Bidders may attend in the auction on the date and time mentioned above. The highest bid will be accepted in the auction. The successful bidder will have to deposit the bid money in full in Cash before the Committee on the spot and the articles must be lifted on the same day at their own cost.

The undersigned have reserved the right to accept or reject any bid without assigning any reason thereof.

Sl. No.	Name of Articles	Quantity	Auction value as per Approval
1.	Shirt K/C Full Sleeve	1361	
2.	Shirt T.C	2547	
3.	Trouser KD	1397	
4.	Trouser T.C	10	
5.	Blanket woolen	1614	
6.	Jercy woolen	662	Destroyed
7.	Mosquito Net	172	Destroyed
8.	DM Booth	1202	Destroyed
9.	Great coat	1594	
10.	Waterproof with hood	793	
11.	Beret cap woolen	569	Destroyed
12.	Cap Badge	819	
13.	Shoulder badge L/R	1011	
14.	Dangree KD	1011	
15.	Trouser woolen E.I	283	
16.	Shirt woolen E.I	206	
17.	Short KD	754	
18.	Web belt Nylon	582	
19.	Hunting Shoe	311	Destroyed
20.	Body Protector	100	
21.	Helmet Eye protector	25	
22.	Poly carbonate shield	70	
23.	Haver sack	738	
24.	Pack web	1395	
25.	Kit Bag	1007	
26.	Cap comforter	768	Destroyed
27.	Husel cord	1896	Destroyed
28.	FS Hat	943	Destroyed
29.	Water Bottle with carrier	92	
30.	Kit Box (Trunk)	80	
31.	Hand Glove	1011	Destroyed
32.	Exe. Table with Eru	1	
33.	Half Secy. Table	4	
34.	EXE Revolving chair high neck	2	
35.	Medium back revolving chair	3	
36.	Staff Visitor Chair	3	
37.	Steel Almira	1	
38.	Steel Rack	2	
39.	Computer Table	1	
40.	Computer Chair	1	
41.	Steel Folding cot	90	
42.	Aluminium Dekshi with Lid 28"	4	
43.	Aluminium Dekshi with Lid 24"	7	
44.	Aluminium Dekshi with Lid 22"	8	
45.	Aluminium Dekshi with Lid 18"	13	
46.	Aluminium Dekshi with Lid 14/16"	35	
47.	Steel Sospen 16"	2	
48.	Steel Gumla Big	1	
49.	Steel Gumla Small	5	
50.	Iron Kerahi 24"	5	
51.	Iron Kerahi 18/16/14"	30	
52.	G.I Bucket 18"	23	
53.	G.I Bucket 16"	10	
54.	G.I Bucket 14"	31	
55.	Iron Khanti 36"	3	
56.	Iron Khanti 24"	4	
57.	Brasso Hata Small	5	
58.	Dabu Hata Iron 28"	7	
59.	Iron Tawa 24"	6	
60.	Iron Tawa 18x18"	5	
61.	Chaki Belna	80	Destroyed
62.	Iron Jarara 24"	13	
63.	Aluminium Dish 24"	2	
64.	Water filter steel	14	
65.	Aluminium Ketti	10	
66.	Water Drum 200/500 Ltrs	12	
67.	Jungle cutting Dao	40	
68.	Belcha	7	
69.	Brass Dish	3	
70.	6 KVA Generator set	1	
71.	5 KVA Generator set	1	
72.	Xerox Machine	4	
73.	Refrigerator	1	
74.	Computer Set	2	
75.	Grass Cutter	2	
76.	Water Purifier	2	
77.	Charge light 350 Watt.	4	
78.	Celing Fan	85	
79.	Type Writing Machine	5	
80.	Lithu Machine	1	
81.	LED Street light	100	
82.	Fax Machine	1	

Sd/  
Commandant  
30<sup>th</sup> APBn, Karagaon  
Karbi-Anglong, Assam

DIPR /C/HLT/266/3-Jan-26

# Bollywood pins hope on 'Dhurandhar 2', 'Ramayana', SRK's 'King' and Salman's 'Battle of Galwan' in 2026

MUMBAI, Jan 2: After a mixed year at cinemas, the Hindi film industry hopes the year 2026 brings better luck at the box office with the release of big ticket movies like Salman Khan-starrer "Battle of Galwan", Shah Rukh Khan's "King" and the second part of "Dhurandhar", which has turned out to be blockbuster.

Ranbir Kapoor, whose last box office triumph was the controversial "Animal" in 2023, is expected to make a big return to the theatres with "Ramayana", which is touted to be one of the most expensive films ever made in India. Then he is also there in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's drama "Love and War" with wife Alia Bhatt and actor Vicky Kaushal.

The year has begun on a good note for the Hindi film industry with Sriram Raghavan's war biopic "Ikki" garnering warm reviews from critics, though the movie's earnings at the ticket window are yet to come out.

"Ikki" will be followed by another war drama in Sunny Deol's "Border 2", which like Sriram Raghavan's film, revolves around the events of 1971 India-Pakistan war. But the film, directed by Anurag Singh, and also starring Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh and Ahaan Shetty, will be different in treatment and story.

Aditya Dhar's "Dhurandhar" has continued to perform well at the box office in the fourth week of its release. It has become one of the highest grossing Hindi films ever by earning over Rs 700 crore in India and over 1,000 crore globally.

Its second part, which has already been shot, will be released on March 20.

This seems to be the year of war movies as Salman Khan's "Battle of Galwan" is also lined up for its release and just recently released the movie's first trailer. Inspired by real incidents, the movie is slated to release on April 17.

Distributor-exhibitor Akshay Rathi, who owns theatres in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, is hoping that there will be a blockbuster hit every month in 2026.

"It's an exciting line-up. We've big-ticket money spinners and 2026 could turn out to be one of the most historic years in the history of Indian cinema. There's a great chance that 'Dhurandhar 2' might become the highest opening Hindi film of all time given the euphoria for part one.

"Films like 'Love and War' seem quite exciting and 'Ramayana' with a great cast in the form of Ranbir Kapoor and Yash, and others will light up the box office in Diwali. We are hoping Salman's 'Battle of Galwan' will also create magic at the box office," Rathi told PTI.

Fans are also awaiting Shah Rukh Khan's return to the big screen after his spectacular run at the box office in 2023 with "Pathaan", "Jawan" and "Dunki". "King", his next that reunites him with "Pathaan" director Siddharth Anand, does not have an official release date yet but it is expected to arrive in theatres this year.

Rathi is also looking forward to Sidharth Malhotra-starrer

"Vvan - Force of the Forrest", David Dhawan-directed "Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai" among potential hits.

Trade analyst Girish Wankhede said 2026 will see franchise films "dominate" the box office alongside standalone movies like "King", and "Battle of Galwan".

"In 2025, we've had 31 films crossing Rs. 100 crores at the box office across different languages, and this year the number of such films will be more due to franchise movies, standalone films and some surprise hits.

"The magic of 'Dhurandhar' will continue in 2026 as it has set a tone with its storytelling and characters. After 'Dhurandhar 2', another big release is 'Ramayana', it's coming out in Diwali, it has a great star cast and director, Nitesh Tiwari. 'King' and 'Battle of Galwan' both are much-anticipated films, both are expected to do big numbers," Wankhede told PTI.

Deol has another major release after "Border 2" in "Lahore 1947", and then there is "Alpha", the Alia Bhatt-Sharvati starrer spy film from YRF.

Ajay Devgn has already announced that he is returning with the third part of "Drishyam 3" on October 2, Akshay Kumar will be back with "Welcome to the Jungle" in December. Rani Mukerji's "Mardaani 3" is releasing on February 27 and Rajinikanth's "Jailer 2" is expected to build on the success of its predecessor with its June release.

Vishek Chauhan, a Bihar-based exhibitor, said 2026 will definitely be "bigger" and "better" as films of top stars like Salman, Shah Rukh, and Ranbir are lined up for release.

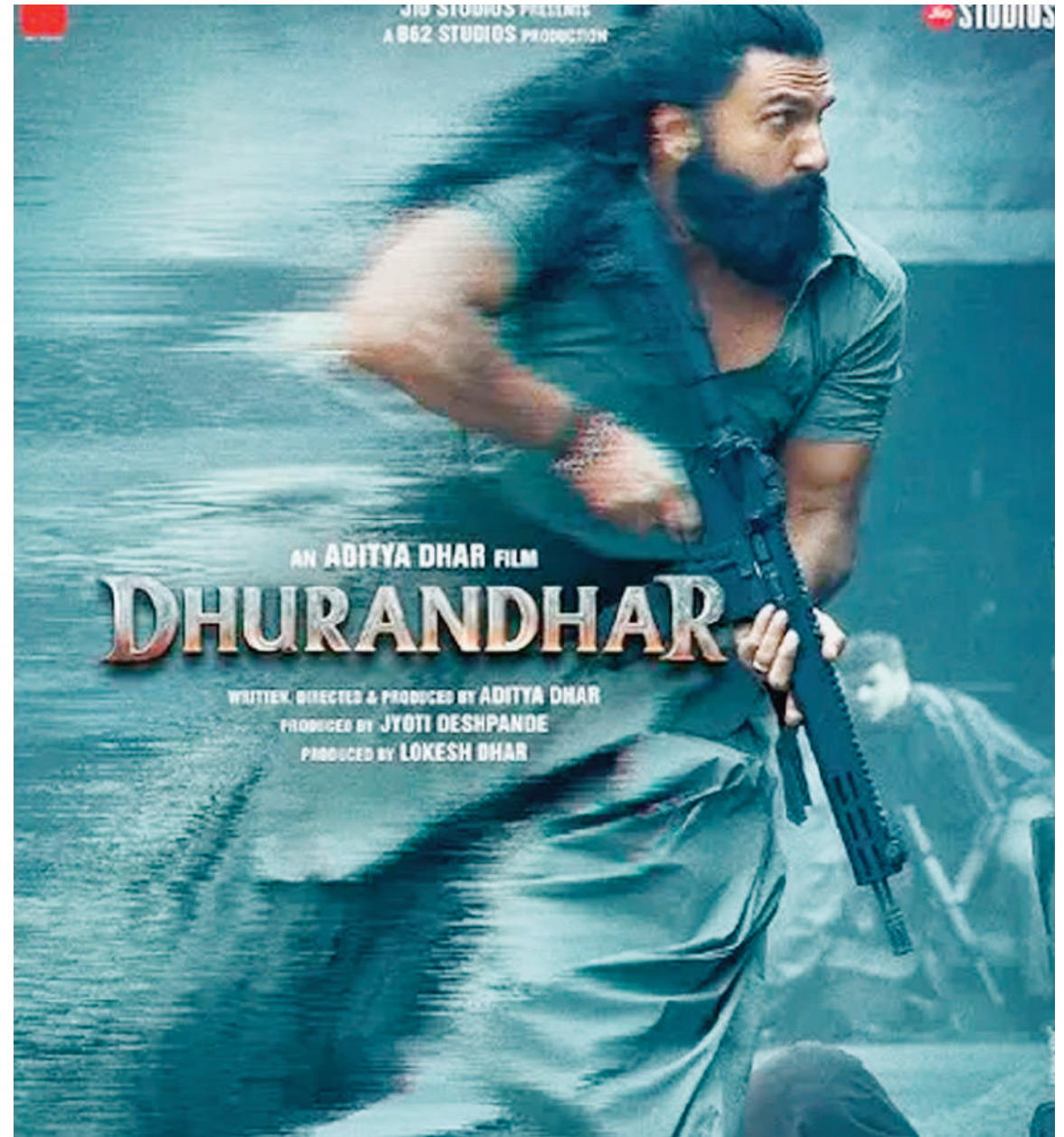
"And all these big guns are going to be firing. I think 2026 definitely will be a much better year. Today, the audience is teaching the producers what they want to see and the producers will also follow that lead. In 2026, the quality of films that will do good numbers at the box office will be much better and bigger. I think in 2026 at least it will be 50 per cent more business in terms of box office than 2025," Chauhan told PTI.

Sharing similar views, Kamal Gianchandani, CEO, PVR INOX Pictures said 2026 will be "bigger" than the previous year.

"Films like 'King', 'Ramayana', 'Love and War', 'Avengers: Doomsday', and a few others. I think next year will be bigger than this year," Gianchandani told PTI.

From the South film industry, there are quite a few Pan-India films like Prabhas's "The Raja Saab" and "Jana Nayakudu", which will be Tamil star Vijay's final appearance on the big screen. Both films are scheduled for release on January 9.

In March, there's Yash-starrer "Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown Ups", Ram Charan and Janhvi Kapoor's "Peddi", Jr NTR and director Pranshanth Neel's film, tentatively titled "NTRNEEL", Kamal Haasan's tentatively called, "KH 237", Prabhas and director Sandeep Reddy Vanga's "Spirit" are also expected to do well at the box office. (PTI)



## 'Dhurandhar' declared tax-free in Ladakh by LG

Ranveer Singh-starrer "Dhurandhar" was on Friday declared tax-free in the Union Territory by the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta.

Dhurandhar, a spy action film directed by Aditya Dhar, has emerged a super hit at the box-office, breaking several records in late 2025 and early 2026 and crossing Rs 1,100 crore in worldwide collections.

"Lieutenant Governor Shri Kavinder Gupta declares Bollywood film Dhurandhar tax-free in UT Ladakh," the LG's office announced in a post on X.



The Lieutenant Governor said the film was shot extensively in the region.

"The film spotlights Ladakh's cinematic landscapes, signalling strong support for filmmakers and reinforcing the UT's push to emerge as a preferred destination for film shoots and tourism".

LG added that the administration is working on a new film policy and will provide full support to film productions in Ladakh.

Released in early December, the film has continued its strong run despite competition from James Cameron's "Avatar: Fire and Ash" and the romantic comedy "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri". (PTI)

## Vijay-starrer 'Jana Nayagan' trailer to drop on Jan 3



KVN Productions, the makers of actor-politician Vijay's final film "Jana Nayagan", announced that the official trailer in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi will be unveiled on January 3 at 6.45 pm on YouTube.

The production house shared a special poster on Instagram on January 1, with Vijay holding a gun alongside co-stars Bobby Deol and Mamitha Baiju, captioned: "#JanaNayaganTrailer #JanNetaTrailer #JanaNayakuduTrailer Tamil, Telugu & Hindi trailers are releasing on Jan 3rd at 6.45 PM".

The trailer drop builds hype for the political action drama, directed by H Vinoh with music by Anirudh Ravichander, ahead of its worldwide Pongal release on January 9.

It follows a record-setting audio launch in Malaysia's Bukit Jalil Stadium, where Vijay bid emotional farewell to fans before focusing on his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK).

Featuring Pooja Hegde, Priyamani, Prakash Raj and Gautham Vasudev Menon, the film positions Vijay as a people's hero in a narrative echoing his real-life political shift, akin to MGR-era star turns with mass action and social messaging.

The Hindi version is titled "Jan Neta", targeting pan-India appeal for Vijay's cinematic swansong. (PTI)

## Have such a funny bone in me, hope directors are inspired: Juhi Babbar



Juhi Babbar loved stepping into a light-hearted role in "The Great Shamsuddin Family" and she hopes that directors take notice and are inspired to cast her in roles that are out of the box and funny.

The actor, who primarily works in theatre, said her stage work evokes an intense impression, but the new film, with its ensemble cast of women of different generations, helps break that image.

"I've such a funny bone in me. But the moment you think of theatre, you think it's intense," the actor told PTI in an interview.

The calls and messages of praising her tongue-in-cheek humour in the film have been encouraging, she said, adding that filmmaker Dr. Chandraprakash Dwivedi and actor Naseeruddin Shah have applauded her in the movie.

"There were no hoardings of the film and it is

through word of mouth that the film is receiving so much love. I've been appreciated by industry people. But what means a lot is that people are watching the movie. I've had people stopping and praising me in the elevator of my building or if I'm at a salon, saying, 'Is that you in the movie, you were so good?'

"It feels good when you're recognised for your work," she said, adding, designer Manish Malhotra and producer Ramesh Taurani too praised her when she met them at Salman Khan's 60th birthday bash.

Juhi said she wants to do good work and be known for performances.

"I think I'm still fairly new in people's minds because they've hardly watched me. I don't have a set image. I've been around for 20 years but I've not been there. I hope the directors get inspired and offer me different kinds of work," the actor, best known for films like Hansal Mehta's "Faraaz", and Neeraj Pandey's "Aiyaaary", said.

"The Great Shamsuddin Family" follows Bani Ahmed, who faces her most important deadline while her house erupts in family chaos, forcing her to juggle a 12-hour writing sprint with an unfolding domestic emergency.

Juhi essays the role of Humaira, the older sister to Bani and Iram, played by Shreya Dhanwanthary. The actor, who is the daughter of Raj and Nadira Babbar, said the role came naturally to her as she is also the eldest child in her real-life family.

She made her debut in 2003 with "Kash Aap Hamare Hote" opposite Sonu Nigam, but over the years, the actor has mostly focused on theatre. She blames a lack of exciting acting offers for her sporadic presence in movies.

"I'm extremely choosy, I don't get the kind of work that I really want to do. If I like something, why will I not do it? So, some good work should come, which is less. Even I wish I was getting more work.

"I'm a married woman, I've a child, and a home, I cannot compromise my family time for something useless. I've to feel that this was worth my time, and that I've contributed something to this piece of art. However, not that many big filmmakers approach me. I don't know why," Juhi added. She thanked directors like Rizvi and Hansal Mehta for offering her roles in "The Great Shamsuddin Family" and "Faraaz", in which she played actor Zahan Kapoor's mother.

"In terms of screen presence, I had around six to

seven scenes in 'Faraaz', but every scene was impactful. There was so much to deliver. In "The Great Shamsuddin Family", I was there throughout the film and there's so much more to perform. I've been offered ensemble films but there's nothing much to perform, hence I don't do it but I loved this film," she said.

The actor said "The Great Indian Shamsuddin Family" is being watched by people from different strata.

"This means the audience is understanding the film, and that it is in real space and talking about real issues. It has resonated with the audience as some things are said openly and some are undercurrent, but people have got both," the actor said.

The film also features her actor-husband Anup Soni in a cameo appearance. Actors Sheeba Chaddha, Farida Jalal, Dolly Ahluwalia, Natasha Rashtogi, and others round out the cast of "The Great Shamsuddin Family".

Juhi said it was Rizvi and producer Mahmood Farooqui's idea to cast Soni.

"They were confused about who to cast for the role. They were like, 'Can we speak to Anup?' and Farida ji jumped at the idea, she is fond of Anup. So, they would tell me 'Let's get him', and I said, 'You can speak to him directly'.

"I didn't want them to take things for granted because I'm part of the film and tell Anup, 'Ek entry kar lo'. Anup has his own standing and makes his own decisions. It was a fantastic surprise for audiences; it worked so well," Juhi, who first met Soni while working on the play, "Begum Jaan", said.

The actor, who began her acting journey with theatre at the age of 21, said two of her plays, "With Love Aap ki Saiyaara" and "Ek Lamha Zindagi" - which she even directed - put her back on track and added that industry people started "noticing" her.

"The Great Shamsuddin Family" came to me through theatre. Anusha and Mahmood have watched me on stage; and Anusha was so sure that she wants me to do this role. She had the choice of so many actors in this age category, who are much more popular than me but she wanted me," she said.

"Hansal sir had not watched me in theatre, but he knew that I'm doing a lot of theatre. It was Mukesh Chhabra who referred my name to him," the actor added. (PTI)

# Man City and Liverpool frustrated in 0-0 draws in Premier League to leave Arsenal with 4-point lead

LONDON, Jan 2: Erling Haaland and Manchester City were frustrated in a 0-0 draw at Sunderland, leaving Arsenal with a four-point lead at the halfway stage of the Premier League season.

Liverpool couldn't manage a goal against a promoted team, either, laboring to a 0-0 draw against Leeds at Anfield. The stalemates highlighted the strength in depth in England's lucrative top flight.

They also maybe showed why Arsenal has been able to forge clear after 19 of 38 games in its bid for a first league title since 2004, with City and Liverpool — the dominant forces in English soccer over the last decade — having lost their old fluency going forward.

There were draws all round on a low-scoring night, with Tottenham held 0-0 at Brentford and Fulham scoring in the 80th minute to finish 1-1 at Crystal Palace.

City's run over City was on an eight-match winning run in all competitions but stumbled against an opponent that has drawn against Arsenal and beaten Newcastle at its Stadium of Light home over the last two months.

Haaland had opportunities either side of halftime against stubborn Sunderland but couldn't add to his league-high 19 goals for the campaign.

Indeed, it was substitute defender Josko Gvardiol who came closest



for City, flicking a shot against the post and having a header saved from point-blank range.

"You can't be perfect every time, every half, every minute," City captain Bernardo Silva said. "The team is showing a lot of resilience at the minute — in the moments when we don't play that well, we are still very consistent, very stable."

Spain star Rodri, the former Barcelona d'Or winner, made his return for City after two months out with a hamstring injury when he came on as a halftime substitute.

Liverpool underwhelms Liverpool extended its unbeaten run to eight games but underwhelmed again amid key absences up front.

Hugo Ekitike's misdirected

header from in front of goal in the first half was the only clear-cut chance at Anfield for Liverpool, which lacked inspiration in attack with Alexander Isak injured and Mohamed Salah at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Liverpool stayed in fourth and is 12 points behind Arsenal in a disappointing title defense.

Since a 4-1 home loss to PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League on Nov. 26, Liverpool has played seven games in the Premier League — winning four of them and drawing the other three. It has struggled to find much fluency, however, with Liverpool manager Arne Slot placing extra emphasis on being tighter at the back after the team's early season woes.

"This season multiple times we have conceded a goal in a game like this and that's a positive thing today," Slot said.

The other result in the recent undefeated streak was a victory at Inter Milan in the Champions League.

Palace struggling Jean-Philippe Mateta headed Palace in front against Fulham, only for Tom Cairney to equalize for the visitors.

That left Palace without a win in six matches in all competitions, with the absence of regulars like Daniel Muñoz, Chris Richards (both injured) and Ismaila Sarr (at the Africa Cup) hitting hard. (AP)

# Planning ahead: Mandaviya tells SAI to set delivery targets for 2026, tackle doping aggressively

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: In what promises to be a crucial and busy year for India's athletes, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has asked top SAI officials to set "delivery targets", come up with ideas to improve the country's sporting ecosystem, and address the menace of doping on a war footing.

With the Commonwealth and Asian Games headlining a year that has its fair share of world and continental championships as well, 2026 would set the ball rolling for Olympic qualification process in shooting, and hockey.

Mandaviya held the meeting with top officials of SAI (Sports Authority of India) and Ministry on Thursday to chart out the annual plan.

His focus was on starting the work on his ambitious plan of having dedicated Olympic Centres for every sport across the country, besides ensuring the start of national leagues in at least five new sports.

"He stressed on setting priorities for the year and asked officers to have delivery targets. He plans to have meeting with Deputy Director level officers every 15 days and take ideas from them to improve the sports ecosystem," a ministry source told PTI.

"Starting national leagues in five



new sports this year is also a major target. Federations will be encouraged and Ministry will extend financial support for these leagues," he added.

India, which would be hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad and also bidding to bring the 2036 Olympics to the same city, is a country with a poor record in doping.

The nation has topped the list of countries with most doping violators in the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) annual testing figures for three years continu-

ously. So, it was hardly surprise that Mandaviya stressed on the need to address the menace.

"SAI and NADA (National Anti-Doping Agency) have been told to carry out aggressive awareness campaigns and if there are violators even after that, they have to be dealt with strict action," the source said.

Mandaviya, it is learnt, is also keen on more private sports academies with support from the Ministry in terms of components such as sports science and trainers. (PTI)

## Neeraj, Sachin in AIU's Registered Testing Pool for 1st quarter of 2026



NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Sachin Yadav are the only Indian athletes to figure in the Registered Testing Pool (RTP) of World Athletics' anti-doping watchdog Athletics Integrity Unit's (AIU) for the first quarter of this year.

While two-time Olympic medal-winning Chopra has been a regular on this list, Yadav is a new entrant after his fourth-place finish in the World Championships last year.

The Asian Championships silver-medallist outperformed Chopra at the world event where the latter finished eighth due to nagging fitness issues that hampered his performance.

Yadav covered a personal best of 86.27m to not just end up higher than Chopra, but also reigning Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan, who also endured a bad day ending 10th overall.

The 26-year-old from Uttar Pradesh, who is over six feet tall, is being widely seen as the next big thing in Indian javelin throw landscape, dominated completely by Chopra for over half a decade now.

The RTP is highest tier pool of international or national level athletes who undergo no-advance notice testing.

The athletes in this list have to provide details of their whereabouts, including home address, and also specify a 60-minute window each day during which they would be available for testing.

The new RTP list is dominated by athletes from Ethiopia, Kenya and the USA.

In the previous RTP also featured, javelin thrower Kishore Jena, steeplechaser Avinash Sable, woman javelin thrower Annu Rani and long jumpers Murali Sreesankar and Jeswin Aldrin.

But none of them find a place in the first quarter list of the new year. (PTI)

# Assam Taekwondo star Master Suaid Al Munib wins bronze at National Championship

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Jan 2: Master Suaid Al Munib, a young and talented taekwondo athlete from Assam, has brought laurels to the state by securing a bronze medal in the Under-10 Boys (25-30 kg) category at the 40th National Level Taekwondo ITF Championship, held at Ahmedabad, Gujarat, from December 28 to 30, 2025.

The prestigious event witnessed participation from competitors across the country and was judged by taekwondo experts from Korea, Australia, the United Kingdom, Taiwan and Cyprus, besides Indian experts.

The promising sportsperson is the son of Dr M K Rahman and S S A Ahmed of Hatimuria village under Moirabari in Mori-

gaon district. A meritorious student, Master Munib is presently studying at Army Public School, Shankar Vihar, New Delhi. This national-level success adds to his consistent record of achievements in taekwondo.

Earlier, he clinched a gold medal at the 36th Delhi State Level Taekwondo Championship, 2025, held at Thyagraj Stadium, New Delhi, and also earned a silver medal at the 16th Inter-School Taekwondo Competition, 2025, held at Laxman Public School, Hauz Khas, New Delhi.

Notably, his sister Munam Zaufishan also won a bronze medal in the 36th Delhi State Level Taekwondo Championship, 2025, competing in the sub-junior category.



## Block-Level Cluster Sports Meet held at Sikari Kathar Village Playground

HT Bureau DIPHU, Jan 2: The Block Level Cluster Sports Meet was successfully organised on December 30 and 31, 2025 at the Sikari Kathar Village Playground, Hidipi, under Bokajan Block.

The event was organised by MY Bharat Kendra, Diphu-Karbi Anglong, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India, in collaboration with the Sikari Kathar Youth Club.

The sports meet witnessed enthusiastic participation from youth and athletes, promoting sportsmanship, unity and physical fitness at the grassroots level.

The programme was formally flagged off by Lorence Kathar (GB).

The event was graced by Jakve Rongpi, president of Sikari Kathar Youth Club, as the chief guest.

Several distinguished guests, including Cherop Kathar (Riso Basa), Longki Timung (social

worker), Chatra Teron (SBI Life Mitra) and Babuson Rongphar (social worker), were also present.

As part of the sporting events, women's kabaddi was played between Sikari Kathar Youth Club and Diamond Club, while the men's volleyball tournament was contested among Sikari Kathar Youth Club, Diamond Club and Hunmili Club.

The matches were held in a competitive yet friendly atmosphere.

Individual events such as long jump and the 100-metre race for both men and women were also organised, providing athletes an opportunity to showcase their abilities.

Various group and individual events were conducted during the two-day meet, and winners were awarded cash prizes, trophies, medals and certificates.

The event concluded with appreciation for the organisers, participants, volunteers and local villagers for their cooperation and support.

# Rotary Club of Nagaon concludes Rotary Premier League 1.0

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Jan 2: The Rotary Club of Nagaon successfully organised the Rotary Premier League 1.0, marking the first-ever Rotary-led box cricket league in Nagaon.

The three-day tournament was held on December 26, 27 and 28, 2025, with the grand finale conducted on December 28.

The league witnessed enthusiastic participation, strong spectator turnout and keenly contested matches, making it a landmark sporting initiative for the town.

The tournament aimed to promote fellowship, sportsmanship and community engagement through sport.

After a series of thrilling matches, Seven Brothers emerged as the champions of Rotary Premier League 1.0.

The winning team was led by captain Gurdeep Singh, whose leadership and team coordination played a crucial role in their success.

Yashoo Riders finished as the runners-up and were widely appreciated for their consistent and spirited performance throughout the tournament.



The event was held under the leadership of Aman Dassani, president, Rotary Club of Nagaon, and Mamta Agarwal, secretary, Rotary Club of Nagaon.

The successful execution of the league was driven by the organising committee led by Vikas Surana, chairperson, RPL 1.0, and Adarsh Singhi, co-chairperson, whose planning and coordination ensured the smooth conduct of the tournament.

The league received strong support from its sponsors, with Achyut as the title sponsor.

Event sponsors included PBG Autocare, Vikash Enterprise & Mukesh Enterprise, ACC Cement,

Radha Steel (Radhe Radhe), Dipaz Family Salon, Sizlers Café Lounge, Arihant Bakes & Cakes, Boom Celebrations and Pushpanjali, along with best wishes from K.C. Jain & B.K. Jain and family.

The Rotary Club of Nagaon expressed gratitude to all sponsors, participating teams, match officials, volunteers and supporters for their cooperation and contribution, which made the tournament a grand success.

With the successful completion of Rotary Premier League 1.0, the club has laid a strong foundation for future editions and similar community-focused sporting initiatives in the region.

## India to tour Bangladesh for three-match ODI and T20I series in September



DHAKA, Jan 2: The Bangladesh Cricket Board on Friday announced it will host India for a three-match ODI as well as T20I series to be played in September this year.

However it is not clear if BCCI will agree to travel to Bangladesh in prevailing conditions with no stable government in place.

According to a media release by the BCB, the three ODIs will be played on September 1, 3 and 6, while the T20Is will be played on September 9, 12 and 13.

The Indian team will reach Bangladesh on August 28 for their limited-overs affair.

In July last year, India's tour of Bangladesh was called off indefinitely and the six-match white-ball tour was deferred for more than one year.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) have mutually agreed to defer the white-ball series, three ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals, between Bangladesh and India in August 2025 to September 2026," the BCCI had informed in a statement last July.

"This decision has been reached following discussions between the two Boards, taking into account the international cricketing commitments and scheduling convenience of both teams."

"The BCB looks forward to welcoming India in September 2026 for this eagerly anticipated series. Revised dates and fixtures for the tour will be announced in due course," it added. (PTI)

# Ameerah wins women's 10m air rifle title, Zuhair claims men's trap gold at Nationals



BHOPAL, Jan 2: Haryana's Ameerah Arshad delivered a composed performance under pressure to clinch the 10m Air Rifle women's title at the 68th National Shoot-

ing Championship (Rifle) here on Friday. She edged past Railways' Rajshree Anilkumar Sancheti by a razor-thin margin of 0.1 point.

In other events, Zuhair Khan of Uttar Pradesh won the men's trap gold with 43 hits.

Ameerah finished the women's final with a score of 251.9, narrowly ahead of Sancheti, who settled for silver on 251.8, while Chhattisgarh's Pranju Shree Somani secured the bronze medal with 230.5.

At the shotgun range in New Delhi, junior men's trap bronze-medallist, Zuhair finished on top in the senior men's trap final with 43 hits, adding a first senior national title to his tally.

Uttarakhand's Shapath Bhardwaj secured the silver medal with 40 hits, while Olympian Kynan Chenai claimed the bronze with 33 hits.

Vivaan Kapoor had earlier topped the qualification with 121, while Zuhair fin-

ished second on 120 (+3), ahead of Avhar Rizvi, who also shot 120 but finished behind on shoot-off (+2).

In the men's trap team event, Uttar Pradesh clinched the gold medal with an aggregate of 345 through the combined efforts of Avhar Rizvi, Mohd Asad Sultan (118), and Rayyan Rizvi (107).

Punjab secured silver, while Uttarakhand took the bronze medal.

In the 10m air rifle junior women final, Karnataka's Tilotama Sen carried her strong qualification form into the final to claim gold with an impressive 253.1.

Maharashtra's Samiksha Subhash Patil finished second to take silver with 250.0, while Haryana's Ramita added a bronze medal to her tally with a score of 230.0.

Tilotama completed a memorable day

by clinching her second gold in the youth women's 10m air rifle final, finishing on 251.6. Ameerah Arshad once again impressed to secure silver with 251.4, while Maharashtra's Avantika Rajendra Shelke claimed the bronze medal with 229.4.

In the team events of 10m air rifle, Haryana dominated the women's competition, winning gold with an aggregate score of 1892.7, ahead of Railways (1886.0) and Madhya Pradesh (1884.3).

Haryana also topped the junior women's team standings with the same aggregate, followed by Karnataka (1887.1) and Gujarat (1876.9).

Karnataka claimed the youth women's team gold with 1887.1, while Haryana (1885.9) and Madhya Pradesh (1881.7) completed the podium. (PTI)

## No major shake ups can be foreseen in the squad that beat South Africa NZ ODIs: Siraj, Pant's future in focus



**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** The indefatigable duo of Rishabh Pant and Mohammed Siraj is expected to be the big talking point on Saturday when the selectors pick a 15-member Indian ODI squad for a three-match series against New Zealand starting January 11 in Vadodara.

While no major shake ups can be foreseen in the squad that beat South Africa in a preceding series a few weeks ago, two specific concerns could be addressed by the Ajit

Agarkar-chaired selection committee.

The first point could be Pant's position as the second wicketkeeper with Ishan Kishan showing his hitting prowess in the middle order for Jharkhand and Dhruv Chand Jurel also smashing a 'Daddy Hundred' for UP in the domestic circuit.

Whether it is Agarkar or head coach Gautam Gambhir, both have shown an inclination to select personnel based on team combination. Therefore in T20 International

als, they have gone for keepers who are openers in Sanju Samson and Kishan.

In ODIs, the same keeper is needed to primarily be a middle-order batter, coming in at No.5 or 6.

To be fair to Pant, since the arrival of Gambhir as head coach, he has played just one ODI between July 2024 to December 2025.

Only 31 ODI games in eight years with an average of less than 35 isn't a true reflection of the resilient Rourkee man's potential.

In terms of impact, even his greatest detractors would agree that he is scores over Kishan and Jurel.

However, his shot selection in the recent lost Guwahati Test against South Africa neither impressed the head coach nor the selection committee. But dropping him without giving a fair run could also raise a few uncomfortable questions.

The second aspect to be discussed is the selection of pacers for the three-match series.

While Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah are likely to be rested keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, it will be interesting to see if the selectors opt to give a break to the other two speedsters -- Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh.

Both played in the recent series against South Africa.

But Siraj, who wasn't picked for the Champions Trophy based on conditions,

played in the away series against Australia before being overlooked for the South Africa assignment.

He hasn't played in the first four rounds of the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy either but might appear for Hyderabad in two of the last three rounds.

His omissions from the 50-over set up after being a regular feature till the 2023 World Cup, has been baffling.

In case of Mohammed Shami, he has played for Bengal across formats but there is a school of thought that he is past his prime as far as international cricket is concerned. The communication between Shami and the selection committee has also not been particularly clear.

Among the Vijay Hazare Trophy performers, two genuine contenders are Sarfaraz Khan (for the number four slot) and Devdutt Padikkal (opener).

However, with Shubman Gill, Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal already guaranteed a place, it will be difficult to fit in Padikkal.

Sarfaraz Khan has been brilliant in the domestic circuit but Rituraj Gaikwad has already surged ahead of him among contenders with a hundred against South Africa.

In the end, all selection debates would be nothing more than a storm in the tea cup if the five wise men decide to maintain status quo. (PTI)

### Anjum Saeed dropped as Pakistan hockey team manager for Pro League after indiscipline



**LAHORE, Jan 2:** The Pakistan Hockey Federation will not send former Olympian Anjum Saeed as manager with the national team for the second phase of the FIH Pro League, following an incident of indiscipline in Brazil last month.

The second phase of the FIH Pro League is scheduled to be held in Hobart, Australia next month and a reliable PHF source said that Anjum will not even attend the national training camp for the event.

"It has been decided not to send Anjum with the team to Australia because of his undisciplined behavior while returning home from Argentina last month with the national team," the source said.

"Head coach Tahir Zaman will also act as manager in Australia."

Anjum, who was the team manager, was detained by Brazilian authorities in Rio de Janeiro during the return journey after the team's flight stopped there for refuelling. He was allegedly caught smoking on the aircraft, which led to an argument with airline staff, following which he was detained for a day and not allowed to return with the squad.

Anjum and a player who stayed back with him eventually returned to Pakistan on a later flight, two days after the team reached home.

Though Anjum denied that he was smoking, the source said the PHF had completed its inquiry and found him guilty of indiscipline. (PTI)

## Pakistan-born Australian Khawaja, set to retire from cricket, criticizes racial stereotypes

**SYDNEY, Jan 2:** Veteran Australia batter Usman Khawaja has announced he will retire from international cricket after the fifth Ashes test beginning Sunday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

He didn't go quietly. The Pakistan-born Khawaja, who was the first Muslim to play for Australia, used his retirement announcement Friday to criticize the "racial" stereotyping he experienced during his career.

It will be the 39-year-old Khawaja's 88th and final test — played at the ground where he began his first-class career. Khawaja scored his first Ashes century at the SCG with 171 against England in 2018.

It was also at that the SCG where he revived his career at age 35, scoring two centuries against England. That prompted one of the great late-career revivals, as Khawaja hit seven centuries in his next two years back in the side.

But Khawaja's position had come under scrutiny and criticism this season after being unable to open in the first Ashes test in Perth due to back spasms and then missing the Brisbane test with the injury.

He was then initially left out in Adelaide until Steve Smith's vertigo allowed Khawaja to return, before an 82 in the first innings there ensured he would stay in the side for the fourth test in Melbourne. Australia, with a 3-1 lead going into the fifth test, has retained the Ashes.

Khawaja said he felt he was treated "a little bit different, even to now," because of his Pakistani and Muslim background.

"Different in the way I've been treated, different in how things have



happened," he said at a media conference in Sydney. "I had back spasms, it was something I couldn't control. The way the media and the past players came out and attacked me... I copped it for about five days straight. Everyone was piling in."

"Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, colored players... we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough," Khawaja was criticized in the days leading up to the Perth match for golfing twice and not taking part in an optional training session. Some commentators suggested the golf might have been responsible for his back issues.

"I can give you countless number of guys who have played golf the day before a match and have been injured, but you guys haven't said a thing," Khawaja told the assembled media.

"I can give you even more examples of guys who have had 15 schooners (large glasses of beer) the night before a game and have then been injured, but no one said a word because they were just being Aussie larrikins," they were just being lads. But when I get injured, everyone went at my credibility and who I am as a person.

Khawaja said he knew the end of his career was imminent. "I guess moving into this series, I had an inkling this would be the last series," he said. "I'm glad I can go out on my own terms."

Khawaja has scored 6,206 runs at an average of 43.49 in his 87 tests with 16 centuries and 28 half-centuries.

"Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters... and off field, particularly through the Usman Khawaja Foundation," Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg said in a statement. (AP)

### South Africa drop Tristan Stubbs, 7 players from 2024 final retained

**JOHANNESBURG, Jan 2:** Hard-hitting middle-order batter Tristan Stubbs was one of the biggest names to miss out on selection as South Africa, led by Aiden Markram, retained seven players from the 2024 edition, in its provisional squad of 15 for the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Apart from Markram, veteran opener Quinton de Kock, pacers Kagiso Rabada, Marco Jansen, Anrich Nortje, hard-hitting David Miller and seasoned left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj are part of the current set-up having played that fateful final in 2024 when the Proteas lost to Rohit Sharma's India.

The new entrants in the squad include young batting sensation Dewald Brevis, pacer Kwena Mphaka, all-rounder Corbin Bosch, batters Tony De Zorzi, Jason Smith and Donovan Ferreira, spinner George Linde.

Smith has been rewarded for his performances in domestic T20 challenge and ongoing SA20. (PTI)

## Home favourites Tamil Nadu Dragons face Hyderabad Toofans in HIL opener

**CHENNAI, Jan 2:** Accord Tamil Nadu Dragons will bank on the home support with they cross swords with Hyderabad Toofans in the opening match of the men's Hockey India League (HIL) here on Saturday. The second edition of the revived Hockey India League and is scheduled to be held in multi-cities, starting with Chennai before it moves to Ranchi and ends in Bhubaneswar with the final scheduled for January 26.

The Toofans had finished runners-up in the last edition, having lost narrowly to the title-winner Shraichi Bengal Tigers. While Toofans will be looking to change their fortunes this edition, the Tamil Nadu Dragons will be vying to start on a high note after missing out on the 3rd place finish last season.

This season will have a single round-robin stage,

with the top four teams advancing to the knockout rounds, unlike the previous edition, which split the teams into two groups of four teams for the first phase.

In the playoffs, the top 2 teams will compete against each other in Qualifier 1, with the winner advancing to the final and the loser going into Qualifier 2.

The second team of Qualifier 2 will be decided by the winner of Eliminator 1, which will be against the team ranked 3rd and 4th on the league table.

Among the top Indian players to watch out for this season are India captain Harmanpreet Singh (JSW Soorma Hockey Club), Hardik Singh (HIL GC), Manpreet Singh (Ranchi Royals) and Rupinder Pal Singh, who returns to competitive hockey with SG Pipers. (PTI)

## Marijne returns as chief coach of embattled Indian women's hockey team

**NEW DELHI, Jan 2:** Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne was on Friday reappointed as the chief coach of India's women's hockey team, five years after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics following which it has been battling a difficult transition phase.

Marijne would be replacing Harendra Singh, who had to resign in December last year due to the team's underwhelming results and allegations of a "high-handed coaching approach".

The 51-year-old Marijne, who was associated with the team from 2017 to 2021, will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Also returning to the Indian hockey set-up is South African Wayne Lombard, who will once again serve as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance.

"It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to support the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage," Marijne stated in a press release issued by Hockey India.

Marijne, who had immense goodwill within the team and was widely credited for building a cohesive unit that revelled in each other's success, quit immediately after the Tokyo Games, citing family reasons. During his tenure, India also broke into



the top 10 of world rankings.

Vila, a former Argentina midfielder, made his international debut in 1997 and represented his country at the Olympic Games in 2000 and 2004. He has been involved in coaching for over two decades.

Lombard, on the other hand, will be supported by Rodet Yila and Ciara Yila, both in the role of scientific advisor.

**Addressing Transition woes**

After the Tokyo high, the team was hit by a challenging transition period when key players like injury-ravaged captain Rani Rampal, Vandana Katarinya and Deep Grace Ekka, retired from the game.

The women's team eventually failed to qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics but finished on the

podium in both the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the 2023 Asian Games, clinching bronze medals.

The team won a silver medal at last year's Asia Cup but it was not enough to ensure direct qualification for the World Cup this August in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The side was also relegated to the Nations Cup after managing just two wins from its 16 games in the elite FIH Pro League last year.

Marijne's first big challenge as chief coach will be the World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad, Telangana from March 8 to 14. He will arrive in India on January 14, while the National Coaching Camp begins on January 19 in SAI, Bengaluru.

"We welcome Sjoerd Marijne, and the entire support staff to the Indian Hockey family," Hockey India President Dr Dilip Tirkey said.

"We extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) and Sports Authority of India (SAI) for expediting the appointment in order to ensure the team's preparations for the upcoming World Cup Qualifiers is not hampered."

"Emphasis has been laid on fitness of the team which was one of the key reasons for Indian Women's historic performance in Tokyo. We look forward to a fruitful stint," he added. (PTI)

## Joburg Super Kings beat Durban's Super Giants in Super Over finish

**JOHANNESBURG, Jan 2:** Donovan Ferreira (33 not out) and Richard Gleeson (3/41) starred for Joburg Super Kings as they beat Durban Super Giants in first-ever Super Over finish in a high-scoring SA20 thriller and top the points table.

Ferreira ran out Eathan Bosch (9) on the final delivery of Super Giants' chase when the scores were tied to force the first-ever tied game in SA20 history, and Gleeson conceded only five runs in the Super Over to help Joburg Super Kings keep their opponent to 5/1.

With only six needed to win, Rilee Rossouw smacked two fours off the first three balls from Noor Ahmed to help Joburg Super Kings record their third win in as many games and top the table with 13 points.

The game was tied when Durban, needing 15 off the final over from Wiaan Mulder, finished at 205/8 in reply to Joburg's 205/4.

Bosch hit the second ball for a six and Simon Harmer (6 not out) found a boundary on the penultimate ball to bring the equation down to one run needed off the final delivery. However, Harmer missed connecting with a short ball outside off and trying to sneak a single, Bosch was run-out with Ferreira executing a perfect direct hit.

Earlier, Evan Jones (43), Heinrich Klaassen (29) and Aiden Markram (37) did the heavy lifting as Durban Super Giants remained in hunt of chasing 206.

Jones was belligerent as he smacked four fours and three sixes to make 43 off only 17 balls, while Klaassen hammered three sixes and a four to make a 19-ball 29 and Markram found three fours and a six



to make 37 off 30 balls.

Akeal Hosein was tidy in his spell of 4-0-31-2 as he ensured both the Durban openers Devon Conway (19) and Kane Williamson (22) were unable to convert their starts.

In the first half, a robust 31-ball 50 not out with four fours and two sixes from former Maharashtra player and now USA's Shubham Ranjane, along with a big finish from Ferreira (33 not out off 10 balls; 1 four, 4 sixes) had powered Joburg Super Kings to 205 for four.

The opening pair of Matthew De Villiers (38) and skipper Faf du Plessis (47 off 30 balls; 3 fours, 3 sixes) had given Joburg an ideal start with an 89-run partnership inside the first nine overs.

Noor Ahmad bowled a tight spell of 4-0-12-3. (PTI)

## Number of issues which left me completely humiliated, says Gillespie on leaving Pak coaching job

**KARACHI, Jan 2:** The sacking of Tim Nielsen as high performance red-ball coach was among a number of issues with the PCB which left him "completely humiliated", says former Australia great Jason Gillespie, looking back at his short nine-month stint as Pakistan head coach.

In April 2024, the Pakistan Cricket Board had appointed Gillespie as the head coach in red-ball cricket and former South African batter Gary Kirsten was roped in for a similar role in white-ball formats.

However, Kirsten's resignation in October later that year followed Gillespie's in December, when Nielsen was communicated by the PCB that his services would not be needed before the tour of South Africa 2024-25.

A former head coach of the Australian team, Nielsen was appointed as the high performance red-ball coach in August 2024.

"I was coaching the Pakistan Test side. The PCB sacked our senior assistant coach with ZERO communication with me about it - as Head Coach I found this situation completely unacceptable," Gillespie wrote on 'X' when asked by a user why he had left his role with the Pakistan Test team.

"There were a number of other issues which left me completely humiliated," he added.

Nielsen's axing, before Pakistan's tour of South Africa, was perhaps the final blow to a rapidly disintegrating relationship between Gillespie and the PCB, which ended with him refusing to board the flight from Adelaide to South Africa and eventually resigning.

In between his resignation and the exit of Kirsten, Gillespie had also served as the interim white-ball coach. Gillespie was succeeded by former Pakistan cricketer Aaqib Javed across formats, who was also serving on the selection panel.

While he was with the Pakistan team, Gillespie felt he was "completely and utterly blindsided" by the PCB.

He told ABC Sport, "There were certainly challenges. I went into the job eyes wide open, I want to make that really clear. I



knew that, you know, Pakistan had cycled through a number of coaches in a pretty short space of time.

"The straw that broke the camel's back, I suppose, was, as a head coach, you like to have clear communication with your employer. I

was completely and utterly blindsided by a decision to not have a high-performance coach. Tim Nielsen was told that his services were no longer required and I had absolutely zero communication from anyone about that."

"And I just thought after a number of other things that had gone on in the previous few months, that was probably the moment where I thought, 'Well, I'm not really sure if they actually want me to do this job or not.'"

Gillespie even said he felt his job was reduced to giving players catching practice before a match.

"I felt I was basically hitting catches and that was about it on the morning of a game," he said.

"You want to be able to have clear communication with all stakeholders, with selectors, for instance, knowing what the team is as head coach well before the game, or before at least the day before the game," Gillespie added.

According to ESPNcricinfo, Gillespie and PCB are now engaged in a financial dispute with the former coach claiming he was not paid his dues while the board claims he did not provide them with a four-month notice period as per their contract. (PTI)

## Venus Williams back to Australian Open

**MELBOURNE, Jan 2:** Seven-time Grand Slam singles champion Venus Williams has received a wild-card entry for the Australian Open beginning Jan. 18 in Melbourne.

The tournament said Friday that the 45-year-old Williams would make a return to Melbourne Park 28 years after her first appearance. In 1998, she defeated her younger sister Serena in the second round before losing in the quarterfinals to fellow American Lindsay Davenport.

Venus had announced in November that she would play in Auckland, New Zealand, where she also received a wild card, two weeks before the Australian Open. The Australian Open said Williams was also entered to play a tournament in Hobart, Australia a week later and just before play begins at Melbourne Park.

She last appeared in Melbourne in 2021 and has finished runner-up in the women's singles twice, losing to Serena in the finals in 2003 and 2017.

"I'm excited to be back in Australia and looking forward to competing during the Australian summer," Williams said. "I've had so many incredible memories there, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to return to a place that has meant so much to my career."

Williams' record at Melbourne Park is 54 wins and 21 losses. This year will be the 22nd time she has appeared in the main draw.

The tournament said Williams is set to become the oldest woman to compete in an Australian Open main draw, surpassing the record previously held by Japan's Kimiko Date, who was 44 when she lost in the first round at Melbourne Park in 2015.

In late December, Williams married Danish-born model and actor Andrea Preti at Palm Beach, Florida. (AP)