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- Trump 'greenlit' bill that could impose high tariffs on China, India for buying Russian oil: Senator
- Syrian authorities urge civilians to evacuate Aleppo neighbourhoods

**8 NATION**

- India-US ties in turbulent times, each day a fresh challenge: Cong
- Mamata storms I-PAC chief's Kolkata home amid ED search

## Gauhati HC Bar Association on 3-day hunger strike

Shifting of court complex to North Guwahati opposed



**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Members of the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCBA) commenced a three-day, six-hour hunger strike on Thursday against the government's move to shift the court complex to North Guwahati.

A new complex of the Gauhati

High Court has been proposed as part of a judicial township at Rangmahal in North Guwahati, and Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of it on January 11.

The hunger strike, led by the GHCBA president KN Choudhury,

began at 10 am in front of the old building of the Gauhati High Court, as part of a decision in an emergent Extra-Ordinary General meeting held on Tuesday.

"... as a peaceful and democratic expression of its considered stand, the Gauhati High Court Bar Association shall observe a peaceful hunger strike," the Association had said in a statement on Wednesday.

The members of the Bar will take part in the hunger strike on Friday and Sunday also, with the GHCBA also deciding to abstain from the foundation stone laying ceremony of the new high court complex.

"The General Body, after due deliberation, has reiterated and reaffirmed its consistent stand, as reflected in earlier resolutions and the referendum conducted by the Association, opposing the proposed shifting of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

'Bangladeshi Muslims to touch 40 pc of Assam population in next Census'

## More unfortunate news for Assam in offing: CM

**NORTH LAKHIMPUR, Jan 8:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that "Bangladeshi Muslims" could constitute nearly 40 per cent of the state's population in the next Census.

The chief minister asserted earlier that a demographic change has been happening in the northeastern state over the decades, with a steady increase in the population of Muslims of Bangladeshi origin.

"The Census will bring more unfortunate news for Assam. The number of Bangladeshi Muslims will touch nearly 40 per cent (of total state's population)," Sarma told reporters on sidelines of a government programme here. In July last, Sarma had claimed



that the population of Muslims in Assam would be almost equal to that of the Hindus by 2041 if the current growth rate continued.

According to the 2011 Census, Assam had 1.07 crore Muslims (34.22 per cent) and 1.92 crore Hindus (61.47 per cent) out of a

total population of 3.12 crore.

The nationwide Census 2027 will be conducted in two phases -- housing listing and housing census from April to September 2026, followed by population enumeration in February 2027. The exercise, originally scheduled for 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sarma also said all BJP MLAs and booth-level agents (BLAs) have been instructed to flag "any doubtful person" during the ongoing Special Revision of electoral rolls in the state.

"We will try that all doubtful Miya Muslim votes are cut. I have instructed all MLAs and BLAs to flag any doubtful person and register (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Manipur 'gang-rape': Charges framed against 6 accused

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** A special CBI court in Guwahati has framed charges against six accused in the case where three women were stripped naked and two of them allegedly gang-raped during ethnic clashes in Manipur in May 2023.

The six accused have been charged on 15 counts, including gang-rape, murder and rioting.

The court of special judge Chitra Bhukan Gogoi set January 16 as the next date of hearing, where all the accused, including the four lodged in a Manipur jail, will have to be present in person before it. The two other accused are out on bail.

The special court framed charges against the accused on 15 counts, in the order passed on January 2, a copy of which is available with PTI.

The case pertains to the incident of mob violence on May 4, 2023, when the three victims were stripped and paraded naked, and two of them were allegedly gang-raped, while family members of one of the victims were killed.

The incident had come to light much later when a video surfaced and went viral on social media.

"...this court, after considering all the pros and cons, including statements of the witnesses and documents, comes to unerring conclusion that there is a prima facie material against all the accused," the order said.

Accordingly, charges were framed against each of the accused persons in the penal provisions of law under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as well as under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

"The particulars of the charges, on being read over and explained, accused persons pleaded not guilty and claimed to be tried," the order added.

All the six accused have been directed to be present in person on the next date "without fail" to put their signatures on the charges framed against them.

Among the charges imposed on the accused under various provisions of IPC are that of murder, gang-rape, assault or use of criminal force on a (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 23,365 women receive ₹10,000 seed capital under MMUA

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 8:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday inaugurated the distribution of seed capital cheques of ₹10,000 each to 23,365 women entrepreneurs in the Khowang Assembly constituency under the Chief Minister's Women Entrepreneurship Mission (MMUA).

The cheque distribution programme was held at the Rangchali public ground in Khowang, marking a major milestone in the state government's flagship women empowerment initiative.

Addressing a large gathering, the chief minister said the enthusiasm witnessed at the event reflected how welfare schemes had "touched the hearts of the people."

He said with the Khowang programme, entrepreneurship funds under the mission had now been distributed in all Assembly constituencies of Dibrugarh district except Duliaganj.

Sarma informed that so far 17,30,814 women across 72 Assembly constituencies have received financial assistance under the mission, while the remaining

15 lakh women will be covered in subsequent phases.

"Today's distribution is only the beginning, not the end. Our goal is to make all 23,365 women of Khowang self-reliant and transform them into Lakhpati Baidesa," he said.

Highlighting the socio-economic impact of women-led enterprises, the chief minister said even an annual income of ₹1 lakh significantly enhances a woman's dignity and standing within her family and society.

He also referred to the Orunodoi scheme, under which eligible women receive ₹1,250 per month, stating that it has improved the dignity of women in thousands of households.

Citing local success stories, Sarma mentioned Julie Lahon, a self-help group member earning around ₹21,000 per month through integrated animal husbandry, and Jyotsna Gogoi, who earns approximately ₹1.8 lakh annually through fruit cultivation.

He said Khowang already has 2,369

Lakhpati women, serving as inspiration for others.

Explaining the utilisation of the ₹10,000 seed capital, the chief minister said beneficiaries could invest collectively through self-help groups, start individual ventures such as livestock rearing, weaving, fisheries, agriculture or small businesses, or support family-run enterprises.

He added that a house-to-house evaluation would be conducted after six months, following which eligible beneficiaries would receive ₹25,000 in the second phase and ₹50,000 in the third phase, along with bank linkages.

Referring to other welfare measures, Sarma said 31,071 families in Khowang are beneficiaries under Orunodoi and ₹8,000 would be credited to their bank accounts on the 20th of next month.

He also highlighted free rice distribution, subsidised essentials, education support and transparent recruitment that has provided government jobs to over 1.5 lakh youths (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## As Congman got no option: Shivakumar on Assam role

Congress appoints Karnataka Dy CM as party's poll observer in Assam

**BENGALURU, Jan 8:** Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who has been appointed as a senior observer for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, on Thursday said that he had no option and, as a Congressman, would work for the party.

Shivakumar, along with former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and former Jharkhand MLA Bandhu Turkey, was appointed on Wednesday by the Congress as the party's senior observers for the Assam Assembly elections.

"I don't have any option. Whatever the party tells us to do, we have to do it. That is what being a Congressman means. I have seen the AICC press release. They have asked me to look after Assam. I had been to Assam earlier as well, long ago, and now they want me there again. I will be going," Shivakumar, who is also the Karnataka Congress President, told reporters.

Elections to 126 constituencies in Assam are likely to be held in March-April. Shivakumar's appointment as a senior ob-



server has triggered speculation, as he is widely seen as a claimant for the chief minister's post, amid talk of a leadership change in Karnataka.

The power tussle within the ruling Congress has intensified amid speculation about a change in CM after the government crossed the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20.

The speculation has been fueled by a reported power-sharing understanding between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar at the time of the Congress forming the government in 2023. (PTI)

## One-day holiday in Assam's Cachar as respect to ex-Union minister



**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** The Assam government has announced a one-day holiday in Cachar district on Thursday as a mark of respect to former Union Minister Kabindra Purkayastha, who died a day ago.

A veteran BJP leader, Purkayastha, had represented Silchar Lok Sabha constituency thrice, being elected for the first time in 1991. He became an MP again in 1998 and 2009.

Purkayastha was the Union Minister of State for Communication during the first government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee during 1998-99.

"HCM Dr. @himantabiswa-led Govt of Assam has announced a one-day holiday in Cachar district as a mark of respect to the demise of late Kabindra Purkayastha," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X.

"This solemn gesture reflects the collective grief of the people and honours his meaningful contributions, giving everyone an opportunity to offer tribute and remember his life and enduring legacy," it added.

The Assam BJP has suspended all scheduled activities on Thursday as a mark of respect for the deceased leader.

Purkayastha had died at the Silchar Medical College and Hospital on Wednesday due to old-age-related issues at the age of 94.

The last rites are scheduled to take place on Thursday.

He is survived by a son, Kanad Purkayastha, who is a Rajya Sabha MP from the state, and a daughter. His wife had predeceased him. (PTI)

## Assam, MP CMs meet in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** The chief ministers of Assam and Madhya Pradesh on Thursday deliberated on development strategies and good governance, with focus on people-centric initiatives.

They also stressed the need for sharing best practices for inclusive growth.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held the discussions with his Madhya Pradesh counterpart Mohan Yadav in Guwahati.

"Today Hon'ble CM Dr. @himantabiswa met Hon'ble Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, @Dr-MohanYadav51 in Guwahati," the Assam Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X.

"Deliberations focused on development strategies, governance and people-centric initiatives, reinforcing (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Goldilocks moment: BJP on India's GDP seen growing 7.4 pc in FY26

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** The BJP on Thursday described as "Goldilocks moment" the estimate that India's economy would grow by 7.4 per cent, and said the country is expected to sustain this momentum in 2027 as well.

The ruling party said the economic growth will maintain its pace with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on reforms and a commitment to providing transparent and corruption-free governance.

The First Advance Estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Wednesday put GDP growth in 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal year) at better than the 7.3 per cent forecast by the RBI and the government's initial projection of 6.3-6.8 per cent.

"Real GDP or GDP at constant prices is estimated to attain a level of Rs 201.90 lakh crore in FY 2025-26, against the provisional estimates of GDP for FY 2024-25 of Rs 187.97 lakh crore, registering a growth rate of 7.4 per cent," the National Statistics Office said.

The better-than-expected showing comes on the back of resilience shown by the economy despite the

United States imposing punitive tariffs of 50 per cent on Indian goods, escalating trade tensions and threatening to disrupt key export sectors.

BJP national spokesperson Gopal Krishna Agarwal said the GDP advance estimates show the Indian economy is growing at a faster pace to become the world's third-largest economy under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, despite "global turmoil" in the economy due to geopolitics and the trend of protectionism in the form of trade and tariffs.

Citing government data showing growth in various sectors, he said 2026 has "emerged as a Goldilocks moment for our country's economy. Everyone believes that 2026 has brought about significant positive changes in the country's economy."

"We expect to sustain the momentum of the economy in 2027 as well. This is because Prime Minister Modi is committed to continued reforms, administrative reforms, complete eradication of corruption, and bringing complete transparency in the governance," Agarwal told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here. The Indian economy had grown at 6.5 per cent in the previous fiscal. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Centre highlights roadmap for \$350 billion textile economy at ministers' meet

## Giriraj Singh urges states to adopt investor friendly policies to strengthen textile sector

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh on Thursday said the Centre was working to ensure sustained growth of the sector and urged states to attract greater investments in the segment.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the two-day National Textiles Ministers' Conference at Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati, Singh said, "The Union government is working in a steady and balanced manner to harmonise production, exports and sustainability in the textile sector."

He said the conference aims to encourage brainstorming, innovation and idea sharing to help build a strong roadmap for strengthening the country's textile industry.

Singh urged the textile ministers of states to formulate investor friendly policies, and emphasised



the need to attract greater investments at the state level.

He expressed hope that the two-day deliberations would help pave the way forward.

Textile ministers and senior officials from states and Union Territories (UTs) across the nation will be

deliberating on the future roadmap of India's textile sector during the conference.

Organised by the Ministry of Textiles, the conference is being held under the theme 'India's Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage and Innovation'.

Addressing the inaugural session, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said the textile industry is witnessing rapid growth and that the artistic skills of the country's craftsmen deserve greater access to global markets.

He maintained that the conference will provide a comprehensive roadmap for planning future actions to accelerate the growth of the industry.

Union MoS for Textiles Pabitra Margherita, in his speech, said through dialogue and coordination among representatives of the Centre and state governments, the conference will enable the industry to expand its presence in the global market.

He asserted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 3.9-magnitude quake hits Assam

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** A 3.9 magnitude earthquake hit Assam on Thursday evening, three days after a 5.1 tremor jolted the state and its neighbouring areas.

According to officials, the latest quake had its epicentre in Udalguri district and lay at a depth of 10 km.

It was recorded at 7.30 pm at 26.71 N latitude and 92.30 E longitude.

Tremors were felt in central and northern parts of the state, including Guwahati.

No injury or damage of property have been reported, the officials added.

Monday's quake, which struck Morigaon district at a depth of 50 km, left three people injured and caused (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Road rage incident leaves minibus driver critically injured in Jorhat

**JORHAT, Jan 8:** In a shocking incident of road rage, the driver of a public van (Magic) allegedly attacked the driver of a minibus (Traveller) with a machete, grievously injuring him on the head on NH-715 under Pulibor police station in Jorhat on Thursday.

The accused van driver has been identified as Nayanjyoti Saikia.

He was picked up from his residence at Potiagan under the Bhogdoi police outpost by outpost in-charge Akash Gogoi and later handed over to Pulibor Police Station.

The injured Traveller driver was immediately rushed to Jorhat Medical College and Hospital with severe head injuries and profuse

bleeding.

The Traveller bus was carrying passengers from Kohima in Nagaland to Mon district of the same state via Jorhat.

Officer-in-charge of Pulibor police station Nitul Saikia said the accused claimed he lost his temper as the Traveller driver allegedly did not give way despite repeated honking.

Acting in a fit of rage, he allegedly assaulted the driver with a machete.

Following the attack, passengers of the Traveller bus—most of whom are residents of Nagaland—were left stranded on the roadside for a considerable time, causing panic and distress.

Police have taken the accused into (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# Lord's Mark among firms with 153 US FDA-listed orthosurgical products

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Lord's Mark Industries Ltd, one of India's fastest-growing diversified conglomerates, has achieved a major milestone by securing United States Food and Drug Administration registrations for 153 orthosurgical products, setting a new benchmark for Indian medical device manufacturers.

All the orthosurgical products are manufactured within the company's globally aligned manufacturing ecosystem, designed to meet stringent regulatory standards.

The facility operates with internationally benchmarked production protocols, robust quality management systems, validated processes, end-to-end traceability and a compliance framework aligned with US FDA requirements, underscoring the company's long-term focus on export-ready, world-class medical manufacturing from India.

The US FDA-listed portfolio spans a wide range of orthosurgical and allied products, includ-



ing orthopaedic braces, spinal and cervical supports, Lord's Activeguard knee and ankle braces, compression stockings, hernia belts, elastic knee supports, soft and hard cervical collars, chin support belts, disinfectant and cleansing wipes, tennis elbow supports, elastic adhesive bandages, abdominal supports, ARS pads, travel neck pillows and post-surgical rehabilitation products, reflecting the breadth and

depth of the company's manufacturing capabilities.

Commenting on the achievement, Sachidanand Upadhyay, Managing Director of Lord's Mark Industries Ltd, said the milestone goes beyond regulatory recognition and reinforces the belief that world-class medical devices can be designed, manufactured and regulated from India at global scale.

He said securing US FDA

recognition for 153 orthosurgical products highlights the strength of the company's Silvassa manufacturing platform, regulatory discipline and long-term vision of positioning India as a trusted source of globally compliant healthcare solutions.

The development significantly strengthens Lord's Mark Industries' access to highly regulated international markets, including the United States, Latin America and the Middle East.

As global healthcare systems increasingly seek cost-effective yet regulation-compliant orthopaedic solutions, the company is well positioned to expand institutional supplies, hospital partnerships and distributor-led exports.

Through its US-based subsidiary Lord's Mark Global LLC, the company joins a select group of Indian healthcare manufacturers with established US FDA recognition, further reinforcing India's growing presence in the global medical technology value chain.

# Bihar startup Agrifeeder to tap export markets; aims higher revenue this fiscal

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Bihar-based Agrifeeder, a startup co-founded by actress Neetu Chandra, on Thursday said it will tap opportunities in the export markets, and aims to clock a 75 per cent increase in revenue to ₹ 3.5 crore this fiscal.

The company, which was founded in 2017, sells various food items made from agricultural produce procured from farmers in Bihar. The products, which include chana sattu, makhana, lemongrass herbal tea and maize, are sold under the brand 'Agrifeeder by Neetu Chandra' through both phys-

ical and online retail channels. Agrifeeder, which has a manufacturing plant in a village near Bha-

galpur, is looking to raise funds from investors to expand its food business.

Chandra invested an undisclosed amount in this startup last year and joined Priya Pandey, Raunak Kumar and Raman Kumar as co-founders.

"We have secured USFDA certification, which will help the company to enter export markets," she told reporters here. Pandey said the company is expecting a turnover of

₹ 3.5 crore this fiscal year, as against ₹ 2 crore in the preceding year.

She said the turnover is expected to jump significantly from the next

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## More unfortunate news

complaints through the proper process," he said.

Rejecting opposition allegation that the names of people not supporting the BJP was being deleted from the voters' list, Sarma said, "If Congress or any party thinks that eligible names have not been included, they can approach the authorities. However, the process is not by giving press conference, but through filing up the relevant forms (for inclusion/ exclusion of names in electoral rolls)."

He also took a swipe at the Congress, claiming that the party has lost relevance in the state and said, "Except for the illegal Bangladeshis, which indigenous person will vote for Congress?"

Asserting that the opposition will have no impact in the Assembly polls, expected in March-April, Sarma said, "I don't see them working in the field. When we were in the opposition, we were in the field day and night. They have already put up their arms."

On BJP's seat-sharing plans for the state polls, Sarma said the decision will be taken by February 15. (PTI)

## Gauhati HC Bar

the Principal Seat of the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court from its present location," the GHCBA had said in the statement.

"The Association has decided to abstain from participating in the proposed foundation stone laying ceremony. All learned members of the Bar are earnestly appealed to and respectfully requested to kindly honour and adhere to the collective decision of the General Body," the statement said.

The GHCBA has been vehemently opposing the relocation of the high court complex to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra from the existing place at the heart of the Guwahati city.

The government is planning to construct the new judicial township at Rangmahal, spread across 129 bighas (over 42.5 acres) of land.

In November last year, the state cabinet had approved Rs 479 crore in the first phase to construct a judicial township in North Guwahati.

Earlier, GHCBA had demanded an immediate halt to the project in the interest of all stakeholders and the public at large.

The Gauhati High Court is presently located in the Uzan Bazar area of central Guwahati on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. It has a historical building, while a state-of-the-art multi-crore modern multi-storey structure was constructed and inaugurated a few years ago.

Both the buildings are located face-to-face on two sides of Mahatma Gandhi Road and are connected through an underground tunnel, having escalator facilities.

The Assam government is seeking to develop the riverfront of the Brahmaputra, for which it requires to acquire the high court land. (PTI)

## 23,365 women receive

in Assam. On land reforms, the chief minister said the government had recovered 1.5 lakh bighas of land from encroachment by suspected illegal settlers and reiterated its commitment to issuing land pattas to tea garden workers and indigenous families.

He also spoke about measures against polygamy and constituency-specific development works, including road projects worth ₹583 crore, flood protection embankments, bridges and flyovers.

"The women of Assam have awakened. A new Assam is visible today," Sarma said, urging collective efforts for the state's progress.

## Manipur 'gang-rape':

woman with intent to disrobe, rioting, being armed with a deadly weapon, promoting enmity between two groups Meiteis and Kukis, and destroying dwelling places.

They have also been charged with different provisions of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, including disrobing a SC or ST person, and parading naked SC or ST women.

"And I hereby direct that you all be tried by this court for the said charges. Particulars of the charges, on being read over and explained, the accused persons pleaded not guilty and claimed to be tried," the order added. (PTI)

## Assam, MP CMs

cooperative federalism and sharing best practices for inclusive growth," the CMO added. (PTI)

## Goldilocks moment: BJP

The better-than-expected showing comes on the back of resilience shown by the economy despite the United States imposing punitive tariffs of 50 per cent on Indian goods, escalating trade tensions and threatening to disrupt key export sectors.

The Modi government has responded by overhauling GST, which lowered taxes on hundreds of items, and implementing long-delayed labour reforms. These, together with the lower income tax burden, cut in interest rates, low inflation and strong rural demand, have kept the momentum in the economy.

"The GDP advanced estimates that came yesterday show how the Indian economy is moving forward strongly under Prime Minister Modi's leadership," the BJP spokesperson said.

"The macro-economic parameters are strong today because of the Modi government's focus on reforms," he added.

Agarwal said the rural economy is growing at 3.1 per cent with a "strong performance" of the agriculture sector. At the same time, the employment-generating construction sector is recording a "strong growth" of 7 per cent, while the services sector has registered robust growth of 9.1 per cent, he said.

"The current macroeconomic indicators clearly demonstrate India's strength. FDI attractiveness is at a record high, and despite next-generation tax reforms and rate reductions, GST collections continue to rise, reaching Rs 1.77 lakh crore in December," he added.

The BJP spokesperson said India has demonstrated "resilience" despite global protectionism and challenges arising from trade tariffs. "Overcoming external pressures, the country recorded exports of a record USD 419 billion during the April-September period," he said.

"For the common people, inflation is the most crucial issue, and on this front as well, the situation remains strong. Both food inflation and overall inflation are below 1 per cent. The fiscal deficit is also under control," Agarwal said.

"These achievements have come at a time when the budget provided major relief in direct taxes by raising the basic exemption limit to Rs 12 lakh. Despite this, India is rapidly moving towards becoming the world's third-largest economy," he added. (PTI)

## 3.9-magnitude quake

minor damage to houses and structures in Morigaon, Nalbari, Sonitpur and Nagaon districts.

The Northeastern region falls in the high seismic zone, making the area prone to earthquakes. (PTI)

## Road rage incident

custody and further investigation into the incident is underway.

## Giriraj Singh urges

India has set a target of building a USD 350 billion textile economy.

Referring to the Handloom Census 2019-20, Margherita highlighted that the Northeastern region accounts for the highest handloom production in the country, contributing around 52 per cent of the total output.

Secretary, Textiles, Neelam Shami Rao said the industry continues to occupy an important place in the nation's social and economic life, and nearly 500 districts across the country export one or more textile products to the global market.

The inaugural session also featured the opening of an exhibition and pavilion showcasing India's textile strength, innovation and rich heritage.

A report, 'India's Textile Atlas: State Compendium 2025', was also released on the occasion. During the day, multiple sessions were held focusing on infrastructure, investments raw materials and fibres including cotton, silk, jute, wool, technical textiles and new age fibres.

Ministers and officials from various states shared best practices, investment opportunities, challenges and policy suggestions to further strengthen the sector.

The Ministry of Textiles also signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with 15 states.

The MoUs are part of the 'Textiles focused Research, Assessment, Monitoring, Planning And Start-Up (Tex-RAMPS)' scheme.

This central sector scheme is designed to improve the coverage, quality, timeliness and credibility of textile-related statistical products and research. (PTI)

## Markets log losses for 4<sup>th</sup> day; Sensex tanks 780 points on renewed trade uncertainties

**MUMBAI, Jan 8:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty fell sharply by nearly 1 per cent on Thursday, continuing their weak momentum for the fourth straight session, due to renewed concerns over potential US tariff hikes amid widespread selling pressure in global markets.

Deep losses in metal, oil & gas, and commodity stocks amid unabated foreign fund outflows added to the pressure, analysts said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 780.18 points, or 0.92 per cent, to settle at 84,180.96. During the day, it plummeted 851.04 points, or 1 per cent, to 84,110.10. A total of 3,158 stocks declined while 1,039 advanced and 170 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 263.90 points or 1.01 per cent to 25,876.85.

"Market sentiment deteriorated amid heightened geopolitical tensions and global trade-related concerns, which weighed on overall risk appetite. Continued foreign institutional selling, coupled with weakness in the rupee, further added to the negative bias. With global cues remaining mixed and the earnings season approaching, trading activity remained cautious and largely stock-specific," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms,

Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, and Trent were among the biggest laggards.

On the other hand, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, and Bharat Electronics were the gainers.

"Indian equity markets extended losses for a fourth consecutive session on Thursday, recording their largest decline in over four months," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

In the past four days, the BSE benchmark has tanked 1,581.05 points or 1.84 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 451.7 points or 1.71 per cent.

US President Donald Trump has backed a sanctions bill that could impose 500 per cent tariffs on countries buying Russian oil, giving the White House leverage against countries like China and India to stop them from purchasing cheap oil from Moscow.

US Senator Lindsey Graham on Wednesday said the legislation would give the White House "tremendous leverage" against countries like China, India and Brazil to incentivise them to stop buying cheap oil from Russia.

"Domestic markets extended losses as sentiment turned cautious amid renewed concerns over US tariffs and persistent FI outflows, overshadowing optimism

around earnings growth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE midcap gauge dropped 1.99 per cent, and the smallcap index declined by 1.97 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, metal tanked 3.34 per cent, oil & gas (3.15 per cent), power (2.92 per cent), energy (2.64 per cent), industrials (2.36 per cent), commodities (2.36 per cent), PSU bank (2.21 per cent), BSE Focused IT (2.04 per cent) and utilities (2 per cent).

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index was higher, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading marginally lower.

US markets ended mostly lower on Wednesday.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 1,527.71 crore on Wednesday, while domestic institutional investors bought stocks worth Rs 2,889.32 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.75 per cent to USD 60.42 per barrel.

On Wednesday, the Sensex declined 102.20 points, or 0.12 per cent, to settle at 84,961.14. The Nifty went down by 37.95 points or 0.14 per cent to 26,140.75. (PTI)

## GDP to grow by 7.5 pc in FY26, says SBI report

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** India's economy is expected to grow at 7.5 per cent in 2025-26 with upward bias, marginally higher than NSO's estimate of 7.4 per cent, according to a report by State Bank of India. The First Advance Estimates released by National Statistics Office (NSO) on Wednesday put GDP growth in 2025-26 at 7.4 per cent as compared to 6.5 per cent in the previous fiscal. The RBI has projected the growth rate at 7.3 per cent. The gross value added (GVA) growth is estimated at 7.3 per cent and nominal GDP expansion at 8 per cent. Historically, the difference between Reserve Bank's estimate and NSO's estimate is 20-30 basis points and hence the 7.4 per cent estimate is quite expected and reasonable, said the research report from SBI's Economic

Research Department. "We, however, believe that GDP growth for FY26 would be around 7.5 per cent with upward bias. The second advance estimates, incorporating additional data and revisions, are scheduled to be released on February 27, 2026.

"So, all these numbers are expected to change with the base revision to 2022-23," it said.

On fiscal deficit, the report said that at the end of November 2025 it stood at Rs 9.8 lakh crore or 62.3 per cent of budget estimate.

"We believe that even though the tax revenue is likely to be lower than that budgeted for FY26, non-tax revenue will be on the higher side thereby not impacting the overall receipts much," the report said. (PTI)

# Indian Plastics Federation launches North East chapter in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** The Indian Plastics Federation (IPF) on Thursday formally launched its North East Chapter in Guwahati, marking a significant step towards strengthening, organising and accelerating the growth of the plastics industry across the region, with a special focus on Assam.

The launch underscores IPF's commitment to building a structured, collaborative and future-ready plastics ecosystem in the North Eastern states.

The federation already has more than 25 active member companies from the region, a number expected to rise to around 150 within the first six months of operations, reflecting growing industry partic-

ipation and long-term commitment to the sector's development in the North East.

The newly constituted chapter will function as a dedicated platform for industry collaboration, support for setting up new plastics manufacturing units, policy advocacy, skill development and promotion of sustainable and responsible manufacturing practices.

It aims to act as a unified voice for regional stakeholders while enabling closer engagement between industry, government and institutions.

According to industry estimates, the North East currently hosts over 250 plastics manufacturing units, generating direct and indirect employment for more than 25,000 people, with an estimated polymer consumption of about 2.5 million tonnes per annum, catering to packaging, household products, infrastructure-related plastics and consumer goods.

Backed by a supportive policy environment, improved ease of doing business and attractive central and state subsidies, the region



is increasingly emerging as a preferred destination for plastics manufacturing investments.

The presence of leading FMCG companies such as Emami, Godrej, Hindustan Unilever Limited, Patanjali, Reliance, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, all of which rely significantly on plastics for packaging, further strengthens the region's industrial ecosystem.

However, a large share of plastic products consumed in the North East continues to be sourced from other states, indicating substantial potential for local manufacturing, import substitution and value addition. In view of these factors, the

plastics sector in the region is projected to witness nearly four-fold growth over the next five years.

The launch event was held in the presence of chief guest Bimal Borah, minister for industries, commerce and public enterprises, Government of Assam, and guest of honour JB Ekka, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, along with senior officials, industry leaders and members of the plastics fraternity.

IPF President Amit Agarwal said the federation has consistently believed in driving inclusive growth of the plastics industry in eastern and North Eastern India, adding that the focus would be on supporting local industry and encouraging new entrepreneurs to enter plastics manufacturing, thereby generating employment and revenue.

Alok Sonthalia, Chairman of the IPF North East Chapter, said the chapter has a clear roadmap and is committed to organising at least one meaningful, industry-focused educational event every quarter to engage, educate and upskill stakeholders across the region. =

### NAME CORRECTION

My correct and actual name is "NANG SUHITANI KHAMHOO." In my Aadhaar Card my name was incorrectly recorded as Suhitani Khamhoo. So, NANG SUHITANI KHAMHOO my correct name and not Suhitani Khamhoo.

NANG SUHITANI KHAMHOO

## Incident follows violent attack in Kharahat Bor Deroi Gaon One killed in Demow Police firing

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, Jan 8:** A tragic incident occurred at Kharahat Bor Deroi Gaon near Demow on Tuesday night, where one person was killed in police firing during an operation to control a violent situation. The deceased has been identified as Ranjit Pandav, a resident of the same village.

According to information received, Ranjit Pandav was reportedly under the influence of alcohol and was shouting and creating panic in the locality late on Tuesday night. His neighbours, Motin Pandav and Gita Pandav, approached him and requested that he stop shouting. However, Ranjit Pandav allegedly became violent and attacked Motin Pandav on the neck and his wife Gita Pandav on her leg with a dao, leaving both of them seriously injured.

Local residents immediately rushed the injured couple to Demow Model Hospital cum CHC at Konwar Dehingia Raichai. The local Village Defence Party (VDP) informed the



Demow Police about the incident, following which a police team rushed to the spot.

Sources said that Ranjit Pandav was highly intoxicated, aggressive and armed with a dao and remained out of control despite repeated attempts by the police to pacify and disarm him. During the operation, Ranjit Pandav allegedly charged towards the police personnel with the

dao. In response, Rupam Barpatra of the Third APBn fired two warning shots. Even after the warning shots, Ranjit Pandav reportedly continued his aggressive behaviour, forcing the police to fire one round in self-defence. The bullet hit Ranjit Pandav on his leg, after which the situation was brought under control.

Ranjit Pandav was immediately taken to Demow Model Hospital cum CHC on Tuesday night. From there, he, along with the injured Motin Pandav and Gita Pandav, was referred to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH), Dibrugarh, for better treatment. Ranjit Pandav later succumbed to his injuries at the hospital in Dibrugarh.

Hiren Kumar Deka, Superintendent of Police of Demow Co-district, informed the media on Wednesday about the entire incident. He stated that Gita Pandav is now out of danger, while her husband Motin Pandav remains in critical condition and is undergoing treatment at AMCH, Dibrugarh.

## Karbi Honghari Armu Chingrum Ameipi 2026: Unity and heritage shine in day-long celebration



**HT Correspondent**

**KHERONI, Jan 8:** The Karbi Honghari Armu Chingrum Ameipi 2026 meeting was held with great enthusiasm on Thursday at Chengbong (Tharvehidi) in West Karbi Anglong district, drawing over 40,000 participants from across the region.

Organised by the Karbi Honghari Armu Chingrum Ameipi in collaboration with the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and in association with the Karbi Honghari Youth Association, Karbi Honghari So-Arlo Ameipi, Karbi

Honghari Students' Union and Karbi Honghari Rongkhang Youth Longri Ameipi, the event served as a vibrant platform for preserving and promoting the rich traditions of the Karbi tribe.

The Karbi Honghari Ameipi and Karbi Honghari Sabha are regarded as the cornerstone of the community's religious and cultural identity. The gathering highlighted the preservation of the approximately 5,000-year-old Karbi culture, including folk traditions, songs, music and religious beliefs,

while inspiring the younger generation to embrace their heritage.

Participants from areas such as Kopili, Amreng, Bithung, Hamren and Rongkhang converged to collectively showcase religious rituals and cultural performances. The day-long program featured numerous groups presenting traditional dances and music, creating an atmosphere of unity and celebration.

In recent years, such events have received support from the Assam government, underscoring efforts to safeguard indigenous cultures.

The event was graced by distinguished guests, including KAAC Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang as the Chief Guest, Karbi traditional King His Highness Sar Longsing Ronghang as the Special Guest, Lok Sabha MP Amarsing Tisso, several MLAs as Guests of Honour, along with KAAC Executive Members, MACs, board chairmen and other dignitaries.

This grand celebration reinforced the Karbi community's commitment to their ancient legacy amid growing modernisation.

## Sumit Sattawan takes charge as Tinsukia Commissioner

**HT Correspondent**  
**MARGHERITA, Jan 8:** Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Sumit Sattawan on Wednesday joined as the new District Commissioner of Tinsukia. The 2015-batch officer assumed charge following a recent transfer order issued by the Assam government.

Prior to his posting in Tinsukia, Sumit Sattawan served as the District Commissioner of Lakhimpur and later Kamrup (Metropolitan) district. During his tenure in Kamrup (M), the district earned considerable reputation in various fields, which was widely attributed to his efficiency and administrative capability.

According to the transfer order, Sumit Sattawan has been posted as the District Commissioner of Tinsukia, while Swapneel Paul has been appointed as the new District Commissioner of Kamrup (M) district. After arriving in Tinsukia on Wednesday afternoon, the newly joined Commissioner participated in an election-related video conference, marking the beginning of his official duties in the district.

## Massive protest in Karbi Anglong against land allotments

Opposition parties, students and civil society demand halt to corporate land deals



**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 8:** In a major show of unity, opposition parties, student bodies, youth organisations and women's groups staged a large protest across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong on Thursday, opposing the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council's (KAAC) policy of allotting tribal land to corporate houses.

The demonstration began at the Karbi Club in Rongnihat and culminated in a procession to the District Commissioner's office, where a joint memorandum was submitted to Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya through District

Commissioner Aranyak Saikia. Protesters filled the streets with banners and slogans defending the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution with chants like "Ambani Adani mati diya nohobo" and "Solar project nalage."

Ji Kathar, president of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), alleged that the BJP-led government is bypassing constitutional protections to transfer indigenous land to corporate giants such as Ambani, Adani, Greenko, Hinduja, Patanjali and Godrej. Raton Ingti, president of the Karbi Anglong District Congress, criticised the KAAC leadership for en-

dangering tribal land under the current CEMship.

Representatives from neighbouring Dima Hasao, including Nirmal Langthasa (Congress) and Jewel Garlosas (Sixth Scheduled Protection Committee), highlighted similar land alienation for mining and hydro projects in their districts. Social activist Sutradhar Talukdar raised concerns over the state government's delay in submitting an affidavit to the Gauhati High Court regarding the eviction process.

The joint memorandum outlined four demands: an immediate probe into land allotments to corporates over the last three years; a halt on all project activities until compliance with the Forest Rights Act and environmental laws; new rules preventing transfer of tribal land without Gram Sabha consent and an investigation into dispossession and environmental damage.

The protest marked unprecedented cooperation among political rivals, including APHLC, KADCC, DHDCC, CPI (ML) Hills Party Committee, NPP (Karbi Anglong Unit), IPP and ASDC(S), along with civil society groups like the Karbi Students' Association, Hills Tribal League and Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum.

## NFR adopts advanced technology for coach maintenance

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has introduced the Fluke ii905 Acoustic Imager at the Sick Line and Pit Line of Guwahati Coaching Depot to improve detection of air brake and pneumatic system leakages and enhance coach safety.

The technology enables fast visual detection of DV leakage, air bellow leakage and air brake pipe leakage by mapping acoustic signals over visible images. This al-

lows precise pinpointing of leaks, reduces diagnostic time and ensures timely rectification, thereby improving operational efficiency. Pit Line staff have been trained in the use of computerised RTR machines and advanced diagnostic tools to maximise effectiveness.

In addition, the Sick Line/Guwahati has launched the "One Day One Coach-INTENSIVE" initiative, where one coach undergoes comprehensive overhauling daily. Works include exte-

rior painting, installation of passenger amenities, replacement of berth rexine, repairs to linen storage, installation of new EPPF cylinders in lavatories, and provision of dustbins and side mirrors. Three coaches have been completed so far under this programme.

These initiatives underline NFR's commitment to passenger safety, quality maintenance, and continual upgradation through modern technology.

## RPWD Act awareness programme held in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 8:** An awareness-cum-sensitisation programme on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 was held on Thursday at the District Commissioner's Conference Hall, Kokrajhar. The programme was organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Assam in collaboration with the District Administration to sensitise officials about the rights, entitlements and welfare measures for persons with disabilities.

The programme was attended by Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Assam, Sushama Hazarika, District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty, along with ADCs, heads of departments and other district-level officials. Emphasising inclusion, the District Commissioner highlighted the responsibility of officials and citizens to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities and eliminate social stigma, while also citing initiatives such as home voting facilities.

Resource person Rajeev Bharadwaj from the Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, briefed participants on key provisions of the RPWD Act, 2016, including the expansion of recognised disabilities from seven to twenty-one. He stressed the need for disability-friendly infrastructure, inclusive education and timely issuance of disability certificates to enable access to benefits such as the UDID card.

## Awareness programme on 'Bal Vivah Mukh Bharat' held in Matia Islampur Gaon

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 8:** An awareness programme under the "Bal Vivah Mukh Bharat" campaign, initiated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, was conducted on Thursday in Matia Islampur Gaon, the adopted village of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). The event was jointly organised by the Disciplines of Social Work and Sociology, Surya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences, in collaboration with the Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission of KKHSOU.

The programme, attended by around 50 villagers including the Gaonbura, aimed to combat child marriage and promote girls' empowerment through education, skill development and entrepreneurship. Dr Mridusmita Duara, Assistant Professor of Social Work, hosted the session, while Dr Dola Borkataki, Assistant Professor of Sociology, highlighted the legal, health and social consequences of child marriage. She emphasised the pivotal role of mothers and women in preventing child marriage within families and advocated for economic empowerment as a key to independence and informed life choices for girls.

Dr Utpal Deka, Assistant Professor of Economics, stressed that child marriage hinders education and skill development, leading to a "waste of human resources" and limiting girls' contribution to their families and community. He urged investment in girls' education to ensure a more prosperous future. The programme fostered dialogue between university faculty and villagers, reinforcing community commitment to building a child-marriage-free society.

## Preparation for 'Adult JE and HPV Vaccination Campaign 2026'

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Jan 8:** Sonitpur district held its first District Task Force Committee meeting to finalise preparations for the Adult Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and HPV Vaccination Campaigns 2026.

Officials, including Assistant Commissioners Rathish Borah and Rajen Kumar Acharya, DC representatives and Health Department staff, reviewed operational plans, team deployment, logistics and beneficiary coverage.

The Adult JE campaign, starting 20 January, will cover residents aged 15-65, primarily at schools or Anganwadi Centres, excluding pregnant women and those with severe medical conditions. The HPV campaign will target girls aged 14-15 over three months. Strategies for social mobilisation, IEC and inter-departmental coordination were also discussed.

## NCW raises concern over growing human-trafficking cases in Assam

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 8:** National Commission for Women (NCW) on Thursday raises concern over the growing human-trafficking cases in some parts of Assam.

Speaking to reporters in Dibrugarh, Vijay Rahatkar, chairperson of NCW said, "In some areas of Assam, human trafficking has been going on and it is a concern for the people of the state. But in other states viz. Jharkhand, the trafficking has been going on and it is necessary to stop trafficking which has been going on largely".

"National Commission of Women has been working seriously to stop the trafficking of women and child. Many a times, we have seen that the trafficking happens through rail route. Trafficking happens in front of your eyes but you don't know. All the stakeholders working on such cases should have a proper training and awareness," said Rahatkar.

"Yesterday, in Dibrugarh we held a conference on anti-human trafficking in association with Railway Police Force (RPF) personnel.



Those who are working in railways are very important and they can play a crucial role to stop human-trafficking. Service provider staffs, Ticket collector and all the personnel involved with Railways are important to stop human-trafficking. NCW has been working on how to identify traffickers and how to stop trafficking and for that we are taking all steps to create awareness," she said.

## Workshop on Carbon Markets held at Tocklai

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Jan 8:** The Tea Research Association (TRA), in collaboration with the Tea Board of India, organised a workshop on "Unlocking Carbon Markets in the Tea Industry" on Wednesday at the Tocklai Tea Research Institute (TTRI). TTRI functions under the Tea Research Association. The workshop was

aimed at strengthening the tea sector's understanding of climate action, carbon finance and sustainable development pathways. The programme witnessed participation from tea garden owners, small tea growers and plantation professionals from across the region. The workshop was inaugurated by Arunika Phukan Yadav, Executive Director, Tea Board of

India, Guwahati, who, in her address, emphasised the strategic importance of sustainability and climate-responsive practices for the long-term growth and resilience of the tea sector.

Earlier, Dr Venkatesan Selvaraj, Director, TRA, delivered the welcome address in which he acknowledged the continued support of the Tea Board of India. He underscored

the growing relevance of carbon neutrality goals and spoke on the opportunities offered by carbon finance, urging tea stakeholders to engage proactively with emerging sustainability frameworks.

The inaugural session was attended by several distinguished dignitaries, including Prabhat Kamal Bezbaruah, noted tea planter and former Chair-

man of TRA, Mohit Agarwal, Director, Asian Tea & Exports Ltd, Dr Karik Neog, Director, Central Muga Eri Research and Training Institute (CMER&TI), Jorhat, Rajen Bora, president, All Assam Small Tea Growers Association, and Dr Deepjyoti Borah, a senior professional in climate and sustainability, along with other industry representatives.

## Day-long tour highlights government schemes, education and local development initiatives Guv Laxman Prasad Acharya visits Morigaon, engages with farmers, artisans and students

**HT Correspondent**



**MORIGAON, Jan 8:** Governor of Assam, Laxman Prasad Acharya, visited Morigaon district on Thursday, engaging with farmers, artisans, students and beneficiaries of various government schemes through a series of programmes at the Agricultural Science Centre, Jhargaoon and other locations.

The Governor visited the Amrit Lake Project and an exhibition showcasing locally produced goods, organic crops, handicrafts and textiles. He tasted groundnuts produced by the Morigaon Agriculture Department and interacted with beneficiaries of schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and Jal Jeevan Abhiyan. Emphasising the importance of education, he urged parents to guide their children and encouraged natural, disciplined lifestyles. Under the Nikshay Mitra programme, he also donated nutritious food packages to tuberculosis patients.

Governor Acharya conducted a review meeting with the district administration, receiving updates on Panchayati Raj, rural development, health missions and cleanliness initiatives. He also visited a fish production center at Nijrapar, Kumai Regional Secondary School and the Handicraft Center at Jhargaoon, interacting with students and artisans. At the school, he encouraged students to develop a reading habit, increase self-confidence and build successful careers. He also inaugurated a cycle distribution programme, handing over bicycles to three students and participated in the PM Poshan midday meal programme.

The Governor visited the Tata Semiconductor Project, met eminent athlete Ashtipar and practised yoga at Amrit Sarovar. He was accompanied by Minister Priyush Hazarika, District Commissioner Anamika Tewari, ADCs, SP Prakash Sonwal, CEO of Zila Parishad Anant Kumar Gogoi and heads of various departments, who presented progress reports and ongoing initiatives in Morigaon district.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Inspiration arrives as a packet of material to be delivered.  
- John Updike

## More airlines, tough competition

The civil aviation ministry's much publicized issue of 'no objection certificates' to proposed three airlines - Shankh Air, Alhind Air and FlyExpress - apparently to break the near monopoly of IndiGo in the fast-expanding domestic aviation market shows, if anything, a lack of market perspective and common sense. If and when these new airlines start operation, they will have practically no impact on the operations of IndiGo and the Air India group, together controlling over 92 percent of the market, unless the government drastically cuts IndiGo's highly dominant market position. IndiGo has been by far the biggest beneficiary of the robust post-2020 market expansion. IndiGo has been continuously expanding its fleet and service to remain the top beneficiary of the massive market expansion. It dominates the country's domestic aviation business with a market share typically hovering around 66 percent. The combined market share of Air India and its subsidiary, Air India Express, is close to 26 percent. The rest are shared by SpiceJet, Akasa Air, Fly91, Alliance Air, Star Air and FlyBig. Under the circumstances, the entry of new airlines will at best further reduce the market share of the existing small airlines potentially turning them sick. The government must cut IndiGo's market share to 40 percent to allow more business space to smaller airlines. It must act fast before it is too late to reorganise the market as well as the route share.

IndiGo operates a massive fleet of around 425-434 aircraft, primarily Airbus A320 family jets and ATR 72s, solidifying its position as India's dominant low-cost carrier with the world's youngest fleet in its category and a huge order backlog for future growth, despite facing recent operational challenges. Under the circumstances, the entry of new airlines will at best further reduce the market share of the small airlines potentially turning them sick. The government must cut IndiGo's market share to allow business space to smaller airlines. To ensure healthy market competition, India's Competition Commission (CCI) and government must break IndiGo's near-monopoly status in market, taking a lesson from the last month's widespread disruptions by IndiGo challenging the DGCA's Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) Order and, in the process, cancelling thousands of flights. This will allow existing small airlines to survive and expand.

Any addition of small airlines at this stage may only harm the existing operators and disrupt air travel plans of local passengers. Maybe, it is time that the government should ask itself why some 30 domestic airlines were forced to shut down their operations in the last 25 years resulting in massive losses to the stakeholders, including government banks and financial institutions. The government and market regulator should work together to ensure a healthy market situation for all the existing operators to grow before making the market further overcrowded with inexperienced new licensees.

## BCCI disallowing B'deshi cricketer from playing in IPL was wrong

By: Ashis Biswas

Even the return of Bangladesh -Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Mr Tarique Rahman to Dhaka may not help in reducing present political tensions in Indo-Bangla bilateral ties. On the contrary, there is a strong possibility of a fresh eruption of poll-related violence in all likelihood to be engineered by the Jamaat e Islam (JEI) and its other allies. Their aim: to ensure the postponement of the general elections in the country on February 12.

This apprehension is not restricted only to Awami League (AL) leaders. Some senior BNP leaders have been saying much the same thing in the Bangladeshi electronic media in different programmes. With the banned AL not participating in the polls, the BNP has emerged as the strongest contender to win the elections. The prolongation of unrest in the country would definitely delay a BNP victory and trigger further lawlessness and violence. It would also negatively impact prospects of better bilateral ties between Bangladesh and India. In recent times, India has shown more interest than before in improving diplomatic ties with its Eastern neighbour. However, the recent ouster of Bangladeshi medium fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman from the coming high profile IPL cricket tournament has angered large number of sports enthusiasts in Bangladesh. The latter are particularly upset that the Indian Cricket Board took the final decision to deprive Rahman from an opportunity to play for the popular Kolkata Knight Riders team sponsored by glamorous Indian actor Mr Shahrukh Khan. The Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) disallowed Mr Rahman following angry protests from BJP supporters who hurled abuses against the KKR owner Ahahrukh Khan. BCCI informed KKR authorities, who had earlier allowed Mr Rahman to play for a season with the Kolkata-based team, that in the present situation it would not be advisable for a Bangladeshi player to play in India. The BCCI however allowed the KKR to recruit any other player for Rs 9 crore, the amount KKR would have to pay to secure his services. Almost immediately the Bangladesh cricket authorities, in a mirror reaction to the BCCI's decision, announced that it would not allow any Bangladeshi to play any IPL match in India, for reasons of safety of the players at present. In a sense Bangladeshi authorities copied the BCCI's stand.

Normally, the episode involving Mr Rahman would have been reported in some detail, given that (a) both India and Bangladesh take their cricket seriously and (b) of some amount of aggressive "needling" or provoking has somehow become factored in India vs Bangladesh matches, no matter the venue. But such details would have been strictly carried on the sports page, as back-of-the-newspaper stuff. This has changed drastically. Nowadays, supporters of both teams behave more like typical football fans, rowdy and ruthless towards each other. Bangladeshis nowadays go out of their way to root for Pakistan .in any India vs Pakistan sports fixture anywhere in the world.

Given this backdrop, it comes as a surprise to find Bangladeshis are also angry with India for treating them at par with Pakistanis. Players from Pakistan have not been allowed by the BCCI to play in the IPL tournament for the last 2/3 years -- an unhappy, and avoidable outcome of Indo-Pak political disputes over the years. And now the crafty Indians, damn them, are doing the same to Bangladeshis, who have mostly supportive of India at UNGA sessions. , say Bangladeshis.

Not unexpectedly, now there are reports in most Bangladeshi papers suggesting that the goodwill generated by the unexpected visit of Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar to Bangladesh to convey India's condolences and respects to former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has been totally offset by the flak New Delhi has copped over the axing of Mustafizur Rahman from the IPL. Ditto India's favourable decision, according to some reports, to export rice to Bangladesh in its hour of need. Or its recent moves to facilitate the sale of its coal to Bhutan and Bangladesh, following a simplified procedure. Or its commendable restraint in not politicising of Bangladeshi mobs lynching two more Hindus after the brutal burning of the late Dipu Das. No one in Bangladesh doubts the importance of rice or coal in their daily life. As for the killings of six Hindus during the last 20 days, and the rape of a Hindu woman, one person was arrested for the rape and two persons were held following the death of the Hindu After all Dr Yunus has stated tie and time again that criminals were killing Hindus in Bangladesh. But that did not make them communalists did it? (IPA Service)

## The educational environment and quality standards in Assam

In this era of the twenty-first century, when rapid changes in knowledge and technology are controlling the world's economy and social systems, it has become imperative to examine how far Assam's education system has truly progressed or how much it has lagged behind. Although government statistics speak of an increase in literacy rates and thousands of students obtain degrees every year, the real issue for evaluation is the standard of that education and its capacity for application in practical life. At present, an unnatural mechanisation and commercialisation have become evident in Assam's educational environment, which has relegated the primary objectives of education—namely, the pursuit of knowledge and the development of human resources—to a secondary position, making it solely number-centric and certificate-dependent. If we observe the overall picture of education from the cities to the rural areas of Assam, we see that weaknesses in infrastructure, lack of planning, and the wastage of talent portend a frightening future. Education today is no longer merely the pursuit of knowledge; rather, it has become a profitable business and a symbol of social status, where greater importance is given to students' rote learning and examination marks than to their mental development or creativity. This tendency has created a generation in our society that can retain information but is incapable of analysing it to create something new. Therefore, a sharp analysis of the causes behind this decline in Assam's educational standards is extremely urgent in the interest of the nation's future.

Primary education is the backbone of any education system, but in the case of Assam, this backbone has been observed to be gradually weakening and paralysed, especially due to the deplorable condition of government schools. Even today, thousands of government primary schools in the state lack adequate classrooms, pure drinking water, toilets, and electricity connections, which create obstacles in building a healthy educational environment. More serious than that is the fact that, citing the lack of quality education in government schools, parents are compelled to send their children to private institutions, resulting in a clear class division in the field of education. On one hand, children from economically affluent families receive education in private schools equipped with modern facilities, while on the other, children from poor and lower-middle-class families struggle to shape their future in the dilapidated environment of government schools. This inequality affects not only the educational sphere but will also cast a profound impact on future social life. Factors such as lack of infrastructure in government schools, shortage of teachers, and keeping teachers more engaged in non-educational government work than in teaching have destroyed the educational environment. Questions have been raised about teacher attendance and the standard of teaching in many rural schools. Although the government seeks to bring students to school through various schemes, there is no proper evaluation of how much actual knowledge practice occurs inside the classroom. Mid-day meals or free distribution of uniforms may increase the number of students, but they cannot ensure quality standards. As long as the foundation is not strong at the primary level, it is futile to expect children

to perform well in secondary or higher education. The foundation of Assam's education system has begun to be infested with termites, and merely superficial measures will not suffice to repair it.

The debate over the medium of instruction in Assam's educational context is an extremely sensitive yet realistic problem that directly affects the intellectual development of students. Leading educationists and psychologists of the world have repeatedly emphasised that the mother tongue is the best medium for a child's intellectual and mental development, but in Assam, the unwarranted fascination with English medium and social pressure are pushing Assamese-medium schools towards the abyss of death. Knowledge of English is indispensable in the present age, but that does not mean the entire education system should be disconnected from the mother tongue. A notion has taken root among Assam's parents that if their children do not study in English medium, they will achieve nothing in the future or will lag behind in society. This mindset not only harms our language and culture but also re-

duction of students' ability to form concepts or understand them. When a child cannot comprehend a complex subject in their mother tongue and is forced to memorise it in a foreign language, their creative thinking dies. Currently in Assam, it is observed that many students score high marks in English-medium schools, yet their linguistic proficiency—in both English and Assamese—is weak. They memorise English words but do not know their actual application, while they cannot write or speak their mother tongue correctly. In this way, we are creating a "suspended" generation that knows neither English well enough to compete with the world nor Assamese well enough to remain connected to its roots. Government emphasis on English education is a good thing, but allowing mother-tongue-medium schools to be destroyed in exchange is a suicidal decision for the community. What should truly happen is scientifically sound education in the mother tongue along with high-standard teaching of English, so that students can become equally proficient in both languages.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

At the secondary and higher secondary levels, Assam's education system has currently transformed into a mere number-supplying machine, where the importance of marks in examinations far exceeds the depth of knowledge. Obtaining letter marks or star marks in board examinations seems to have become the sole aim of life. This number-centric competition has created unbearable mental pressure on students and forced them to mechanically memorise textbooks. In reality, even a student who scores 90 percent or 95 percent often fails to understand general practical knowledge or the depth of fundamental subjects. In this system, excessive importance is given to science, mathematics, and English, while subjects like social sciences, literature, or arts are neglected, as if they have no value. This has created an imbalance in society. The mindset that only becoming a doctor or engineer constitutes success forces many potential talents to wither prematurely. Parallel to this, the rising business of "coaching centres" or tuition has given a new dimension to the commer-

cialisation of education. Instead of relying on classroom teaching in schools, students spend thousands of rupees on private tuition. This proves how weak our mainstream education system has become. If proper teaching occurs in school itself, why should the need for tuition arise? In this entire process, there is no opportunity for the development of students' thinking ability, questioning mindset, or analytical capacity. They are taught only what questions may appear in examinations and how to write answers to obtain more marks. This type of education may increase the number of degree holders, but it cannot create thoughtful citizens capable of contributing to nation-building. The state of higher education in Assam is also not encouraging. Although new colleges and universities are being established in the state, we lag far behind in quality research and the creation of new knowledge. Our universities have currently become mere degree-granting factories, where an environment for original research is almost non-existent. Due to lack of infrastructure, shortage of funds, and outdated curricula, our higher education institutions cannot compete with leading institutions elsewhere in the world. As a result, thousands of talented students from Assam are compelled every year to go to cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, or Pune for higher education. This process of "brain drain" is an irreparable loss for the state. Most of those who go outside do not return, causing Assam to lose its best human resources. Moreover, allegations of political interference and corruption—from teacher appointments to administrative work—are frequently raised in our colleges. When politics enters the temple of education, it is natural for the pursuit of knowledge to be obstructed. What passes for research is often done merely to enhance degrees rather than to solve societal problems. Since our curricula do not align with current market demands and industry needs, many graduates from universities struggle to find employment. In other words, our higher education merely educates students but fails to make them skilled or self-reliant. Unless this gap is bridged, our economic development will remain stagnant.

The teaching community is the primary driving force of any educational environment, but the perception that has developed in society regarding the teaching profession in recent times and the role played by teachers are matters of concern. In the past, teaching was not merely a profession; it was a service and a vow for society-building. But today, in many cases, it is regarded only as a government job and a means of earning salary. The shortage of trained and skilled teachers is a major problem in Assam's education system. Although the TET examination is conducted as per government rules, there is a noticeable lack of continuous training for skill enhancement after appointment. On the other hand, the reluctance and irresponsibility of some teachers towards teaching have damaged the respect of the entire teaching community. Teacher absenteeism has become a normal occurrence in some rural schools. Conversely, the government also causes loss to students by engaging teachers in non-educational tasks such as censuses, elections, or other work. To improve educational standards, teachers must be given facilities to concentrate solely on teaching and research, while their performance must be rigorously evaluated at the

same time. Allegations of exploitation in private schools—making teachers work more for less pay—are not new. If teachers lack mental satisfaction, they can never provide good education to students. Therefore, restoring the dignity of teachers and ensuring their accountability is the responsibility of both government and society. With the rapid changes in technology, teachers must also keep themselves updated; it is not possible to teach today's students with old methods.

The condition of technical education and vocational training in Assam is quite dismal, and it is a primary cause of our unemployment problem. Our social system still views government jobs with respect and looks down upon manual or technical work. This mindset has kept our youth away from technical education. Consequently, the number of degree holders in arts and general science streams has increased in the state, but there is a shortage of skilled workers for industry or construction sectors. Young men and women from Assam have to go outside and work as security guards or hotel staff because they lack any specific skill. The number of polytechnics, ITIs, or other technical institutions in the state is insufficient, and the infrastructure of those that exist is not very advanced. Although the government has introduced schemes like "Skill India" or other skill development programmes, their impact has not yet reached the grassroots level significantly. In a modern economy, theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient; practical skills are essential. Vocational education should be included in our curricula from the school level so that students can choose their future livelihood according to their interests. Only by arranging specialised technical education in fields like agriculture, tourism, handlooms, or food processing—based on Assam's resources—will the state's economic development be possible. Instead of bringing skilled workers from outside, we must develop our own youth into skilled individuals.

In conclusion, it can be said that for the improvement of the educational environment and quality standards in Assam, relying solely on government policies or grants will not suffice; a social awakening and radical change in mindset are required. Keeping the education system above politics and carrying out its administrative and educational reforms is the demand of the time. We need an education system that does not merely build storehouses of information but expands the horizons of students' thinking and inspires them with human values. Parents must also understand that their children are not racehorses; they have their own talents and interests. Success will come only by emphasising genuine knowledge and skill acquisition instead of chasing marks. To raise Assam's educational standards to compete with the world, quality must be ensured at every level from primary to higher education. Only if the four pillars—teachers, students, parents, and government—perform their duties with dedication and honesty can we build a knowledge-enlightened and prosperous Assam. Otherwise, we will continue merely discussing problems, and our future generations will move towards darkness. Time is short, so it is imperative to begin this reform from today itself. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## Threats and invites: Trump's world in january 2026

By: Satyabrata Borah

Just a few days into January 2026, the world was still buzzing about a shocking U.S. military operation that happened on January 3. American special forces struck Venezuela's capital, Caracas, captured President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, and flew them straight to the United States. Maduro now faces serious drug trafficking charges here. President Donald Trump called it a big win against a leader he blamed for helping flood America with drugs and causing trouble in the region. But Trump did not stop there. In the days that followed, he made a series of tough, direct comments about several other countries. He spoke in interviews, to reporters on Air Force One, and in public. His words worried leaders abroad and sparked heated debates at home.

One country that got hit hard with criticism was Colombia. Trump described it as a very sick place run by a sick man, meaning President Gustavo Petro. He accused Petro of liking to make cocaine and sell it to the United States. Trump added darkly that Petro would not be doing that for much longer. He even said the idea of a military operation in Colombia, like the one in Venezuela, sounded good to him. These remarks came just after the Maduro capture, and they scared a lot of people. Colombia is the world's biggest producer of cocaine, and drugs from there have long been a huge issue for the U.S. For years, the two countries worked together on plans to fight it, with America sending billions in aid for helicopters, training, and crop spraying.

Petro, though, has a different approach. He is a former rebel fighter who became president and wants to end the drug war through peace deals with armed groups and helping poor farmers grow legal crops instead of coca. This has caused friction with Washington. Petro fired back strongly. He said if the U.S. tried anything, he would take up arms again to defend his country. He basically dared Trump, saying come and get me. Colombians rallied around him, seeing Trump's words as an insult and a threat to their sovereignty. The government formally protested, calling the cocaine accusations completely false.

Things escalated quickly, but then took a surprising turn. By January 8, Trump had a phone call with Petro where they talked about their differences. Soon after, Trump invited Petro to visit the White House. It was a classic Trump move: start with heavy pressure to show strength, then offer a meeting to negotiate. Many think he wants Colombia to crack down harder on drugs in exchange for better relations. The invitation calmed some fears of immediate action, but the damage was done. Trust between the two nations felt strained. Around the same time, Trump revived his interest in Greenland. This huge, icy island belongs to Denmark but has its own local government. Trump insisted that America needs Greenland badly for national security. He pointed to the Arctic, where ice is melting fast, opening new sea routes and exposing rare minerals. Russia and China are building up their presence there, and Trump wants to stop them. The

U.S. already has a space and missile base on the island, but Trump says that's not enough. We need full control to protect shipping lanes, track missiles, and mine resources.

His White House team said they are looking at all options to get Greenland, from offering to buy it to using military force if necessary. They stressed that the military is always on the table. This shocked Europe. Denmark's prime minister said firmly that Greenland is not for sale and its people decide their future. Leaders across Europe worried about harming NATO ties, since Denmark is an ally. Greenlanders themselves pushed back, proud of their independence. Trump tried this buy idea in his first term, and it was mocked then. But now, after proving he can act decisively in Venezuela, people take him more seriously. Still, most experts doubt Denmark would ever agree, and force would cause a massive international crisis.

Trump also had strong words for Mexico. He complained that deadly drugs, especially fentanyl made in labs there, are pouring across the border and killing Americans. He said the cartels are very powerful and something will have to be done about Mexico to wipe them out. He hinted at possible U.S. action if Mexico does not fix it. Mexico's president, Claudia Sheinbaum, responded carefully. She said her country is handling security its own way and values its independence. No one wants U.S. troops marching in; past presidents always rejected that to avoid looking weak. Mexico and the U.S. are huge trade partners, with factories and supply chains crossing the border daily. Any big confrontation could hurt jobs and economies on both sides. Mexican officials and businesses hoped quiet talks would prevent worse steps, like new tariffs or raids. In Cuba, Trump sounded almost hopeful for change. He said the communist government there is ready to fall because it lost its cheap oil from Venezuela. For many years, Maduro sent oil to Cuba at low prices in return for Cuban doctors, teachers, and intelligence help. Now, with Maduro gone and America planning to sell Venezuelan oil to U.S. companies, that lifeline ends. Trump predicted Cuba's already struggling economy would collapse, forcing the regime out without even needing an invasion. Exiled Cubans in Miami celebrated, dreaming of freedom. Havana prepared for blackouts and shortages, maybe turning more to allies like Russia or China. Trump seemed to prefer squeezing them economically rather than risking a direct fight.

Even farther away, Trump weighed in on Iran. For over a week, big protests rocked the country over skyrocketing prices, unemployment, and anger at the leaders. Security forces cracked down, and reports said dozens died. Trump warned that if Iran killed more protesters, the U.S. would hit them very hard. He even said America might step in to protect people on the streets. Some protesters waved signs begging Trump for help. Iran's government blamed outside meddlers, including America, for the unrest. This threat raised tensions in the Middle East, where U.S. bases and ships are close enough for quick strikes. People worried it could spark a wider war, involving groups backed by Iran in

places like Iraq or Yemen. All these comments happened in a rush, building on Venezuela's success. Trump portrayed it as proof that America can act fast and win against bad actors. His administration talked about running Venezuela's oil sales and guiding it toward stability. Critics called the whole thing risky and illegal without Congress approving, but Trump pushed ahead. Many saw this as Trump bringing back the Monroe Doctrine, the 200-year-old idea that America should control its hemisphere and keep outsiders away. But he updated it with modern threats like drugs and Arctic rivals. Supporters praised him for standing tall and protecting U.S. interests. Others feared isolation, lost allies, and unnecessary conflicts. World reactions were strong. Latin American leaders condemned interference. Europe united behind Denmark. Iran defied the warnings. At home, Republicans mostly backed Trump, while Democrats questioned the rush to force.

Around the same period, Trump pulled America out of dozens of international groups he called useless and proposed a huge jump in military spending to build the strongest force ever. It all fit his message: less talking in global clubs, more acting with power. What happens next remains unclear. Will talks with Petro lead to real cooperation? Will Greenland stay off-limits? Can Mexico and the U.S. team up better on cartels without blows? Might Cuba open up under pressure, or hang on? Could Iran calm its protests or face strikes?

One thing is sure: Trump's early 2026 statements put everyone on notice. He speaks bluntly, threatens big, and sometimes follows through. Countries are negotiating, preparing, and watching closely. The coming months could reshape alliances, trade, and security in big ways. For now, the world holds its breath, hoping tough words lead to solutions rather than chaos. In simple terms, Trump is saying America will not sit back anymore. He wants problems fixed his way, using strength when needed. Whether that brings peace or more trouble, only time will tell. People everywhere are talking about it, from street protests to quiet diplomatic calls. It's a new chapter in how America deals with the world, full of drama and uncertainty.

To understand why this matters so much, think about everyday lives. Drugs from Colombia and Mexico kill tens of thousands in the U.S. each year. Families suffer. Greenland's location could affect future wars or trade routes worth trillions. Cuba's people endure shortages, dreaming of better days. Iranians risk their lives protesting for change. Trump's approach touches all that, for good or bad. Leaders like Petro and Sheinbaum have tough jobs balancing national pride with practical needs. Allies like Denmark feel betrayed. Adversaries prepare defenses. Back in America, voters who elected Trump wanted this kind of boldness, tired of what they saw as weakness before. As days pass, some tensions ease with talks, others build. The Venezuela operation changed the game. No one ignores Trump's words now. They wait to see action. History shows bold moves can win big or backfire hugely. In 2026, we're watching it unfold in real time.

# Trump's onslaught on Venezuela is aimed at looting natural resources including Oil

By: Asad Mirza

During the past one year, perhaps no other man has garnered so much news headlines and space as the American President Donald Trump. This is not due to any of his humane policies or pro-people announcements, but based solely on his quirky and unpredictable executive orders undermining the global political, diplomatic, and economic rules-based governance or a lack of comprehension on how to run a superpower.

After a hiatus of four years, Trump came back as the 47th American president, promising to get the 14 years-old Russia-Ukraine war ended within 24 hours of assuming office, though nothing of that sort has happened in the last one year.

Immediately after assuming office, he started a whimsical Tariff War against almost every nation and vowed to colonialise Greenland and run over Mexico. The latest folly, which this foaming at the mouth American president has committed is a completely flagrant violation of international norms and the respect for any sovereign country.

Trump's second term is marked by aggressive foreign actions, including the military capture of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and threats toward Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and renewed interest in Greenland, sparking global backlash and concerns over US power projection.

At his inauguration in January 2025, Donald Trump pledged to be a "peacemaker and unifier". Although he has claimed to have brokered several — and in some cases, short-lived — peace deals including that of the self-claimed one between India and Pakistan, he also carried out military interventions with relish, bombing seven countries during the first year of his second term.

During his first stint as US president, Trump dramatically ramped up strikes against jihadists in Somalia. He has intensified this air campaign again since returning to the White House, with 118 strikes conducted in 2025 — more than the Bush, Obama and Biden administrations combined.

Trump launched a wave of air and naval strikes against targets in Houthi-controlled Yemen in early 2025, pledging to "annihilate" the Iran-backed militia group after it hit Israel and targeted Red Sea shipping in retaliation for the war in Gaza.

In March last year a US airstrike killed a senior



leader of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. The operation was carried out with Iraq's intelligence services. Trump wrote on social media that it exhibited "peace through strength".

During Israel's short war with Iran in June, the US struck three Iranian nuclear facilities. B-2 stealth bombers dropped bunker-busters and cruise missiles were launched from a sub. Trump claimed the country's nuclear programme had been "completely and totally obliterated", although the extent of the damage is still unclear.

After IS killed two US soldiers and a US civilian interpreter in central Syria on December 13, 2025 Trump authorised more than 70 strikes on the group. His rebranded "war secretary", Pete Hegseth, described them as a "declaration of vengeance".

Nigeria A US ship stationed in the Gulf of Guinea launched more than a dozen cruise missiles at two IS training camps in Nigeria on Christmas Day. Trump said the aim was to protect Christians who Maga figures say are being targeted for their faith. Nigeria's government denies this, but acquiesced to the strikes.

The US began attacking alleged drug boats off Venezuela's Caribbean coast in September, carrying out 33 known strikes and killing at least 112 people so far. US forces also docked two sanctioned oil tankers, pursued a third and hit a Venezuelan port facility with a drone before last Saturday's operation.

Donald Trump's second term as United States president is increasingly being defined by an aggressive projection of power far beyond Amer-

ica's borders. Following the dramatic US military operation in Venezuela and the capture of President Maduro, Trump has signalled that his ambitions stretch across the Western Hemisphere and into the Arctic, triggering alarm from Latin America to Europe.

He has also muscled about the idea of kidnapping another president, Colombia's Gustavo Petro, and said Venezuela's vice president Dely Rodríguez, will suffer "a fate worse than Maduro" if she fails to fall in line.

Further, Greenland is not the only country feeling the pressure. Trump's rhetoric following the Venezuela operation has been especially sharp toward Colombia. Even as US forces were bringing Maduro to New York, Trump warned Colombian President Gustavo Petro to "watch his ass".

Maduro's ouster has been justified in the name of combating "narco-terrorism." He has been called the "narco dictator" of a "narco regime." Maduro's government was indeed up to its neck in drug smuggling. But the stress placed on this issue reflects a persistent failing in the US approach to Latin America—what we could perhaps call narcolepsy. This seems to be the greatest undoing of the US foreign policy, to remain sound asleep when it comes to Latin America except when it is occasionally awakened to deal with narco-trafficking. Otherwise, public opinion in the United States studiously ignores the one region, excluding Mexico, with which the US has run a consistent trade surplus.

Trump's wrath against Latin American countries started with his spat against Mexico and operations to take control of Panama Canal.

But why is Trump adopting an aggressive posture against the Latin American countries? The reason mostly is based on his temperament to treat every issue in economic terms and his promise of MAGA.

It is not a hidden fact that in the past 25 years, China has made inroads into every Latin American country just like Asia and Africa, China runs its bases and companies from every Latin American country. So, Trump's gameplan is not just to occupy or subjugate Venezuela just for its oil, but as evident from his statements he is basically trying to ramp-up the American presence in every Latin American country.

Why? Because most of these nations also form the backbone of the Chinese expansionism and its control of the global rare earth minerals. Mexico is the largest global producer of Silver, which it largely exports to China and with the imminent Chinese export order banning export of Silver from China, it will ultimately create a Chinese hegemony over the global supply of Silver. Further Bolivia has vast resources of Lithium and Chile and Peru have large deposits of Copper.

Trump knows very well that if the American hold over the global AI, supercomputers and other technological equipment must continue then it has to be done with the control of the global supply chain of the rare earth minerals.

So, in essence it is not a strategic or geopolitics blitzkrieg, which Donald Trump has launched against the Latin American countries but this bombastic show is essentially for the control of the global rare earth minerals. (IPA Service)

## Punjab Govt led by AAP has taken major measures to improve women Health

By: Jag Mohan Thakern

Hindustan Times on its web portal reported an incident, on Oct 15, 2025, which makes everyone shudder and reflects how humanity has dipped into a deep well of poisonous inhuman water. "A 27-year-old woman was allegedly forced to give birth on the roadside in Palwal (Haryana) on Sunday afternoon after the doctors at the local government hospital refused to attend to her without a fresh ultrasound report, her family and police said on Tuesday, adding that the baby was declared dead soon after."

Hospital staff allegedly told the woman's family that she could not be admitted for delivery until they produced a new ultrasonography report, despite the family showing one that was week old. With no ambulance available, the woman's husband placed her on a motorcycle and drove to a private diagnostic centre nearby, according to the family's complaint filed with the police. Ultimately the baby had to breathe his last."

Another example of shameless behaviour of Haryana government hospital staff: NDTV.com in its updated news on Jan 10, 2024, reports, "A woman gave birth to a baby on a vegetable cart on the premises of the government-run district hospital in Haryana's Ambala yesterday after the doctors allegedly refused to pay attention to her husband's repeated requests for help. The baby was born out of doors on one of this winter's coldest evenings. The man — a resident of Dappara, a city in Punjab's Mohali district — had been running from pillar to post after managing to bring his pregnant wife to the hospital. But no one was ready even to bring a stretcher for her, he said."

Such examples are not limited to the boundaries of any state. Rajasthan NDTV, on Jul 02, 2025, posted on its web portal, "Pregnant woman gave birth to a child on the road in Karauli (Rajasthan): A shameful incident involving the health department has come to light in Karauli. A woman gave birth to a child on the road outside the district's Community Health Center (CHC). The CHC was locked due to the absence of doctors and medical staff. The pregnant woman's family members made her sit on the road. Later in the afternoon, the woman, writhing in pain, gave birth."

However, on January 5, 2026, Haryana Health Minister Arti Singh Rao has directed officials to ensure that special emphasis is laid on strengthening the state's healthcare infrastructure in the upcoming general budget. She said that, based on GIS mapping, it must be ensured that no region of the state remains deprived of health institutions and that all citizens receive equitable and quality healthcare services.

The Minister reiterated that the Haryana Government is fully committed to the health of the common people and that every possible step will be taken to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services across the state.

Now the question arises, despite a developed state and having a double engine government of the same party for the last 11 years, both in state and centre, and as being claimed the Haryana Government is fully committed, then why it has not succeeded yet in providing an accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services across the state? Aren't the incidents of Oct 15, 2025 and Jan 10, 2024 a stigma on the face of the BJP-led state government, if true to the extent as reported?

Amid such disturbing news, Punjab has claimed

to have developed an Oasis in the Women Health Sector. Let us see what they claim?

Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Balbir Singh, on January 4, claimed that in a major stride toward safeguarding the health of future generations, the Punjab Government has successfully decentralized maternal healthcare, with Aam Aadmi Clinics (AACs) emerging as the new lifeline for expectant mothers. Within just four months of launching a specialized, protocol-driven pregnancy care model, the state has recorded a massive surge in service utilization, with nearly 20,000 pregnant women visiting these clinics every month.

Sharing the success of the initiative, the Minister Dr. Balbir Singh revealed that the program has already provided free ultrasound services to over 10,000 women through a unique referral system. By empanelling nearly 500 private diagnostic centres, the government has ensured that women can access scans—usually costing between ₹800 and ₹2,000—entirely free of charge. This intervention alone has saved Punjab's families an estimated ₹1 crore in out-of-pocket expenses in a short span of 120 days.

Official data shows that less than 70 percent of pregnant women in Punjab had received their first ante-natal check-up and fewer than 60 percent had completed the recommended four check-ups, while the state's maternal mortality ratio stood at 90 per one lakh live births, higher than the national average. These figures underlined the urgent need for a comprehensive, accessible pregnancy care model across the state.

The Minister stated that Punjab witnesses nearly 4.3 lakh pregnancies every year, making early detection, regular monitoring, and timely referral critical for safeguarding the health of mothers and infants. Over the last three years, the Mann government has established 881 Aam Aadmi Clinics, which have emerged as the backbone of Punjab's primary healthcare system, recording over 4.6 crore OPD visits and treating nearly 70,000 patients daily. Leveraging this infrastructure, the government launched an expanded, protocol-driven pregnancy care model through AACs around four months ago.

Under this reform, all essential ante-natal check-ups are now available at Aam Aadmi Clinics themselves. These include routine and critical tests such as HIV and syphilis screening, complete blood tests, sugar, thyroid, hepatitis, fetal heart rate, cholesterol and haemoglobin assessments. Where ultrasounds are required, AAC doctors issue referral slips enabling pregnant women to access free ultrasound services.

Importantly, around 5,000 women are being identified monthly as high-risk pregnancies, allowing for continuous tracking, focused support, and timely referral to higher medical facilities for specialist care.

The Minister revealed that the reform has also significantly improved the patient experience. Women can now complete most pregnancy-related tests close to their homes, avoid long travel and queues at major hospitals, receive consultations within minutes, and access ultrasound services without any financial burden. From the first antenatal visit to postnatal follow-up, the initiative strengthens the entire pregnancy care pathway by integrating technology, standardised clinical protocols, referral systems and community-level support. On this momentous achievement, Health Minis-

ter Dr Balbir Singh said the initiative reflects the Punjab government's commitment to maternal and child health. "Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, Punjab is building a healthcare system that ensures every mother receives quality care close to home. With 4.3 lakh pregnancies annually, the expansion of pregnancy care services at Aam Aadmi Clinics is a transformative step and sets a new benchmark for primary healthcare in India," he said.

The government maintains that the initiative is one of Punjab's most significant investments in maternal and child health in recent years, aimed at ensuring that no woman is left behind due to geography, income constraints or lack of awareness, while steadily improving health outcomes for mothers and newborns across the state.

The Health Minister said that under the Diagnostic Initiative, X-ray and ultrasound facilities are being provided at all secondary healthcare facilities or empanelled diagnostic centres at nominal government fixed rates. To bridge the human resource gap, he said that 3,620 health professionals have been recruited over the last three years, including specialists, medical officers, nurses, and frontline workers. Special initiatives such as re-employment of specialists up to 65 years and hiring on empanellment basis are further boosting specialist availability, he added.

While highlighting the government's commitment towards women-centric welfare policies, the Minister for Social Security, Women and Child Development, Punjab, Dr. Baljit Kaur, stated on December 29, 2025 that the state Government continues to take people-centric initiatives to ensure the welfare of women and strengthen maternal and child health security. In this direction, the Punjab Government has disbursed financial assistance worth ₹26.06 crore to pregnant women and lactating mothers during the current financial year.

Dr Baljit Kaur emphasized that the scheme is not limited to financial assistance alone, but is a significant step towards strengthening maternal health, nutrition, and newborn care. She reiterated that the Punjab Government is committed to ensuring that no mother is deprived of essential healthcare services due to financial constraints, and that every child receives a safe and healthy start to life.

Providing further details, Dr. Baljit Kaur said that under the scheme, financial assistance of ₹5,000 is provided on the birth of the first child, which is released in two instalments—₹3,000 as the first instalment and ₹2,000 as the second instalment.

She added that on the birth of the second child, if the child is a girl, financial assistance of ₹6,000 is provided in a single instalment. The Minister emphasized that the entire amount is transferred directly into the beneficiaries' bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to ensure transparency and timely support.

The Cabinet Minister informed that so far, 69,110 pregnant and lactating women have benefited from the scheme during the current financial year. She further stated that the Punjab Government has set a target to cover 1.14 lakh beneficiary women during the financial year 2025–26 under this scheme.

Reaffirming the government's resolve, she said that the Punjab Government remains fully committed to the welfare of women and children, and ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach every eligible beneficiary remains the top priority. (IPA Service)

## High Court satisfied with SIT probe into Sabarimala gold theft case

By: P Sreekumaran

The Kerala high Court's expression of satisfaction with the investigation being conducted by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the Sabarimala gold theft case constitutes a major setback to the combined Opposition in the State.

The Opposition has been launching a vituperative campaign to discredit the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government on the issue, making baseless allegations and unleashing an orchestrated misinformation campaign.

In a major relief to the Government, the court has extended by another six weeks the deadline to the SIT to complete the probe. The Court had granted a six-week extension a month ago, following a request by the head of the SIT. This was after the SIT submitted its updated probe findings to the court.

On Monday, January 6, H. Venkatesh, Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) (Law and Order), who heads the SIT, S. Sasidharan, Superintendent of Police, the investigating officer and the Chief Vigilance Security Officer of Sabarimala submitted a detailed report on the ongoing investigation. Of the 15 accused, nine have already been arrested. The SIT's report concludes that the alleged misappropriation of gold occurred between 1998 when the gold cladding works were done by UB Group and September 2025 when the Dwarapalaka idols were sent to Smart Creations in Chennai, a private firm for gold plating.

The SIT had collected samples from the original plates at the Sannidhanam and conducted scientific tests at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC). The nature of examination being very sensitive and complex, all efforts have been taken by the scientists to carry out the tests in a most comprehensive manner. The results have not yet been obtained.

The outcome of these tests are crucial as it may shed light on the manner in which the gold was surreptitiously removed, replaced, or misappropriated pursuant to a pre-meditated and concerted design by individuals who were entrusted with the custody and protection of the valuables of the deity, according to a Division Bench of Justice V. Raja Vijayaraghavan and Justice K. V. Jayakumar.

After going through the report, the High Court said it was satisfied that the investigation was being carried out in a professional and thorough manner, leaving no stone unturned.

Despite the attempts made by certain persons to conceal records relating to the transactions under scrutiny, the SIT had succeeded in tracing and recovering vital documentary evidence. And in spite of the clear directions of the court, it was being reported that the SIT was being subjected to pressure through misleading, speculative and unfounded reports aired through a sec-

tion of the mainstream media as well as social media platforms. Such biased reportage had the potential to undermine the integrity of the probe, erode public confidence in institutions, and interfere with the fair administration of criminal justice.

The court further said, "We reiterate our direction to the SIT and its officials to continue the investigation meticulously and fearlessly, uninfluenced by any external pressures or extraneous considerations."

Meanwhile, more details of the report have come out. The report said the key persons arraigned as accused in the case conspired to steal more gold from the temple, including from the gold-plated Dwarapalaka statues and the door frame of the sanctum sanctorum.

The three accused, the report said, held a secret meeting in Bengaluru after the case came up for hearing in Court in October 2025. The trio of Unnikrishnan Potti, Bellary-based jeweler Govardhan and Pankaj Bhandari, CEO of Chennai-based Smart Creations, where the idols were taken for gold plating — discussed the possible course of action in case they were implicated in the case, in an attempt to destroy evidence. Their cellphone records confirmed this, said the report.

Another shocking finding is that the officials of the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) had conspired in the alleged misappropriation of gold from the temple. All criminal activities were part of a larger conspiracy and organised crime. The trio also had plans to dismantle other gold-plated items of the Sreekoil and misappropriate the gold.

The report also said that the TDB officials, who had clear knowledge that the temple's door frames were gold-clad, with dishonest intention referred to them as copper plates, even in the mahazar. These acts amounted to official misconduct, thereby abetting and aiding Potti and others to steal the gold taken to Smart Creations.

The SIT made these submissions while opposing the bail plea of Govardhan. It said he was aware of the gold-plating work done on the sanctum sanctorum. His custody was needed as there is a need to additionally ascertain his role in the case.

In another report submitted before the court, the SIT has raised grave allegations against A. Padmakumar, former TDB president, too. He indulged in grave misconduct by making false entries in official correspondence, which led to the misappropriation of gold from the temple. He allegedly even replaced the word gold cladded to copper covered, when the door frames were given for gold plating. In another development the Vigilance wing of the TDB has launched an inquiry into alleged irregularities in the distribution of ghee offerings at the Sabarimala temple. According to informed sources, 16,000 packets of ghee, valued at Rs 16 lakh, which were handed over to the distribution counter, are reported to be missing. (IPA Service)

# Trump 'greenlit' bill that could impose high tariffs on China, India for buying Russian oil: Senator

*'This will be well-timed, as Ukraine is making concessions for peace, and Putin is all talk'*

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Jan 8:** US President Donald Trump has "greenlit" a sanctions bill that could impose 500 per cent tariffs on countries buying Russian oil, giving him "tremendous leverage" against countries like China and India to stop them from purchasing cheap oil from Moscow.

Senator Lindsey Graham said he had a "very productive meeting" with Trump at the White House on Wednesday, during which the President "greenlit" the bipartisan Russia sanctions bill that has been in the works for months.

"This will be well-timed, as Ukraine is making concessions for peace, and Putin is all talk, continuing to kill the innocent. This bill will allow President Trump to punish those countries who buy cheap Russian oil, fuelling Putin's war machine," Graham said in a post on X on Wednesday.

"This bill would give President Trump tremendous leverage against countries like China, India and Brazil to incentivise them to stop buying the cheap Russian oil that provides the financing for Putin's bloodbath against Ukraine," he said.

Graham said he looks forward to a "strong" bipartisan vote on the bill, "hopefully as early as next



week." Trump has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, among the highest in the world, including 25 per cent levies for its purchases of Russian energy.

Graham and Blumenthal have introduced the Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025, which would impose secondary tariffs and sanctions on "countries that continue to fund Putin's barbaric war in Ukraine."

The legislation has proposed a 500 per cent tariff on secondary purchase and reselling of Russian oil and one that almost every single member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has co-sponsored.

"President Trump and his team have made a powerful move, implementing a new approach to end this bloodbath between Russia and Ukraine... However, the ultimate hammer to bring about the end of this war will be tariffs against countries, like China, India and Brazil, that prop up Putin's war machine by purchasing cheap Russian oil and gas," a joint statement by Graham and Blumenthal had said last week.

Earlier this week, Graham said that Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra informed him about New Delhi reducing its purchases of Russian oil and asked him to

convey to President Trump to "relieve the tariff" imposed on India. Graham, accompanying Trump on Air Force One on Sunday, was talking about his tariff bill.

He said that to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, pressure must be put on Russian President Vladimir Putin's customers. Trump said that the sanctions are hurting Russia very badly and then mentioned India. Graham then said that the US put a 25 per cent tariff on India for buying Russian oil.

"This stuff works...but if you are buying cheap Russian oil, keeping Putin's war machine going, we are trying to give the President the ability to make that a hard choice by tariffs. I really do believe that what he (Trump) did with India is the chief reason India is now buying substantially less Russian oil," Graham said.

Kwatra last month hosted US Senators, including Graham, Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Peter Welch, Dan Sullivan and Markwayne Mullin at India House, the official residence of the Ambassador of India in Washington, DC. "Had fruitful conversations on the India-US partnership from energy and defence cooperation to trade and important global developments. Grateful for their support

for a stronger India-US relationship," Kwatra had said in a post on X. India buys about 88 per cent of its crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel, from overseas.

Russian oil made up hardly 0.2 per cent of all crude oil that India imported till 2021. India, the world's third-largest oil importer, became the largest buyer of discounted Russian crude after Western countries shunned Moscow following its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Traditionally reliant on Middle Eastern oil, India sharply ramped up Russian imports as sanctions and reduced European demand made barrels available at steep discounts, pushing its share from under 1 per cent to nearly 40 per cent of total crude imports.

In December, Russia remained India's top supplier, but its share fell to less than a quarter of all oil imports from about a third in November. According to real-time data analytics company Kpler, Russian crude imports into India are expected to fall to around 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, down from 1.84 million bpd in November, marking the lowest level since December 2022. (PTI)

## Iran ready to fight back if US or Israel attacks again, says foreign minister

**BEIRUT, Jan 8:** Iran does not want war with Israel or the United States, but is ready to fight back if attacked again, the country's foreign minister said on Thursday.

Speaking upon arrival in Beirut, Abbas Araghchi told reporters that Iran is also ready for negotiations with the US over its nuclear programme as long as the talks are based on mutual respect rather than "dictation" by Washington.

Araghchi's comments came as many fear that close US ally Israel will target Iran again as it did during the 12-day war it launched against Tehran in June. Israel killed a slew of top military officials and nuclear scientists, and the US bombed Iranian nuclear enrichment sites.

"America and Israel have tested their attack on Iran, and this attack and strategy faced extreme failure," the Iranian official said in Beirut at the start of a two-day visit to Lebanon. "If they repeat it, they will face the same results."

"We are ready for any choice. We don't desire a war, but we are ready for it," Araghchi said.

In February, US President Donald Trump reimposed a "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran in an effort to block its development of nuclear weapons. The campaign included US-led strikes on three critical Iranian enrichment facilities in June.

Araghchi said Tehran is ready for "negotiations, but I say that the negotiations should be based on mutual respect and mutual interests."

"We believe that once the Americans reach the outcome that constructive and positive negotiations rather than ordering dictation are the framework, then at that time the results of these negotiations become fruitful," he said.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60 per cent purity — a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels — after Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers in 2018. Tehran has maintained its atomic programme is peaceful, though the West and the IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog, say Iran had an organised nuclear weapons programme until 2003. In late December, Trump warned Iran that the US could carry out further military strikes if the country attempts to reconstitute its nuclear programme, as he held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida. (AP)

## 'UAE smuggled wanted Yemen separatist leader out of country'

**DUBAI, Jan 8:** Saudi Arabia alleged Thursday that the United Arab Emirates smuggled a separatist leader in Yemen wanted for treason out of the country and flew him to Abu Dhabi.

The UAE had no immediate reaction to the claim, which further escalates tensions between the neighbouring nations on the Arabian Peninsula as their partnership in the years-long war in Yemen breaks down.

A Saudi military statement claimed Aidarus al-Zubaidi, the leader of the Southern Transitional Council, fled Yemen by boat to Somalia. Then, UAE officials flew al-Zubaidi to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the Emirates, the statement said. The UAE has been the major supporter of the council, known as the STC, which sparked a confrontation between Saudi Arabia and the Emirates in recent days after STC fighters advanced in two governorates and appeared to be preparing to secede from Yemen.

The Saudi statement from Maj. Gen. Turki al-Malki included him, naming a major general in the UAE as being involved in al-Zubaidi's alleged escape, along with identifying his nom de guerre — something highly unusual in the typical clubby world of Gulf Arab relations. It also suggested an Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft used in the operation had been used in "conflict zones" like Ethiopia, Libya and Somalia — routes the Emirati military has been accused of funneling weapons through in the past.

The UAE has denied running guns into those areas. The Emirati Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. The STC did not immediately acknowledge the allegation either, saying on Wednesday that al-Zubaidi had remained in Aden, where forces allied against the Iranian-backed Houthis rebels had congregated for years since the rebels seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa. (AP)

## Pakistan air force chief meets Saudi military leadership, discusses ways to expand military ties

**ISLAMABAD, Jan 8:** Pakistan's air chief met Saudi Arabia's top air force commander and discussed opportunities to expand military cooperation between the two longtime allies, the military said here on Thursday.

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Chief, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, this week visited the Gulf Kingdom, where he met Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force Lt Gen Turki bin Bander bin Abdulaziz and Chief of the General Staff General Fayyadh bin Hameed Al-Rowaily.

According to a statement by the Pakistan military on Thursday, bilateral cooperation, regional security dynamics and future defence collaboration were discussed during the meetings.

It said that the Saudi defence leadership praised the robust bond of fraternity between the two brotherly nations and commended the close, enduring cooperation that exists between their respective Air Forces.

"Acknowledging the growing significance of Multi Domain Operations in addressing the complexities of modern warfare, the military leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Ara-

bia conveyed strong interest in leveraging Pakistan Air Force's rich operational experience through enhanced joint training and operational collaboration," the statement said.

"They also appreciated Pakistan's constructive role in promoting regional peace and stability," it added. "Both sides expressed satisfaction over the existing level of cooperation and agreed to further enhance engagement through joint training, operational collaboration and exchange of professional expertise," the statement said.

Sidhu highlighted the historic, time-tested and fraternal relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, founded on shared religious values, mutual respect and strategic alignment.

He reiterated his unwavering commitment to enhancing existing ties in the realm of military-to-military cooperation through bilateral and multilateral exercises. He underscored the profound transformation of the PAF in recent years, with particular emphasis on its evolution into a robust Multi-Domain Force.

Sidhu emphasised that this enhanced capability, seamlessly inte-

grating space, electronic warfare, cyber, niche technologies and artificial intelligence domains, was decisively manifested during the May conflict in 2025, reflecting PAF's operational prowess, adaptability and combat effectiveness, the statement said.

It further said that his visit "underscores the depth of the enduring strategic partnership between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and reflects the shared commitment of both nations to further strengthen cooperation in the defence and aviation sectors".

The Defence Agreement between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was highlighted as a powerful affirmation of mutual trust, strategic alignment and enduring brotherly ties, it said.

Both sides agreed to broaden the horizon of collaboration by exploring new avenues of defence cooperation, it added.

In September, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a "strategic mutual defence" agreement, which declared that any attack on either country would be considered "an aggression against both". (PTI)

## Minneapolis on edge after fatal shooting of woman by ICE officer

**MINNEAPOLIS, Jan 8:** Minneapolis was on edge Thursday following the fatal shooting of a woman by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer taking part in the Trump administration's latest immigration crackdown, with the governor calling for people to remain calm and schools cancelling classes and activities as a safety precaution. State and local officials demanded ICE leave the state after 37-year-old Renee Nicole Macklin Good was shot in the head. But Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said agents are not going anywhere. The Department of Homeland Security has deployed more than 2,000 officers to the area in what it says is its largest immigration enforcement operation ever. Noem said more than 1,500 people have been arrested.

Macklin Good's killing on Wednesday morning in a residential neighbourhood south of downtown

was recorded on video by witnesses, and by the evening, hundreds of people came out for a vigil to mourn her and urge the public to resist immigration enforcement. Some then chanted as they marched through the city, but there was no violence.

"I would love for ICE to leave our city and for more community members to come to see it happens," said Sander Kolodziej, a painter who came to the vigil to support the community. The videos of the shooting show an officer approaching an SUV stopped across the middle of the road, demanding the driver open the door and grab the handle. The Honda Pilot begins to pull forward, and a different ICE officer standing in front of it pulls his weapon and immediately fires at least two shots at close range, jumping back as the vehicle moves toward him. (AP)

## Clashes with Kurds continue

## Syrian authorities urge civilians to evacuate Aleppo neighbourhoods



**ALEPPO (SYRIA), Jan 8:** Syrian authorities warned civilians to leave a contested area in the northern city of Aleppo on Thursday and opened a corridor for them to evacuate for a second day as clashes continued between government and Kurdish forces.

The government of Aleppo province gave residents until 1 pm local time to evacuate in coordination with the army. State news agency SANA, citing the army, said the military would begin "targeted operations" against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsood, Achrafieh and Bani Zaid half an hour after that deadline.

The military later issued a series of maps with the areas under evacuation order.

An Associated Press journalist at the scene heard sporadic sounds of shelling as civilians streamed out of the area Thursday morning. As of Wednesday, more than 46,000 people had been displaced across the province, according to Aleppo's Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour.

Mohammad Ali, operations director with the Syrian Civil Defence in Aleppo, said some 11,000 more fled Thursday.

"There's a large percentage of them with difficult medical issues, elderly people, women, and children," he said.

The SDF has said that at least eight civilians were killed in the Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods, while government officials reported that at least five civilians and one soldier have been killed in the surrounding government-controlled areas in the fighting that broke out on Tuesday. Dozens more on both sides have been wounded.

Each side has accused the other of deliberately targeting civilian neighbourhoods and infrastructure.

**Churches hosting displaced**

St. Ephrem Syrian Orthodox Church in Aleppo city was hosting about 100 people who had fled the fighting. Parishioners had donated mattresses, blankets and food, priest Adai Maher said.

"As soon as the problems started and we heard the sounds (of clashes), we opened our church as a shelter for people who are fleeing their homes," he said.

Among them was Georgette Lulu, who said her family is planning to travel to the city of Hasakeh in SDF-controlled northeast Syria when the security situation allows.

"There was a lot of bombing and loud noises, and a shell landed next to our house," she said. "I've been through these circumstances a lot, so I don't get frightened, but my niece was really afraid, so we had to come to the church."

Hassan Nader, a representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Aleppo, said about 4,000 were staying in shelters in the city while tens of thousands had gone to other areas of the province, and the ministry was working with NGOs to supply them with food, medicine and other necessities.

**Political impasse**  
The clashes come amid an im-

passé in political negotiations between the central state and the SDF.

The leadership in Damascus under interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa signed a deal in March with the SDF, which controls much of the northeast, for it to merge with the Syrian army by the end of 2025. There have been disagreements on how it would happen. In April, scores of SDF fighters left Sheikh Maqsood and Achrafieh as part of the deal.

Officials from the central government and SDF met again on Sunday in Damascus, but government officials said that no tangible progress had been made.

Some of the factions that make up the new Syrian Army, formed after the fall of former President Bashar Assad in a rebel offensive in December 2024, were previously Turkish-backed insurgent groups that have a long history of clashing with Kurdish forces.

In the city of Qamishli in the Kurdish-controlled northeast, thousands of protesters gathered Thursday, chanting in support of the SDF and against the government offensive.

**International concerns**

The SDF has for years been the main US partner in Syria in fighting against the Islamic State group, but Türkiye considers the SDF a terrorist organisation because of its association with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a long-running insurgency in Türkiye. A peace process is now underway.

Despite the long-running US support for the SDF, the Trump administration in the US has also developed close ties with al-Sharaa's government and has pushed the Kurds to implement the March deal.

A US State Department official said in a statement Thursday that the US "is closely monitoring the situation" and urged "restraint on all sides." It said US envoy Tom Barrack is trying to facilitate dialogue between the two sides.

"All parties should focus on how to build a peaceful, stable Syria that protects and serves the interests of all Syrians, rather than pushing the country back into a cycle of violence," the statement said.

Türkiye's Ministry of National Defence said Thursday that the "operation is being carried out entirely by the Syrian Army" while Türkiye is "closely monitoring."

"Syria's security is our security," the statement said, adding that "Türkiye will provide the necessary support should Syria request it."

The United Nations has expressed concern at the violence.

UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters Wednesday that Secretary General Antonio Guterres "is alarmed by reports of civilian deaths and injuries following hostilities in Aleppo."

"We call on all actors to immediately de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint, and take all measures to prevent further harm to civilians" and to "promptly resume negotiations in order to fully implement the 10 March agreement," he said. (AP)

## Farmers block highways across Greece in protest over rising costs, EU trade deal

**KASTRO (GREECE), Jan 8:** Farmers in Greece escalated nationwide protests on Thursday, launching a 48-hour blockade of major highways, junctions and toll stations over soaring production costs and a contentious European Union trade deal with South American nations.

Tractors lined key routes across the country, halting all traffic except emergency vehicles. Police directed traffic to secondary routes when possible and did not intervene to counter the blockades.

But the country's conservative government has warned that it would not tolerate more extended blockades.

The country's main highway connecting Athens to the northern city of Thessaloniki was shut in both directions at several points, as farmers demanded stronger state support and the rejection of the EU-Mercosur agreement.

"We've reached a breaking point," Yiannis Baritas, a cabbage



farmer and father of five, said at a roadblock in southern Greece. "We'll stay here as long as it takes to support our families. They've pushed us to desperation."

The protests, which began in November, initially centred on rising production costs, worsened by a series of crises: a subsidy fraud scandal delaying legitimate payments, and a sheep and goat pox outbreak.

The government on Wednesday announced late concessions to try and head off the latest protests, including cheaper electricity rates for farmers and fuel tax rebates.

The proposed trade deal would create a vast free-trade zone between Europe and South American nations, including Brazil and Argentina. European farmers fear it would flood the market with cheaper imports — triggering protests in other EU countries as well, including in France on Thursday.

"If this agreement goes through, Greek agriculture is finished," Vangelis Roubis, a protest organiser, told The Associated Press outside the southern city of Halkida.

"Greece depends on agriculture and tourism. We don't have heavy industry like Germany or France. Production costs here are 300% higher than in Latin America."

Roubis pointed to potatoes as an example: Greek farmers need 35 to 40 cents per kilogram to break even, compared with roughly 10 cents in Brazil.

He added: "We want Greece to join the block of EU nations that rejects this deal." (AP)

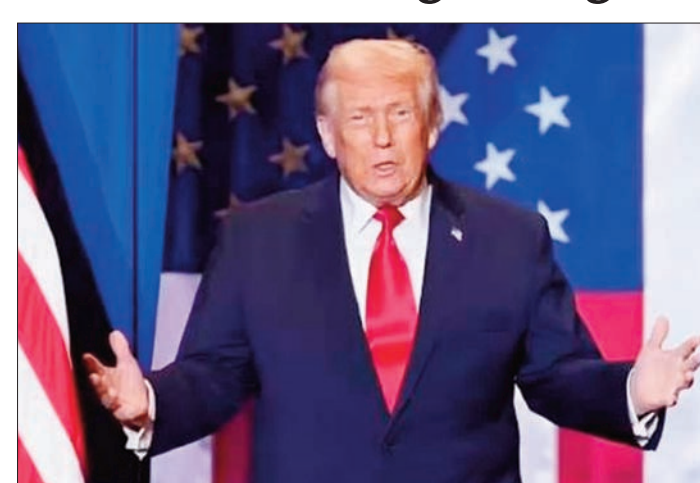
**WASHINGTON, Jan 8:** President Donald Trump on Wednesday proposed setting military spending at USD 1.5 trillion in 2027, citing "troubled and dangerous times."

Trump called for the massive surge in spending days after he ordered a US military operation to capture Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and spirit him out of the country to face drug trafficking charges in the United States. US forces continue to mass in the Caribbean Sea.

The 2026 military budget is set at USD 901 billion.

Trump in recent days has also called for taking over the Danish territory of Greenland for national security reasons and has suggested he's open to carrying out military operations in Colombia. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has ominously warned that longtime adversary Cuba "is in trouble."

"This will allow us to build the Dream Military" that we have long been entitled to and, more importantly, that will keep us SAFE and



SECURE, regardless of foe," Trump said in a posting on Truth Social announcing his proposal.

He added that he feels comfortable surging spending on the military because of increased revenue created by his administration through tariffs imposed on friends and foes around the globe since his return to office.

Meanwhile, Trump on Wednesday also threatened to cut off Pentagon purchases from Raytheon, one of the biggest US defence contractors, if the company did not end the practice of stock buybacks and invest more profits into building out its weapons manufacturing capacity.

Trump in recent months has re-

peatedly complained that defense companies have been woefully behind on deliveries of critical weaponry, yet continue to mete out dividends and stock buybacks to investors and offering eye-popping salaries to top executives.

"Either Raytheon steps up, and starts investing in more upfront investment like Plants and Equipment, or they will no longer be doing business with Department of War," Trump said on social media.

"Also, if Raytheon wants further business with the United States Government, under no circumstances will they be allowed to do any additional Stock Buybacks, where they have spent Tens of Billions of Dollars, until they are able to get their act together."

On Wall Street, shares of defense contractors fell, with Northrop Grumman dropping 5.5 per cent, Lockheed Martin declining 4.8 per cent and RTX Corp., the parent company of Raytheon, slipping 2.5 per cent. (AP)

Mein calls HPCL facility a milestone for India's energy self-reliance

India's energy security, economic rise reflects decisive reforms: Deputy CM

ITANAGAR, Jan 8: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Thursday said the Narendra Modi-led NDA government is steadily strengthening India's energy security and overall economic standing through "decisive and future-ready action", underlining the country's progress across key sectors.



Highlighting a major development in the energy sector, Mein said the commissioning of HPCL's Residue Upgradation Facility (RUF) at the Visakhapatnam Refinery on Monday marks a significant milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance. "The Modi government continues to strengthen India's energy security through decisive and future-ready action," Mein said in a post on X.

He added that the RUF will enhance fuel production efficiency, reduce dependence on crude imports, and maximise value from every barrel of oil, thereby reinforcing India's resolve towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The facility includes India's first residue hydrocracking unit and the world's first LC-Max unit, capable of converting about 93 per cent of low-value

bottom-of-the-barrel oils into high-value petroleum products.

Calling the project a major engineering achievement, the deputy chief minister noted that the facility is designed to upgrade heavy, low-value residues into high-value fuels, improving refining depth and boosting fuel self-sufficiency.

"This is a decisive step towards energy security and long-term sustainability," Mein said.

In another social media post, Mein drew attention to India's broader transformation under Modi, citing achievements across agriculture, the economy and clean energy.

"Becoming the world's leading rice producer, the world's fourth largest economy and the world's third largest solar power producer shows what focused reforms can achieve," the deputy chief minister said.

He described the country's progress as a reflection of resilience and sustained growth driven by reforms.

According to him, this transformation is having a direct impact on people's lives.

"This change under Modi is creating opportunities for farmers, youth and innovators across India," Mein said, stressing that growth in clean energy and economic capacity is laying the foundation for a stronger and more self-reliant nation.

The deputy chief minister reiterated that strengthened energy infrastructure, reduced import dependence and leadership in renewable energy are crucial to meeting future demand and ensuring inclusive growth. (PTI)

ECI holds CEO conference ahead of IICDEM 2026



HT Correspondent  
NAHARLAGUN, Jan 8: The Election Commission of India (ECI) held a conference of Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) at IICDEM, New Delhi on Thursday. The conference is being held in the run-up to the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM), scheduled from 21st to 23rd January 2026 at Bharat

Mandapam, New Delhi. Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr Vivek Joshi, addressed the participants and apprised them about the nuances of IICDEM 2026 and their specific roles.

Following the address, the CEOs discussed the 36 thematic groups that will

be led by respective CEOs at IICDEM 2026. The themes encompass all aspects of election management and are aimed at developing a body of knowledge, building on the rich and varied experiences of the Election Management Bodies (EMBs).

IICDEM 2026 will be the largest global conference of its kind hosted by India in the field of election management and democracy. It will be attended by nearly 100 international delegates representing EMBs from across the world, along with representatives from international organisations, foreign missions in India and academic and practising experts in the field of elections.

The conference will include general and plenary sessions such as the Inaugural Session, EMB Leaders' Plenary, EMB Working Group Meetings and the launch of ECINET, along with thematic sessions covering global electoral themes, model international electoral standards and best practices and innovations in electoral processes.

Leading academic institutions, including 4 IITs, 6 IIMs, 12 NLU and IIMC, will also participate, with 36 thematic groups led by CEOs of States/UTs and national and international academic experts contributing to deliberations.

ACCI flags influx of Bangladeshi products, links trade concerns with violence against Hindus

ITANAGAR, Jan 8: The Arunachal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) on Thursday raised concern over the growing influx of Bangladeshi products into Indian markets, saying that unchecked entry of foreign brands is hurting local traders, MSMEs and indigenous entrepreneurs, particularly in the sensitive border state.

ACCI president Tarh Nachung, in a statement, said local traders face significantly higher transportation and operational costs, making it difficult to compete with low-priced imported goods.

He cautioned that the trend threatens local employment, traditional trades and runs contrary to the national vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Vocal for Local'.

The ACCI also expressed concern over reported incidents of violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. Citing reports, the chamber said six Hindus have been killed in the last 18 days, including Rana Pratap Bairagi and Sarat Mani Chakraborty on January 5.

Describing these incidents as inhuman and deeply disturbing, the chamber said it was shocked to see the rising presence of Bangladeshi brands in India even as members of the minority community continue to face violence in Bangladesh.

It said the growing market footprint of such brands is impacting local trade and small businesses.

The ACCI pointed out that products of Bangladeshi companies have gained access across the country, including the Northeast.

While reiterating respect for lawful international trade and

regional cooperation, the chamber cautioned that unregulated or excessive market penetration is creating unfair competition for local traders, MSMEs and indigenous businesses.

Underscoring the strategic and economic sensitivity of the Himalayan region, Nachung urged policymakers to adopt a region-specific approach while framing trade and market-access policies.

He cautioned that unchecked inflow of foreign-branded products could weaken the fragile economic ecosystem of the Northeast.

The chamber also asked distributors of the identified foreign brands operating in the state to surrender their licences immediately, while retailers should sell or dispose of existing stocks within a week.

It said ACCI teams would conduct surprise checks in markets across the state and that violators could face action, including recommendations for cancellation of licences.

The ACCI placed several demands before the authorities, including regulation of market access for foreign brands in 12 Himalayan states and regions, strict monitoring of quality, pricing and statutory compliance of imported products, policy protection and incentives for local traders and MSMEs, stronger promotion of Indian and local brands, and mandatory consultation with ACCI before granting any trade relaxation.

Stating that its protest is constructive and non-confrontational, the chamber said it does not oppose international trade but seeks fair trade practices and sustainable local economic growth. (PTI)

Arunachal Cabinet approves proposals to strengthen healthcare, education infrastructure

New initiatives include mobile medical units, upgraded diagnostics, fire services reforms and education sector expansions



ITANAGAR, Jan 8: The Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet on Thursday approved various proposals aimed at strengthening healthcare services, improving public safety, boosting education infrastructure and generating employment across the state.

At a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, the Cabinet gave its nod to a proposal of engaging HLL Lifecare Ltd, a central government enterprise, to create diagnostic infrastructure in 256 sub-centres, 82 primary health centres (PHCs), 25 community health centres (CHCs) and 64 block public health units.

The initiative will be implemented with health grants from the 15th Finance Commission, a statement from the Chief Minister's Office said. The firm will also implement a laboratory management information system across all health facilities in the state, including medical colleges, general and district hospitals, CHCs, PHCs and sub-centres.

The Cabinet noted that tele-radiology CT scan services implemented through HLL Lifecare Ltd at Aalo, Bomdila, Khonsa, Namsai, Tawang, Tezu, Yingkiang and Ziro have already benefited nearly 12,000 patients.

Officials said the creation of diagnostic infrastructure is aimed at providing accessible and affordable quality diagnostic services closer to communities.

The Cabinet also approved the procurement of 40 mobile medical units (MMUs)

under the Vibrant Villages programme, funded by the Ministry of Home Affairs ministry, through HLL Lifecare Ltd. Operational support for the units will be provided under the National Health Mission.

The MMUs will serve 455 vibrant villages across 11 border districts namely like Anjaw, Dibang Valley, East Kameng, Kra Daadi and Kurung Kumey.

Each mobile unit will provide comprehensive primary healthcare services, including outpatient care, maternal and child health services, elderly care, basic diagnostics such as portable handheld X-ray with AI support, essential medicines, screening for communicable and non-communicable diseases, teleconsultation and referral services.

The initiative is expected to improve health indicators, reduce out-of-pocket expenses and enhance the quality of life in border areas.

In view of the rising fire incidents and the need for a stronger disaster response framework, the Cabinet approved a proposal to enact the Arunachal Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Bill, 2025, replacing the existing Act.

The new legislation aims to modernise the legal and operational framework of the department and will be placed before the state Legislative Assembly for passage.

The cabinet also approved special grade promotions for fire and emergency services personnel on completion of 15, 20

and 30 years of service to address career stagnation and recognise long years of service. A total of 142 personnel will benefit from this decision, the statement said.

To strengthen prison administration, the council of ministers approved the creation of 91 posts for seven sub-jails located at Longding, Khonsa, Changlang, Pasighat, Yingkiang, Aalo and Koloriang.

In a major step to strengthen human resources in the education sector, the cabinet approved the creation of 58 posts.

This includes 14 administrative, non-teaching and teaching posts, along with 32 assistant professor posts, for the government model degree colleges at Piyong in Namsai district and Kanubari in Longding district to enable the start of academic activities.

Additionally, 12 assistant professor posts were approved for introducing sociology, commerce and mass communication courses in select government colleges across the state, aimed at expanding access to higher education and creating employment opportunities for youth.

The Cabinet also gave its nod to the creation of a directorate of urban local bodies under the Urban Affairs department, in line with the 74th Constitutional Amendment. To address cadre stagnation in the forest department, the Cabinet approved a one-time relaxation of residency requirements under the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Service Rules, 2019.

This will allow immediate promotions against existing vacancies without any additional financial burden. A total of 48 APFS officers will directly benefit, while around 60 frontline forest officers will receive indirect promotional benefits.

The Cabinet gave the green signal to the Recruitment Rules for the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) for Pakke, Namdapha and Kamlang Tiger Reserves.

The decision will facilitate recruitment to 324 posts of special tiger guards, strengthen wildlife protection and anti-poaching efforts under Project Tiger and generate employment for local youth. (PTI)

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL  
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (PHE),  
KAAC ZONE, DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG**

No. Addl. CPHE/KAAC/ESTT-73/2025-26/ Dated: - / /2026

**NOTIFICATION**

On approval of the KAAC authority, it is for information to all concerned candidates who have qualified in written examination are to attend viva voce and computer test as per following scheduled. All the qualified candidates in written examination are hereby directed to carry original Admit card along with educational qualification documents.

The viva voce and computer test will be held on 10/01/2026 and 11/01/2026 from 10.00 AM to 4:00 PM at the Office of the Additional Chief Engineer (PHE), KAAC Zone, Near AGCC colony, Rongmirjeng. Diphu, Karbi Anglong. There will no change of schedule

Roll Number of the Selected Candidates for Viva Voice & Computer Test  
Name of Post: **Junior Assistant**

**Date of Interview: 10-01-2026**

3	37	78	105	142	176	208	248	284	324
8	43	80	107	143	177	209	254	288	327
10	44	81	108	144	181	211	255	289	328
11	47	83	109	146	183	212	258	294	331
15	48	86	115	152	184	213	260	296	338
17	51	88	117	154	185	214	261	298	339
21	52	89	123	155	192	215	266	299	342
22	57	93	124	157	197	223	270	303	
26	59	94	128	158	199	225	273	305	
27	62	95	130	160	200	230	274	309	
29	63	96	135	162	202	241	278	314	
31	65	98	136	167	203	242	279	318	
32	67	99	139	168	205	244	280	320	
34	76	104	140	172	206	247	281	321	

**Date of Interview: 11-01-2026**

346	398	456	504	530	560	589	624	672	706
349	405	457	506	535	561	596	625	673	709
357	416	459	509	538	567	597	627	675	711
360	422	461	510	540	569	598	628	683	719
362	427	466	514	544	570	605	629	687	726
368	429	472	516	547	573	607	637	690	731
369	431	473	519	548	576	611	640	691	732
373	434	480	520	550	577	617	644	693	734
374	438	481	522	553	579	618	648	694	735
376	442	491	523	554	580	620	657	697	736
381	444	492	525	556	583	621	663	698	738
382	448	500	528	558	587	622	664	700	740
390	449	503	529	559	588	623	669	705	743
745									

Name of Post: **Sectional Assistant**  
**Date of Interview: 10-01-2026**

1	40	49	61	68	86	96	200	315	326
31	46	53	62	81	87	161	312	321	373
384									

**Date of Interview: 11-01-2026 (Stenographer and Assistant Driller)**  
Name of Post: **Stenographer**

1	3	4	6	8	9
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Name of Post: **Assistant Driller**

1	2	8	9	13	16
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Sd/-  
Additional Chief Engineer (PHE)  
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu

Memo No. Addl. CPHE/KAAC/ESTT-73/2025-26/683-86 Dated: 7/01/2026

# 'A 'new abnormal' in bilateral relationship' India-US ties in turbulent times, each day a fresh challenge: Cong on Trump's new tariff threat

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The Congress on Thursday said the India-US relationship is going through "turbulent times" and each day is a "fresh challenge" as US President Donald Trump backed a sanctions bill that could impose 500 per cent tariffs on countries buying Russian oil.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said the India-US ties are seeing a "new abnormal", notwithstanding posts of appeasement from the Indian prime minister.

"Senator Lindsay Graham, a close ally of President Trump, is pushing a Bill that will impose vast new sanctions on India for its trade and other ties with Russia. Earlier, Senator Bernie Moreno had introduced a Bill that proposes a 25 per cent tax on American companies that make outsourcing payments," he said on X.

To add to India's extreme discomfiture, President Trump continues to shower lavish praise on Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir, the Congress leader said. "There is undoubtedly a 'new abnormal' in the bilateral relationship.



Every day is a fresh challenge, appeasing posts from the PM notwithstanding."

Trump has backed a sanctions bill that could impose 500 per cent tariffs on nations buying Russian oil, giving the White House leverage against countries like China and India to stop them from purchasing cheap oil from Moscow.

US Senator Lindsey Graham on Wednesday said the legislation would give the White House "tremendous leverage" against

countries like China, India and Brazil to incentivise them to stop buying cheap oil from Russia.

"After a very productive meeting today with President Trump on a variety of issues, he greenlit the bipartisan Russia sanctions bill that I have been working on for months with Senator Blumenthal and many others," Graham said in a post on X Wednesday.

"This will be well-timed, as Ukraine is making concessions for peace, and Putin is all talk, contin-

uing to kill the innocent. This bill will allow President Trump to punish those countries that buy cheap Russian oil, fuelling Putin's war machine," he said.

Graham said he looks forward to a strong bipartisan vote on the bill, hopefully as early as next week.

Trump has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, among the highest in the world, including 25 per cent levies for its purchases of Russian energy.

Earlier this week, Graham had said that Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra informed him about New Delhi reducing its purchases of Russian oil and asked him to convey to President Donald Trump to relieve the tariff imposed on India. Graham, accompanying Trump on Air Force One on Sunday, was talking about his tariff bill.

He said that to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, pressure must be put on Russian President Vladimir Putin's customers. Trump said the sanctions are hurting Russia very badly and then mentioned India. Graham then said that the US put a 25 per cent tariff on India for buying Russian oil. (PTI)

# Mamata storms I-PAC chief's Kolkata home amid ED search, alleges bid to seize TMC's internal data

KOLKATA, Jan 8: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday dramatically turned up at the residence of I-PAC chief Pratik Jain amid an ongoing ED raid, alleging that the central agency was attempting to seize the TMC's internal documents, hard disks and sensitive data linked to its election strategy.

She said the raid at the residence and offices of Jain, "the in-charge of my IT cell", was politically motivated and unconstitutional.

Banerjee, also the TMC supremo, arrived at Jain's residence around noon, minutes after Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Verma reached the spot, and stayed for 20-25 minutes before emerging with a green folder in her hand.

"They have raided the residence and offices of our in-charge of IT cell. They were confiscating my party's documents and hard disks, which have details about our party candidates for the assembly polls. I have brought those back," Banerjee told reporters.

She accused the ED officials of walking away with hard disks, mobile phones, laptops, candidate lists and internal strategy documents of the ruling party.

"Is it the duty of the ED to collect political party data?" she asked.

Apart from providing political consultancy to the TMC, the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) also manages the party's IT and media operations.

Launching a blistering attack on the BJP leadership, Banerjee described the search as an act of "political vendetta", and accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of misusing constitutional agencies to intimidate opposition parties.

"This is not law enforcement. Is this how the nastiest and naughty home minister functions, who cannot protect the country and is sending agencies to harass before elections?" she said, later adding, "After this, you will be reduced to zero. I am sorry Mr Amit Shah, the Prime Minister must control his

home minister." ED searches had also been underway since early morning at I-PAC's office in Sector V, Salt Lake. Banerjee alleged the raids began around 6 am when no one was present at the office.

"They started the search when there was nobody inside. They transferred our data, poll strategies and information into their system. This is a crime," she alleged after visiting the Sector-V office.

"They attempted to take away all the documents from the office. The tables are empty. If the papers need to be recreated, it will take so much time that the elections will be over. Was it fair for them to do this?" she questioned.

Banerjee said TMC is a registered political party and pays income tax regularly.

"We have elected representatives. If the ED needed anything, they could have taken the details from the Income Tax Department," she said.

The TMC boss wondered why central agencies don't send notices to BJP leaders.

"The BJP is the biggest party of thieves. What will happen if we reciprocate this ED search by raiding BJP party offices in Bengal; we are exercising restraint. But, our restraint should not be mistaken for our weakness," she said.

According to sources, several files were brought out of the office during the search and placed in the chief minister's vehicle while she was still at Jain's residence.

Banerjee reached the I-PAC's Sector-V office around 1 pm. By then, senior officers of the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate had cordoned off the area, while several local TMC leaders and ministers, including Bidhannagar Mayor Krishna Chakraborty and state minister Sujit Bose, were already present, along with DGP Rajeev Kumar.

Central forces had sealed the entry and exit points of the multi-storey building where I-PAC's office is located.

Without engaging with central

force personnel, Banerjee accessed the building through the basement and took a general lift to reach the 11th floor, where the office is situated, despite a separate VIP lift arrangement being available.

"They have taken our election strategy, our SIR data and other details. If the assembly polls pass and we have to draw up election plans afresh, who will be responsible?" the CM asked.

Accusing the BJP of systematically undermining democracy, Banerjee alleged large-scale deletion of voters from electoral rolls in West Bengal.

"The BJP is the murderer of democracy. Names of over 15 lakh people have been deleted through the SIR process. Do they think they can capture the state by deleting voters and raiding the IT cell offices of political parties?" she said.

Asserting that the TMC is a registered political party that pays income tax, Banerjee said the Centre cannot "bulldoze us using money and muscle power".

"I dare the BJP to fight us politically if they want to win Bengal," she said, adding that she would remain at the I-PAC office until Jain arrived and resumed work.

Banerjee also asked party workers to protest in every block of the state against the ED raids.

Asked whether she could speak to Jain, the CM said, "For party matters, I had called him, but he did not take the call. Upon enquiring further, I learnt that his phone was taken by the ED. Then, I thought they had probably taken away all our strategy and poll details, prompting me to rush to his residence."

She left the I-PAC office at around 4:14 pm, after Jain came to his office.

The episode is reminiscent of a dramatic standoff in 2019 at the same Loudon Street area, when the CBI searched the bungalow of then police commissioner Rajeev Kumar, prompting Banerjee to rush to the spot and later stage a dharna in central Kolkata. (PTI)

# TN CM launches Pongal cash gift of ₹ 3,000 with hampers to ration cardholders



CHENNAI, Jan 8: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin launched the distribution of Pongal cash gift of ₹ 3,000 and a special package to rice category ration cardholders on Thursday, marking the simultaneous distribution of cash and gift hampers through the fair price shops across the state.

The gesture is aimed to enable people celebrate the mid-January harvest festival in a grand manner, he said. The CM personally handed over ₹ 3,000 cash, one kg raw rice, a kilo sugar, a sugarcane, a dhoti and a saree to a few beneficiaries at a FP outlet in Alandur here.

The Pongal gift package covers 2.22 crore rice category ration cardholders, besides the families living in the Sri Lankan rehabilitation camps in the state.

The state government had earmarked ₹ 6,936 crore exclusively for the cash component. In addition, ₹ 248.66 crore has been allotted for procuring and distributing the package items.

The State Food and Civil Supplies department had distributed tokens through the FP shops specifying the time of distribution, which has commenced from on Thursday. State Ministers: K R Periyakaruppan, R Sakkarapani, Ma Subramanian, T M Anbarasan, and senior officials participated. (PTI)

# ED searches I-PAC office, its head Pratik Jain's home in Kolkata in coal 'scam' case

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Jan 8: The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted searches at the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC and the home of its director Pratik Jain in Kolkata as part of a money laundering probe into an alleged multi-crore rupee coal pilferage scam, official sources said.

The I-PAC's office in Salt Lake and Jain's house on Loudon Street are among about 10 premises, including four in Delhi, being raided by the federal probe agency in the presence of central paramilitary teams since 7 am, they said.

Jain, the co-founder and a director of the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) and an IIT-Bombay

alumnae, is being covered as there is "specific" evidence against him related to certain hawala transactions and cash deals emanating from the coal "scam" case in West Bengal, the sources said. Jain is also the head of the IT cell of the Trinamool Congress, the ruling party in West Bengal.

The ED case stems from a November 2020 FIR filed by the CBI, which alleged a multi-crore rupee coal pilferage scam related to Eastern Coalfields mines in West Bengal's Kunistoria and Kajora areas in and around Asansol.

Local coal operator Anup Majhi, alias Lala, is the prime suspect in the case.

The ED earlier questioned Tri-

namool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee, the 38-year-old nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and claimed that he was a beneficiary of the funds obtained from the illegal coal trade. Mamata Banerjee reacted sharply to the ED action and reached the residence of Jain in an official convoy, terming the raids "politically motivated" and "unconstitutional".

ED sources said the action was taken "purely on the merits of the coal scam case and the proceeds of crime linked to it, and there was no political angle" to it. The agency is undertaking the action based on "specific" evidence that shows the "involvement" of Jain and some others, they told PTI. (PTI)

# Climate activist Harjeet Singh's company calls ED action baseless, biased

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Satat Sampada, the organisation of climate activist Harjeet Singh and his wife, said the allegations made by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against the firm and its founder were baseless, biased and misleading.

The ED on January 5 searched the home and office of the company and the couple as part of an investigation being conducted against them under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) for allegedly channelling foreign funds to run narratives on cutting down use of fossil fuels in India on behalf of foreign "influencer groups".

Singh was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh excise department on charges of keeping liquor bottles beyond the "permissible" limit at his home, on the information provided by the ED. A Ghaziabad court had granted him bail on January 6.

In a statement to PTI, Satat Sampada said that it was constrained to share further details on this action "as the matter was sub judice". "We categorically state that the allegations being reported are baseless, biased, and misleading."

The ED, in a statement, said it was investigating alleged misuse of Rs 6 crore funds received from abroad by Singh's organic farming and climate action company Satat Sampada Pvt. Ltd. (SSPL), co-founded with his wife Jyoti Awasthi, and purported narrative-building on behalf of foreign influencer groups.

The agency said it was also probing the source of funds for Singh's visits to Pakistan and Bangladesh during 2025. "The company was established using the founders' personal savings and loans, including by mortgaging their only home, reflecting their long-term commitment to environmental and social causes," Satat Sampada said in its statement.

"SSPL's consultancy and management services expanded after Mr Singh left his full-time employment in 2021 to engage more actively with the organisation," it said.

These services, it added, focused on management advisory work related to the environment, climate change and disaster response.

The company further said that Singh has travelled internationally for the past two decades to partici-

pate in climate-related conferences, summits and policy forums.

These visits were undertaken strictly in a professional capacity, where he has consistently represented the concerns of developing countries and highlighted India's progress in renewable energy and climate action, Satat Sampada said.

"We fully cooperated and provided all relevant information and documentary evidence and remain willing to extend complete cooperation and furnish any further information required by the competent authorities," it said.

The ED had alleged that the company's primary activity appears to be channelling foreign funds to run narratives furthering the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty's (FF-NPT) cause in India on behalf of foreign influencer groups.

The agency added that while FF-NPT is presented as a climate initiative, its adoption could expose India to legal challenges in international forums like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and severely compromise the nation's energy security and economic development.

# Air India takes delivery of first Dreamliner after privatisation

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Tata Group-owned Air India has taken delivery of the first Boeing 787-9 aircraft after the airline was privatised nearly four years ago.

This is also the first line fit or custom-made Dreamliner for the airline.

Generally, line fit refers to an aircraft specifically made for a particular airline.

An official on Thursday said Air India completed the title transfer of the Dreamliner at the Boeing's Everett factory in Seattle on January 7.

After inspections by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the aircraft, also the first line fit Dreamliner to be taken by Air India after being acquired by Tatas in January 2022, is expected to arrive in India in the next few days.

The new aircraft has a three class configuration -- economy, premium economy and business class seats.

The last line fit Dreamliner that

was acquired by Air India was in October 2017 when the carrier was under the government ownership.

According to the official, the latest aircraft is the airline's first wide-body and 52nd overall delivery from the 220 Boeing jets ordered in 2023.

Air India Express has already taken delivery of 51 narrow-body Boeing 737-8s, including its first line fit plane that was inducted in late December.

After Tatas took over in January 2022, Air India placed orders for 350 Airbus and 220 Boeing planes. Out of the Airbus order, 6 A350s have already been inducted into the Air India fleet.

Air India already has 26 B787-8s and 6 B787-9s of erstwhile Vistara which was merged with the airline.

Currently, Air India Group has over 300 planes, including 185 aircraft with Air India and the remaining ones with Air India Express. (PTI)

# Major setback for India's green cause: Kharge on Madhav Gadgil's demise

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Congress leaders on Thursday condoled the death of noted ecologist Madhav Gadgil, with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge saying India has lost one of its foremost voices in ecological inquiry and that his demise is a major setback for the country's green cause.

Gadgil, known for his work on the Western Ghats, passed away in Pune after a brief illness, family sources said on Thursday. He was 83.

Gadgil breathed his last late Wednesday night at a hospital in Pune, the sources said.

"In the passing of Dr. Madhav Gadgil, India has lost one of its foremost voices in ecological inquiry. His leadership helped turn scientific evidence into protective action, most notably through decisive engagement with landmark conservation efforts and community rights, particularly in the Western Ghats," Kharge said in a post on X.

A recipient of the Padma Bhushan, the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize, and Karnataka's Rajyotsava Prashasthi, he leaves behind an enduring imprint on research, teaching, and ecological conservation, and his departure is a major setback for the country's green cause, Kharge said.

"My deepest condolences to his family, friends and the scientific community," he said.

Congress general secretary and former environment minister Jairam Ramesh hailed Gadgil as a top-notch academic scientist, a tireless field researcher, a pioneering institution-builder, a great communicator, a firm believer in people's networks and movements, and friend,

philosopher, guide, and mentor to many for over five decades. "Trained at the very best universities in modern science, he was at the same time a champion of traditional knowledge systems - especially in biodiversity conservation," Ramesh said on X.

His influence on public policy has been profound going back to his crucial role in the Save Silent Valley Movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Congress leader said. "His (Gadgil) intervention to protect forests in Bastar was crucial in the mid-80s. Later, he gave shape to a new direction to the Botanical Survey of India and the Zoological Survey of India. During 2009-2011, he chaired the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel and wrote its report in a most sensitive and democratic manner that remains unmatched in both substance and style," Ramesh recalled.

He had studied biology at Harvard under E O Wilson, who had been hailed as Darwin's Heir, Ramesh noted.

Although inspired by Wilson, Gadgil -- unlike most others who went to study abroad -- came back to India to build its own research capacities and capabilities, guide students, engage with local communities, and make a difference to policy, he said. In all of these he succeeded more than admirably, Ramesh added.

Luckily three years back he was able to bring out his delightful memoir, which is at once educative, entertaining, and enlightening, Ramesh said.

Gadgil's life was devoted to scholarship in the noblest sense of the term and he will remain an iconic and inspirational figure,

the former environment minister said.

"Speaking on a personal note, in the twenty-six months I was Environment Minister during May 2009-July 2011, I turned to him every other day for guidance and advice. And our conversations were not confined to matters related to ecology," Ramesh said.

"We spoke often of his father Dhananjay Gadgil, one of India's greatest economists and author of that classic The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, first published in 1924. We would also speak of the intricacies of the Indian monsoon, since his wife Sulochana was an authority on the subject," he said.

Nation builders come in different forms and varieties and Gadgil was definitely one of them, Ramesh said.

"Above all he had the hallmark of a true scholar -- he was gentle, unassuming, and exuded empathy and humility -- behind which was a vast ocean of knowledge and learning," Ramesh said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also condoled Gadgil's demise. "Deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. Madhav Gadgil, a compassionate voice for nature and social justice. His life's work will continue to inspire generations. My heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones," Priyanka Gandhi said.

In 2024, the United Nations presented Gadgil with the annual Champions of the Earth award, the UN's highest environmental honour, for his seminal work on the Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot. (PTI)

# Operation Sindoor reinforced message that people must contribute to nation-building: IAF chief



NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Chief of the Indian Air Force, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, on Thursday praised NCC cadets for their contributions during Operation Sindoor, and said the military action reinforced the message that life is not just about earning money or personal pursuits, but also doing something for the country.

Addressing cadets at the ongoing National Cadet Corps (NCC) Republic Day Camp at Delhi Cantonment, the IAF chief urged them to continue giving their best for the country, irrespective of whether they join the armed

forces later or pursue other professions.

He also exhorted them not to be deterred by failures but to emerge stronger from any setback, citing his own journey to the top post.

Singh said he too faced failures in his life and career, but he rose to become an IAF chief, which he described as something "that was destined".

"So, whether you are a soldier or a military leader in uniform, or a regular citizen, give your best and contribute to nation-building," he said.

The IAF chief told the NCC cadets that the role played by them in civil de-

fence activities during Operation Sindoor motivated many people.

"Operation Sindoor has brought a lot of awareness. It is not just about earning money or doing things only for oneself in life, it is equally important to do something for the country," he asserted.

Operation Sindoor was carried out by the Indian armed forces in the early hours of May 7, 2025, targeting terror hideouts in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in response to the Pahalgar terror attack that claimed 26 civilian lives last April.

A large number of NCC cadets assisted in emergency drills, blood donation camps and other civil defence activities during the operation, officials said.

A total of 2,406 NCC cadets, including 898 girls, from across the country are participating in the nearly month-long camp, which was inaugurated on Monday by Vice President C P Radhakrishnan. It will culminate with the NCC PM Rally on January 28.

Before his address, the IAF chief attended several cultural performances.

In one of the dance acts, a group of cadets visually depicted Operation Sindoor, portraying air strikes and air defence measures.

The performance included a poster carrying the logo of Operation Sindoor, while also honouring the vision of a Viksit Bharat. (PTI)

‘Government has a zero-tolerance policy towards such incidents’

## CM condemns attack on BJP workers in Tripura, orders strict action



**AGARTALA, Jan 8:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday condemned the attack on BJP workers allegedly by party ally TMP in West Tripura district, and said that legal action would be taken against the culprits.

The Tipra Motha Party (TMP) also criticized the incident that occurred at Hezama area on Wednesday during the construction of an office of the BJP, saying it does not believe in the politics of violence.

According to police, two BJP workers sustained head injuries after they were allegedly attacked by members of the Tipra

Motha party. The injured were undergoing treatment at GB Pant Hospital here.

The incident led to tension in the area, following which a police picket was posted there to prevent any escalation of the situation.

Speaking to reporters, the chief minister said political differences cannot justify violence or intimidation.

“The government has a zero-tolerance policy towards such incidents. The police and district administration have been directed to carry out a thorough investigation, identify those involved, and ensure their prompt arrest,” Saha said.

He also instructed officials to take preventive measures to avoid the recurrence of similar incidents.

Meanwhile, the Tipra Motha party also condemned the attack, terming it “completely unexpected and deplorable.”

Addressing a press conference on Thursday, TMP spokesperson Rajeshwar Debbarma said violence has no place in the party’s ideology.

He asserted that party chief Pradyot Kishore Debbarma has repeatedly stressed the need for peace and harmony in Tripura.

“For the development and progress of the state, all sections must work together. Violence and unrest only push the state back-

ward,” he said.

Calling for collective responsibility, Debbarma urged all political parties and citizens to maintain a peaceful environment.

He said, “Differences of opinion are natural in a democracy, but those must never be expressed through violence.”

The TMP spokesperson demanded strict action against those involved, irrespective of their political affiliation.

He called for a swift and impartial investigation and exemplary punishment to ensure that such incidents are not repeated in the future. (PTI)

## Gunfight breaks out between armed groups in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** A gunfight broke out between two armed groups on Thursday morning in Manipur’s Kangpokpi district, officials said.

Suspected cadres of the banned Zeliangrong United Front (S Kamson), who went to destroy an alleged illicit poppy cultivation at Kharam Vaiphei, engaged in a gunfight with armed Kuki underground groups, they said.

There is no report of any casualty in the firing, officials said, adding that firing has stopped.

Additional security forces have been rushed to the peripheral areas.

The sound of firing created tension and panic in the peripheral villages of Imphal



West district, which share boundaries with Kangpokpi district and have witnessed large-scale gunfights between Kuki and Meitei groups in 2023 and 2024.

Meanwhile, ZUF S Kamson, in a statement, said it engaged in a gunfight at around 7.40 am at Kharam Vaiphei with armed Kuki groups, where unlawful activities, including illicit poppy cultivation and setting up of underground camps of Kuki Suspension of Operations groups, have been reported.

More than 260 people have been killed in ethnic violence in Manipur since May 2023.

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities started after a ‘Tribal Solidarity March’ was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community’s demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. (PTI)

### Former BJP Manipur president Meinam Bhorot Singh dies at 76

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** Former president of BJP’s Manipur unit Meinam Bhorot Singh died here on Thursday following prolonged illness, party sources said.

He was 76. Singh had also served as the party’s national secretary and was also an MLA.

The party expressed profound grief over his demise, describing him as a seasoned leader who played a key role in strengthening the BJP in the state.

In a statement, the BJP said, “Bhorot was a seasoned leader rooted in nationalist ideals, and worked tirelessly to strengthen the party in Manipur during the pivotal years of organisational expansion.”

“His leadership, discipline, and political conviction played a crucial role in deepening the party’s outreach and shaping its grassroots presence across the state” it said, adding that his legacy will continue to inspire party karyakartas and future generations committed to public service and democratic values.

Former chief minister N Biren Singh condoled the demise of Bhorot Singh and said his death was an irreparable loss to the BJP.

In a post on X, Singh said, “I am deeply saddened by the demise of Shri Meinam Bhorot Singh Ji, former President of BJP Manipur and former MLA, Thangmeiband AC. His passing is an irreparable loss not only to the BJP but also to the people of Manipur.” (PTI)

### Over 50 acres of illicit poppy cultivation destroyed

**IMPHAL, Jan 8:** Security forces destroyed around 53 acres of illicit poppy cultivation in Manipur’s Kangpokpi district, police said on Thursday.

The drive was carried out on Wednesday, it said.

“Combined teams of the police, CRPF, Forest Department and NCB destroyed 53 acres of poppy cultivation in the hill ranges of Moljol, Tusam, Vaichei-Naphai and surrounding areas in Kangpokpi district,” an official statement said.

## More than 32,000 candidates apply for 1,176 police constable posts

**KOHHIMA, Jan 8:** More than 32,000 candidates have applied for 1,176 constable posts in Nagaland Police, an official said on Thursday.

The recruitment rally commenced across multiple districts of the state on Wednesday for 1,176 posts of constable (general duty).

The rally is being conducted simultaneously in several districts.

The recruitment process began with document verification, followed by physical standard tests and medical examinations. Candidates who qualify these initial stages will proceed to physical efficiency tests, including running and other endurance events, before appearing for the written examination at a later stage.

Officials said the process will continue for several days as per district-wise schedules.

Only indigenous inhabitants belonging to Naga tribes were eligible to apply, and the entire application process was conducted online for the first time.

Authorities have emphasised that strict measures have been put in place to ensure transparency, fairness and merit-based selection.

## Nagaland police recruitment rally enters second day



tion.

Multiple monitoring teams have been deployed at recruitment centres, and candidates are being screened according to prescribed standards.

Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton, who also holds the Home portfolio, assured aspirants that the entire recruitment process would be conducted in a fair, transparent and merit-based manner.

He emphasised that there would be no room for favouritism or interference and urged candidates to rely solely on their performance and preparation. The process will continue till January 16. (PTI)

### HT Correspondent

**DIMPUR, Jan 8:** The second day of the recruitment rally for Nagaland police constables in several districts on Thursday saw a large number of candidates participating in physical tests.

The recruitment rally is being held from January 7 to January 13.

In Noklak town, the Noklak District Level Screening Committee (DSLSC) conducted the rally at Noklak public ground Noklak.

Briefing the candidates, presiding officer, Noklak DSLSC, Kuhovi Sema, DIG (Range) Mokochung, said the recruitment will be fair and free. He asked the candidates to follow the rules and cooperate with the recruitment officer for the successful conduct of the recruitment.

Altogether, 1,344 candidates are participating for 42 posts under Noklak district.

The candidates will undergo physical, medical standard and written tests for appointment.

In Zunheboto, the screening of candidates in the ongoing rally is being held at the police reserve ground, Zunheboto. In Kiphire, the rally is being conducted at the parade ground of the 14th NAP (IR) Battalion, Okhezung, Kiphire.

Candidates who qualify in the physical and medical standards and successfully clear the physical efficiency tests will be shortlisted for the written examination based on the ratio fixed by the Departmental Recruitment Board.

rural development,” he said.

The Minister informed that in Tripura, during the last seven years after 2018, ₹ 7,801 crore was allocated, while during the seven years before 2018, the amount was ₹ 6,490 crore.

“Using MGNREGA, 8 lakh 10,000 assets were created, while 6, 67,332 assets were created during the seven years before 2018. Wage payments directly benefiting rural households amounted to ₹ 5,332 crore in the last seven years, as against ₹ 4,240 crore during the previous period before 2018. Currently, Tripura has 6.56 lakh job cards and 10.20 lakh registered workers under the scheme. For North Eastern states, the Centre provides 90 percent of the funding, with only 10 percent contributed by the states. The new law places strong emphasis on water conservation, water security, asset creation, livelihood generation, rural infrastructure and climate change mitigation.

Administrative expenditure, earlier capped at 6 percent, has now been increased to 9 percent to improve implementation efficiency,” he said.

ciency,” he said.

The Minister informed that earlier, workers often faced delays in receiving wages. Under the reformed system, wages are now directly transferred to workers’ bank accounts, ensuring transparency and timely payments. The new law is fully digitally driven, aimed at eliminating corruption and leakages.

He also said that large-scale corruption occurred during the Left Front regime under MGNREGA.

“In Bishalgarh block, a ₹ 17 crore scam was exposed in the CAG (AG) report. Following audits and investigations, cases were registered at Bishalgarh Police Station, charge sheets were filed against 12 accused in 40 cases and the matter is currently pending in the High Court,” he said.

The Minister further informed that Tripura has shown consistent performance in MGNREGA implementation, ranking 2nd in 2020–21, 3rd in 2021–22, 4th in 2022–23 and again 4th in 2023–24 at the national level.

## GOVT. OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT TRANSPORT OFFICER, KARBI ANGLONG, DIPHU

No. KADT/2023/AUC/21-A

Mail id-dtkarbianglong@gmail.com  
dated Diphu the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2026

### AUCTION NOTICE

Subject : Disposal of seized unclaimed vehicles,

Under Rule 109A of Assam Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Rule 2023, office of the District Transport Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu, is proposing to scrap 15 (fifteen) number of seized unclaimed vehicles on "as is where is basis". Accordingly, sealed quotations affixing court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and twenty five paise) only are invited from RVSF for scrap of the said vehicles on the terms and conditions mentioned below.

- Registered Vehicle Scrappage Facility (RVSF), interested in purchasing the above mentioned vehicles, may submit their highest bid in the enclosed Proforma in a sealed cover addressed to the undersigned latest by 3.00 P.M on or before 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026 at the Office of the District Transport Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu and will be opened on the same day at 3.05 PM. The Bidder or their representatives, not more than one for each quotation, may be present, if they so desire, at the time of opening of the Quotations.
- For inspection of the vehicles, Mr Bitupon Changmai, MVI may be contacted between 2.00 PM to 3.00 PM on working days.
- The Auction of the said vehicle will be governed by the following conditions-
  - The vehicle will be sold on "as is where is basis". The auction process will be conducted in presence of the constituted Standing Committee for Auction of Seized Vehicle.
  - The successful highest bidder will be required to deposit the bid amount by means of Demand Draft.
  - 25 (Twenty five) percent of purchase money shall be paid within 7 (seven) days from the date of sale. In default of making such payments, the vehicle shall be sold to the next highest bidder.
  - On payment of Purchase money, the authorized officer shall issue a receipt for the same and the sale shall become absolute. He shall also cause the vehicle to be delivered to the purchaser.
  - The vehicle will be disposed off on "as is where is basis" and no guarantee for its worthiness or quality will be given by the department.
  - The Bid amount is excluding GST, as the GST is to be paid by the recipient of the goods as per the rates applicable.
  - The Standing Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any/all of the quotation without assigning any reason.

Sl No.	Registration No.	Date of Registration	Type of Vehicle	Minimum bid value	Parking ground
1.	A509C6406	22-03-2013	3 Wheeler (passenger)	5750/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
2.	AS09AC1246	20-07-2016	3 Wheeler (passenger)	6300/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
3.	A509C7909	NA	HGV(truck)	91975/-	Bajrang Dharam Kata
4.	AS09C6110	24-11-2012	3 Wheeler (passenger)	5750/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
5.	A509C5582	18-10-2012	3 Wheeler (passenger)	5750/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
6.	AS09AC8341	31-05-2019	Tata Magic	17450/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
7.	A509A4632	30-09-2008	Tata Magic	16250/-	Borpathar Police Station
8.	AS09C0365	07-08-2009	Tata Magic	16250/-	Borpathar Police Station
9.	AS09C6808	30-05-2013	Cruiser	36550/-	OTO campus
10.	A509C2085	NA	HGV (truck)	42250/-	Howraghat Police Station
11.	A509C7178	24-07-2013	Tata Magic	16250/-	Borpathar Police Station
12.	A509C5116	18-06-2012	3 Wheeler (passenger)	5750/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
13.	ML05A5759	01-07-1993	Bus	91975/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
14.	NL110328	NA	Bus	91975/-	Balaji Parking, Khatkhati
15.	A509AC2318	05-05-2017	HGV (Dumper)	203925/-	DTO Campus

Sd/-  
District Transport Officer  
Karbi Anglong, Diphu



## Kannada superstar Yash is Raya in first official glimpse from 'Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups'

The makers of "Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups" on Thursday released the first look of Kannada superstar Yash, introducing him as Raya through a brief teaser shared on the actor's 40th birthday.

The Geetu Mohandas-directed movie marks Yash's first project since the blockbuster success of "KGF: Chapter 2" in 2022.

Production banner KVN Productions shared the official teaser of the film on its social media page. Set in a cemetery, the teaser shows Yash's character Raya amid gunfire and action, offering a glimpse into the film's darker tone and action-driven narrative.

"Get a good look at your danger - Introducing RAYA," the studio wrote in the caption.

Yash's character unveil follows earlier announcements introducing the film's female cast -- Kiara Advani as Nadia, Nayanthara as Ganga, Huma

Qureshi as Elizabeth, Rukmini Vasanth as Melissa and Tara Sutaria as Rebecca. In addition to headlining the movie, Yash also serves as the co-writer and co-producer of "Toxic". The film is co-written and directed by Mohandas.

It has been shot simultaneously in Kannada and English, with dubbed versions planned in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and other languages.

The technical team includes cinematographer Rajeev Ravi, music composer Ravi Basrur, editor Ujwal Kulkarni and production designer TP Abid. Action sequences are choreographed by JJ Perry, along with Anbariv and Kecha Khamphakdee.

Produced by Venkat K. Narayana and Yash under KVN Productions and Yash's Monster Mind Creations, "Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups" is slated for a worldwide theatrical release on March 19, 2026. (PTI)

## PRIME VIDEO UNVEILS NEW TELUGU MOVIE 'CHEEKATILO', FILM TO RELEASE ON JAN 23

Streaming service Prime Video on Thursday announced "Cheekatilo", its new original movie starring actor Sobhita Dhulipala in the lead role.

The movie, directed by Sharan Kopishetty, is an edge-of-the-seat crime suspense about a true crime podcaster whose relentless quest for truth exposes some of the most brutal and darkest secrets of the city.

Set to be released on January 23, the film is produced by D. Suresh Babu under the banner of Suresh Productions Pvt Ltd and also stars actor Viswadev Rachakonda.

Set against the backdrop of bustling city of Hyderabad, "Cheekatilo" features Dhulipala as Sandhya, a true crime podcaster, who goes on a relentless pursuit of justice after her intern's mysterious death unravels a chilling trail of brutal crimes.

In a statement, Nikhil Madhok, director & head of Originals, Prime Video India, said the streaming service remains committed to expanding its south Originals slate with stories that are bold, rooted, and creatively distinct.

"What sets 'Cheekatilo' apart is its blend of cultural authenticity, with modern storytelling mediums like podcasts that play a key role in the narrative. We believe the movie's universal themes of resilience and sisterhood will extend its appeal far beyond the Telugu-speaking diaspora and connect with audiences across India and globally," he added.

"Cheekatilo" also features Chaitanya Visalakshmi, Esha Chawla, Jhansi, Aamani and Vadlamani Srinivas in pivotal roles. (PTI)



## Tamil film fraternity rallies behind Vijay as 'Jana Nayagan' faces release hurdles



Members of the Tamil film industry, including prominent actors and filmmakers, extended solidarity to actor-turned-politician Vijay as the release of his much-anticipated film "Jana Nayagan" faced last-minute hurdles linked to certification and also theatre availability.

Actor Silambarasan T R was among the first to voice support, saying "setbacks have never stopped" Vijay and expressing confidence that the "real Thiruvizha" (festival) would begin once the movie hits theatres.

In a post on X, he addressed Vijay as 'anna' (elder brother) and remarked that the star had weathered "bigger storms" in the past.

Filmmaker Karthik Subbaraj lamented the difficulties faced by both big-budget and independent films amid censor delays and limited theatre access. In a detailed post, he said the censor certification delay had affected Vijay's "Jana Nayagan" and another major production, while also pointing out the lack of screens for smaller films such as his own "Sallyargal".

"Jana Nayagan" (roughly meaning people's hero), has faced legal hurdle over the certification row, with the Madras High Court reserving its order on the matter, even as the producers announced postponing its release.

Subbaraj urged the film fraternity to "rise above fan wars and political agendas" and work collectively to "save cinema", calling for a streamlining of censor board and release regulations.

"Otherwise postponement of big films on festival dates will eventually kill the industry," he added.

Actor Ravi Mohan aka 'Jayam' Ravi expressed emotional support, calling Vijay "the opening" himself, and stated that "Pongal only starts then", referring to the traditional festive release window.

Similarly, Sibi Sathyaraj said the ongoing events surrounding the film's release were "setting the perfect stage for a massive success", expressing confidence that "good things will happen" for Vijay.

Actor Shanthnu Bhagyaraj described the situation as "heartbreaking" and said that fans and the audience would stand by the team of Jana Nayagan for what is right. "Pongal starts only with Jana Nayagan release, reflecting widespread anticipation among Vijay's supporters."

Director Ameer also weighed in, criticising alleged political pressure attempts in connection with the film's release.

"Only people in Tamil Nadu will decide who needs to rule the state, not cheap politicians," he said in a social media post voicing support for Vijay.

Vijay's "Jana Nayagan", helmed as his final film before fully transitioning into politics through his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) party, has drawn nationwide interest.

The film, a political action drama mounted on a large scale, is widely seen as a prelude to the actor's entry into active politics. (PTI)

## PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS-STARRER 'THE BLUFF' SET FOR FEBRUARY 25 PREMIERE ON PRIME VIDEO



Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas' upcoming Hollywood film "The Bluff" will premiere on Prime Video on February 25, the streaming service said on Thursday.

Directed by filmmaker Frank E Flowers, the

film features "The Boys" star Karl Urban. Set against the historical and cultural backdrop of the Cayman Islands, the movie follows a former pirate whose peaceful life is upended by the return of her violent past, a press release said.

Chopra Jonas plays Ercell "Bloody Mary" Bodden, a skilled ex-pirate who believes she has left behind a life of bloodshed to live quietly with her family.

"But when her notorious former captain, Connor (Urban), arrives seeking revenge, Ercell's world is torn apart. Forced to confront the demons she's tried to bury, Ercell is thrust back into a deadly game of secrets and survival.

"Armed with lethal swordsmanship, cunning traps, and a fierce will to protect those she loves, she wages a brutal war against Connor's merciless crew. Ercell's fight to save her family becomes a journey of redemption, as she reclaims her power and embraces the warrior she once was," read the official logline.

The action-adventure blends period storytelling with large-scale action, featuring sword fights, tactical traps and hand-to-hand combat.

Written by Joe Ballarini and Flowers, "The Bluff" is produced by filmmaker duo Anthony and Joe Russo, and Angela Russo-Ostot through their production banner AGBO, along with Chopra Jonas, Michael Disco, Cisely Saldana and Mariel Saldana.

The cast also includes Safia Oakley-Green, Temuera Morrison and Ismael Cruz Cordova. (PTI)

## Scorpions to return to India after two decades with 'Coming Home' tour



Scorpions, Germany's greatest hard rock band known for hits such as "Wind of Change" and "Still Loving You", on Thursday announced their much-awaited return to India after nearly two decades with their "Coming Home 2026 tour".

The band, which was founded in Hanover in 1965 by guitarist

Rudolf Schenker, will perform in Shillong on April 21 at JN Stadium, followed by stops at Delhi-NCR on April 24 at HUDA Grounds, Bengaluru on April 26 at NICE Grounds and Mumbai on April 30 at Jio Gardens, BKC.

"Sixty years after the band's founding, we're bringing our 'Coming Home' concert to India.

It will be a unique celebration for our fans and for us," Schenker said in a statement.

Vocalist Klaus Meine said, "We are incredibly excited to finally be touring India again after such a long time and are looking forward to meeting our many, many fans in India. The concerts will also be a very special experi-

ence for us." Guitarist Matthias Jabs said, "Finally playing in India again and on top of that our now iconic 'Coming Home' concerts will be spectacular and unforgettable for us as well." The tour is produced and promoted by BookMyShow Live, the live entertainment experiential division of BookMyShow.

"Scorpions hold a singular place in the history of global rock, with music that has transcended generations, borders and cultures. Their return to India after nearly two decades is significant, not only for fans who have grown up with their songs but also as a reflection of how far India's live entertainment ecosystem has evolved.

"This tour marks a watershed moment for rock culture in the country, celebrating music history, fan devotion and the enduring power of live performance," Naman Pughalia, Chief Business Officer - Live Events, BookMyShow said.

Scorpions last performed in India during the 2000s, touring the country as part of their "Acoustica Live Tour" in August 2001 with a concert in Bengaluru, and later during the "Humanity World Tour" in December 2007, when they played shows in Shillong, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

The 2026 India tour is being positioned as part of the band's farewell run, coming after the release of their last studio album "Rock Believer", which was released in February 2022.

The "Coming Home" tour is supported by Meghalaya Tourism in Shillong with The Circus as event partner. (PTI)

Mandhana's RCB and Jemimah's DC also in fray

# Harmanpreet's MI in pursuit of third WPL title

NAVI MUMBAI, Jan 8: Still basking in the glory of their maiden ODI World Cup triumph, India's effervescent women cricketers will return to competitive action in the fourth Women's Premier League starting here on Friday, kicking off their build-up to this year's T20 World Cup.

Two-time winners and defending champions Mumbai Indians, led by Harmanpreet Kaur, will face the only other title-winning side in the WPL, Smriti Mandhana's Royal Challengers Bengaluru, in the tournament-opener here at the 'home of Indian women's cricket', the DY Patil Stadium.

The fourth WPL will be held in two stages, in Navi Mumbai and Vadodra, presenting players from around the world to go against the best and augment their preparations for the T20 World Cup, slated for June-July in England.

MI have the best squad on paper at their disposal led by Harmanpreet with captains of England (Nat Sciver-Brunt) and West Indies (Hayley Matthews) in tow.

Having retained the majority of their squad, MI will be the team to beat given their formidable batting, bolstered by New Zealand's Amelia Kerr, promising Australian Milly Illingworth, and India's dependable Amanjot Kaur.

With G Kamalini at the top, MI could also find themselves facing selection headache with the available talent.



Shabnim Ismail will lead the bowling attack which also includes Saika Ishaque, who will face the challenge of getting her act together after a tough couple of seasons following an impressive debut in 2023.

With Meg Lanning moving to UP Warriorz, mercurial Indian batter Jemimah Rodrigues has taken charge of the Delhi Capitals' outfit which carries the burden of tripping at the finish line all three times in the finals.

The Capitals have a dangerous squad and one that can go the distance if things fall in place.

Among Indians, Delhi have the

World Cup winners and in-form opener Shafali Verma, Sneha Rana and Shree Charani, while domestic talent base includes Niki Prasad, India player Minnu Mani and right-arm Nandani Sharma, who is the only Indian pacer in the camp.

Delhi's overseas roster is impressive too, with the ODI World Cup's best batter and South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt looking to continue with her form.

Marizanne Kapp and Alana King will handle the bowling workload but Annabel Sutherland's withdrawal has reduced the firepower to some extent.

A lot will hinge on how Mand-

hana, in the absence of the legendary Ellyse Perry, pulls the RCB side while garnering runs at the top.

Mandhana's form is never really a concern and she will feel confident given the talent base which the 2024 winners have.

Australia batter Georgia Voll, all-rounder Grace Harris and South Africa's doughty all-rounder Nadine de Klerk will share the batting responsibilities. Behind the wickets and for the finishing job, RCB have the explosive Richa Ghosh in ranks.

India's Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, and England's Lauren Bell are among the premier seamers for RCB who also have quality spin bowlers in England's Linsey Smith, India's Radha Yadav and Shreyanka Patil.

After a couple of ordinary seasons, Gujarat Giants made it to the playoffs last year and they will look to go one better this year.

But for the Ashleigh Gardner-led side, the overseas stars will have to do the heavy-lifting given that they do not have any front-line Indian batter in their ranks.

Renuka Singh Thakur is the biggest Indian star in the camp along with Titas Sadhu and Rajeshwari Gayakwad, with wicket-keeper-batter Yastika Bhatia looking for a strong comeback after an injury layoff.

However, GG have the formidable Gardner at the helm and a few

other Australians around her. Behind the wickets and at the top of the order will be Beth Mooney, while the legendary White Ferns' Sophie Devine is back in the WPL mix after missing it last year.

Australian Kim Garth can share the new ball with Renuka and Kashvee Gautam, with spin bowling options being Georgia Wareham, Gayakwad and Tanuja Kanwar.

Having gone through a complete overhaul, UP Warriorz have landed the right captaincy choice in Lanning but they do not have a specialist wicketkeeper apart from Uttar Pradesh's Shipra Giri.

Phoebe Litchfield at the top gives the Warriorz an option to pair her with India's Pratika Rawal, fitness permitting, or even the dangerous Kiran Navgire.

Harleen Deol and Lanning can form the middle-order but the Warriorz' think-tank, led by head coach Abhishek Nayar, are also required to find a finisher.

In that case, among all-rounders, the Player of the ODI World Cup Deepti Sharma, Chloe Tryon, the dangerous Deandra Dottin, and India's Shikha Pandey may have to double-up.

India's Kranti Gaud and England's Sophie Ecclestone will form the fulcrum of the bowling attack but for the Warriorz, finding solutions to some pertinent questions, will be vital. (PTI)

# Shadab Khan makes impressive comeback and propels Pakistan to 6-wicket win over Sri Lanka



DAMBULLA (SRI LANKA), Jan 8: Allrounder Shadab Khan staked his claim for a spot at next month's T20 World Cup with 2-25 in his return from a shoulder injury over Sri Lanka in the first T20 on Wednesday.

Shadab got the wickets of Kusal Mendis and Dhananjaya de Silva in his first over before Sri Lanka collapsed to 128 all out in 19.2 overs after losing the toss.

Sahibzada Farhan then smacked 51 off 36 balls and Shadab made an unbeaten 18 off 12 balls as Pakistan cruised to 129-4 with 20 balls to spare.

Shadab had last played an international game in June before undergoing surgery on his right shoulder.

"Comebacks in internationals are tough because you start from zero," said Shadab, who was named player of the match. "The surface was helping definitely, but in cricket you have to always assess the conditions. Here, fuller (balls) were better than good length."

The three-match series continues in Dambulla on Friday and Sunday and will serve as a tuneup for the T20 World Cup. Pakistan is due to play all its World Cup games in Sri Lanka and is yet to announce its squad for the event.

Sri Lanka struggled to get momentum against Pakistan second-string fast bowlers after the Pakistan Cricket Board had allowed Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf to skip the series and play in the Big Bash League in Australia.

Leftarm fast bowler Salman Mirza (3-18) had Kamil Mishara caught at mid-on for a three-ball duck and Pathum Nissanka struggled to score run-a-ball 12 before

pulling Mohammad Wasim's (2-7) short ball and got caught at deep square leg inside the power play. Shadab made an immediate impact in his first over when he trapped Mendis lbw of a fuller delivery and then de Silva, returning to T20 format after June 2024, got caught behind for 10 of an inside edge as Sri Lanka slipped to 38-4 in the seventh over.

Janith Liyanage (40) was the only home team batter to cross the 20-run mark, but he got a lucky escape on 4 when Farhan dropped a sitter at long-on that could have given Shadab his third wicket.

Wrist-spinner Abrar Ahmed (3-25) then sliced through the middle order before Mirza grabbed two more wickets in his return spell as Sri Lanka lost last four wickets for just one run.

Farhan and Saim Ayub (24) provided Pakistan a blazing start of 59 runs inside the power play against some wayward bowling of fast bowler Nuwan Thushara (0-31). Maheesh Theekshana (1-31) broke through in the last over of power play when he bowled Ayub of a straight delivery.

Farhan, who smashed two sixes in one over of Thushara, raised his half century off 35 balls before he holed out to mid-off soon afterwards. Wanindu Hasaranga bowled a tidy four-over spell of 1-17 and de Silva had Fakhar Zaman stumped before Shadab carried Pakistan to 1-0 lead in the series.

Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka rued losing the toss on a wicket that was under covers for the last two days due to rain.

"Setting up totals aren't easy on these surfaces that was covered for a couple of days," he said. "No excuses, we didn't have the batting start we needed, losing wickets in clusters need addressing." (AP)

## Sivasagar CC, Gypsy Club advance to second round of Premier League Cricket

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 8: Cricket Club of Sivasagar (CCS) and Gypsy Club booked their places in the second round of the Premier League Cricket Championship being organised by the Sivasagar Sports Association at Peoli Phukan Stadium here.

In a league match played on Thursday, CCS defeated Griffon Club by four wickets. Batting first, Griffon Club were bowled out for 155 in 37.3 overs, with Lakhyjyoti Das scoring 28 and Samiron Buragohain contributing 22. For CCS, Abhinob Das returned impressive figures of 3 for 39.

Chasing the target, CCS reached 159 for 6 in 29.3 overs. Sahil Shah played a crucial knock of 49, while Abhinob Das chipped in with 27 runs to guide the team to victory.

In the inaugural match played on Wednesday, Gypsy Club registered a massive 208-run win over Demow Cricket Club to enter the second round. Gypsy Club posted a formidable total of 288 for 8 in 32 overs, while Demow Cricket Club were bundled out for just 77 runs.

## Spanish soccer league battles Cloudflare over piracy, says U.S. company ignores illegal content

MADRID, Jan 8: Once the ball starts rolling in the Spanish league, the game is on for some 50 analysts who start looking for signs of online piracy.

They scan websites, social media posts, IPTV platforms and streaming portals in search of illegal broadcasts of La Liga matches.

The trained analysts identify the pirated content and take the steps needed to take them off air, including notifying Internet intermediaries like Cloudflare, the U.S.-based company whose content-delivery network is believed to manage nearly 20% of the Internet traffic worldwide.

And that's when the real fight begins for the Spanish league.

La Liga, one of the most active European leagues fighting piracy and audiovisual fraud, accuses Cloudflare of ignoring illegal content and not doing enough to block it. It says Cloudflare plays a decisive role in the dissemination of online piracy that significantly hurts the soccer industry.

Protecting its content is key for the league, which recently sold domestic audiovisual rights for more than 6 billion euros (\$7 billion) through the 2031-32 season.

Spanish league president Javier Tebas told The Associated Press in an email that Cloudflare is an organization "fully aware that a significant share of sports audiovisual piracy relies on its infrastructure and, despite this knowledge, it continues to protect and monetize that activity, as recognized by courts in multiple jurisdictions."

Tebas said that in Spain alone, more than 35% of La Liga's content piracy continues to be distributed through Cloudflare's infrastructure,

DURBAN, Jan 8: Shai Hope blasted the highest individual score of the SA20 Tournament before Lungi Ngidi claimed the League's first ever hat-trick to power Pretoria Capitals to a 15-run victory over Durban's Super Giants here.

Hope struck an unbeaten 118 off 69 balls, whacking nine sixes and nine boundaries to steer the Capitals to 201/4.

Heading into the final over, Super Giants needed 18 runs to win with an in-form Jos Buttler at the crease.

But Buttler, who was within touching distance of his own maiden SA20 century, could not drag DSG over the finishing line as Roston Chase delivered a sequence of accurate yorkers to close out the Capitals' second victory of the competition.

Buttler was literally left stranded on 97 not out with both Kwen Maphaka and Noor Ahmad run out in Chase's last over, while Demow Cricket Club were bundled out for just 77 runs.

despite thousands of formal notices and judicially backed enforcement measures implemented by Internet service providers.

"This is not a legal, technical or ideological debate, but a case of a company prioritizing its commercial interests and financial gain over the law, the sustainability of the global sports industry, and the protection of its own customers, whom it uses as a digital shield for organizing piracy networks," Tebas said.

Cloudflare speaks of censorship-Cloudflare, which describes itself as a "long-standing champion of a free and open Internet," denies wrongdoing and accuses the league of bullying its way into controlling what Spanish users see online during matches. Cloudflare told the AP that the league's "indiscriminate blocking practices" have kept Spanish users from accessing tens of thousands of legitimate sites while the games are on. The company said La Liga thinks that its commercial interests can "trump the right of ordinary Spanish users to browse lawful sites" during matches.

Cloudflare has encouraged Spanish users who notice lawful sites getting blocked because of La Liga to track those blocks and tell their lawmakers. Cloudflare highlights the need to fight "Internet censorship and the harm it causes."

"Cloudflare regularly works collaboratively with rightsholders to help address issues like illegal streaming," it said. "La Liga, however, has shown no interest in this type of collaboration, believing instead they can bully their way to having complete control over what Spanish users see online during football matches by making unsupported claims and threats." (AP)

## Hope's ton, Ngidi hat-trick take Capitals to win over DSG

Twenty20 captain formed an opening 106-run partnership with Connor Esterhuizen (37) that laid the platform, before another whirlwind 85 off 44 balls with Chase (24) for the second wicket.

Super Giants' chase began in a breezy fashion with new opener Marques Ackerman's 27 off 17 balls before Buttler played a lone hand for the remainder of the innings.

The home side could not put together partnerships with Gideon Peters, who was playing his first competitive match in nine months, claiming back-to-back wickets of Heinrich Klaasen and Evan Jones.

His earlier scalp was of Aiden Markram, before Ngidi entered the fray.

The Proteas seam bowler showed his experience with David Wiese being his first victim, followed by Sunil Narine before Gerald Coetzee completed the hat-trick when he held out in the deep.

Capitals moved up to fourth



place in the standings with 11 points after this victory while

DSG slipped to fifth on eight points. (PTI)

## Tottenham great Martin Chivers dies at age 80

LONDON, Jan 8: Martin Chivers, the former Tottenham and England striker, has died. He was 80.

Chivers' death was confirmed in a statement by Spurs on Wednesday. The Premier League club did not state the cause of death.

"It is with immense sadness that we announce the passing of our legendary former striker," Spurs posted on X — going on to describe him as "one of the all-time greats."

Chivers is fourth on Tottenham's all-time scoring list with 174 goals in 367 appearances. He is behind only Harry Kane, Jimmy Greaves and Bobby Smith on that list.

He joined the London club in 1968, winning two English League Cups and the UEFA Cup. He left for Swiss team Servette in 1976.

Tottenham said its players would wear black armbands in honor of its former player for the game against Bournemouth on Wednesday.

Chivers started his career at Southampton, where he scored 108 goals in 189 appearances. Southampton said it was "deeply saddened" by the news of his death. (AP)

## SA20 will help South African talent thrive at world stage: Uthappa

DURBAN, Jan 8: Former India batter Robin Uthappa said SA20 is poised to make a world of difference to South African cricket, as young talent has now started coming steadily through the league which might interest IPL scouts as well.

SA20 has showcased some bright prospects such as batters like the Hermann brothers (Rubin and Jordan), and pacers Kwen Maphaka and Ngobani Mokoena, who have represented South Africa at various levels, over the last four years.

"I reckon as far as atmosphere and quality of cricket are concerned, it's the second-best league after the IPL. You will see South African cricket thriving," Uthappa, who is here as a commentator, told a select media gathering.

"I think with the way they're performing at the ICC Championship tournaments and the way they played in India recently, I think you'll see a lot of that talent coming through," he added.

Uthappa said these players will also be in big demand in various other leagues across the world.

"The likes of Mokoena, an 18-year-old



fast bowler who plays for Paarl Royals, Jordan Harman who plays for Sunrisers. I think these are talents that even the IPL scouts will keep their eyes on because these are players for the future. You will see them playing in world cricket very, very soon," he added.

Uthappa also said the SA20 has sparked genuine interest in India — cricket's biggest market — because of the quality and intensity

## Novelty of ICC tournaments is wearing off, need to evolve from administrative perspective: Uthappa

DURBAN, Jan 8: Former India batter Robin Uthappa said the "novelty" around ICC tournaments are tapering off, and the game needs to evolve from an "administrative perspective" to retain the charm around them.

The current cricket calendar has three World Cups crammed in it in the space of 10 months. The Women's World Cup was played across September and November 2025, and now the men's T20 World Cup will be staged between February 7 and March 8, 2026.

The corresponding women's

event is scheduled to begin six months later, lending a touch of significance to Uthappa's words.

"I think the game needs to evolve from the administrative perspective. How much value do fans and audiences hold for an ICC tournament every year? The novelty of it is wearing off, to be very honest and with all due respect," Uthappa answered a PTI query during a select media interaction during SA20.

Uthappa, who is donning the hat of a commentator during the ongoing SA20, believed that there

should be some gap between two ICC events to add more value to them.

"I think the novelty of the ICC Championships must be there. I think it's an integral part, not just for the players but also for the fans, also for the viewers. It has to mean something. There has to be a little bit of a gap. We can't have or shouldn't have an ICC championship every year. That is the hard truth that I think the administrators have to look at and face and look at evolving the game in a way where it's actually moving towards," he added. (PTI)

"I think the novelty of the ICC Championships must be there. I think it's an integral part, not just for the players but also for the fans, also for the viewers. It has to mean something. There has to be a little bit of a gap. We can't have or shouldn't have an ICC championship every year. That is the hard truth that I think the administrators have to look at and face and look at evolving the game in a way where it's actually moving towards," he added. (PTI)

Uthappa said the SA20 and its scheduling is perfectly aligned with the needs of a fast growing cricket viewership across the globe.

"Today, you have to understand that cricket is evolving exponentially at a high pace. The true aficionados who've seen the game evolve and want the game to continue to evolve will watch the game because they want to stay in pace with the game."

"You see that the Big Bash League also is built in a silo. Despite that, the league has survived 10 years and done well right?"

"So I think a league like this (SA20), which is a lot more within the time-lines of India, is about 60-70 per cent of the viewership of cricket around the globe. You will see that this league will thrive over a period of time and viewers have the patience and the wherewithal to see a league like this thrive," he said. (PTI)

"You have got to look at this from a holistic perspective. What runs the culture here, the cricket culture here, and what runs the ecosystem here? So, when you look at it, there are still some hurdles for them to overcome. I think it'll get there over a period of time."

"You know, IPL became IPL maybe after the fourth or fifth season, right? You got to

# Australia wins Ashes series 4-1 with a five-wicket victory in Sydney

**SYDNEY, Jan 8:** Mitchell Starc took 31 wickets. Travis Head posted three centuries and tallied 629 runs. Alex Carey completed 28 dismissals.

The bowling, batting and fielding performances feature highly on the all-time lists for Aussies in the Ashes, underscoring Australia's dominance in the 4-1 series win that was completed on Day 5 of the fifth test with a five-wicket in Sydney.

"Yeah, it has been magnificent," Steve Smith, Australia's stand-in captain for four of the five tests in the absence of Pat Cummins, said of the individual contributions. "I think everyone's stood up at different times. (Starc, Head and Carey) were obviously huge standouts, but other guys stood up at different times throughout the series and, you know, that's what makes a good team."

The Australians bowled England out for 342 on the fifth morning of the series finale and, chasing 160 for victory, finished 161-5 with Carey hitting the winning runs and Cameron Green unbeaten on 22. Usman Khawaja was sent into retirement with a guard of honor and a standing ovation.

"It was nice to finish on a high note," said Smith, who scored a century in the first innings to move up to No. 6 on the all-time list. "We know the importance of every test match with the World Test Championship, so to get the result here and finish the series on a high was incredibly pleasing."

The Australians retained the Ashes with wins in the first three



tests, but England was determined to narrow the margin after its drought-breaking win in Melbourne.

"Tough one to take knowing that we can play a lot better than that, but ... the Australian cricket team, they've just been incredible for five test matches," injured England captain Ben Stokes said. "But also, being pretty truthful to ourselves, we've done a little bit of damage ourselves."

**Khawaja's kiss goodbye**

The 39-year-old veteran walked to the crease after Smith was bowled by Will Jacks and

Australia was 92-3. He was given a guard of honor from the England players, shook hands with Stokes and hugged Marnus Labuschagne. He got off the mark with a padded reverse sweep and edged another ball between the wicketkeeper and first slip for another 2.

Labuschagne had a reprieve when he was dropped on 20 by Jacob Bethell and took 16 off the next over, bowled by Jacks, to get the chase down to 41.

That's where Khawaja's 88-test career finished, dragging a delivery from Josh Tongue (3-42) onto his

stumps. He saluted the crowd, then kneeled and kissed the turf in front of a "Thankyou Uzzy" sign that was painted onto the field.

Labuschagne was soon run out for 37 when he took off for a single, only to get sent back by Carey. At 121-5, it was tense, until Carey and Green combined to usher Australia home.

**Fifth morning**

England resumed on Day 5 at 302-8, a lead of 119 runs, and was bowled out for 342, a 159-run lead with 2 1/2 sessions remaining. Starc dismissed Bethell for 154

and Tongue (6) to finish off the England innings and finish the series with 31 wickets at an average of 19.9, a performance that earned him the player of the series honors.

The Australians started their chase quickly, scoring 10 in the first over, before Head was caught in the deep for 29.

After getting a major reprieve on a contentious DRS decision on 16, Jake Weatherald misjudged a short ball from Tongue and was caught out for 34.

**Contentious call**

That DRS ruling added extra spice to the last day of the series. England reviewed umpire Ahsan Raza's not out decision to a caught behind appeal against Weatherald from Brydon Carse's bowling.

DRS technology appeared to show a slight murmur when the ball passed the toe of Weatherald's bat before going through to the wicketkeeper. But TV umpire Kumar Dharmasena deemed there was inconclusive evidence, and upheld the original decision.

The England players were stunned, after watching the DRS replays on the stadium screens, and Stokes had to step in to move Carse away from umpire Raza as he demanded an explanation. Stokes calmly approached the umpire, discussed the decision-making process, and got on with the game.

**Crowd record**

The total crowd across five days of the fifth test was 211,032, a record for the Sydney Cricket Ground. (AP)

# Malaysia Open: Sindhu, Satwik-Chirag secure quarterfinal spots



**KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8:** Star shuttler PV Sindhu produced an impressive performance, defeating Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki to book her spot in the women's singles quarterfinals but India's challenge ended in the men's singles at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Former world champion Sindhu, returning after a long injury lay-off, defeated the eighth-seeded Miyazaki 21-8, 21-13 in 33 minutes.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, will take on third-seeded Japanese Akane Yamaguchi, a three-time world champion, who defeated China's Gao Fang Jie 21-11 4-21 21-17 in another match.

Top men's pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who won a second bronze at world championships last year, also sailed into the quarterfinals with a 21-18 21-12 win over Malaysia's World No. 17 Junaidi Arif and Roy King Yap in 39 minutes.

The former World No. 1 Indians, who reached the finals of Hong Kong Open and China Masters in 2025, thus extended their head-to-head record against the Malaysian pair to 4-0.

The Asian Games champions will next face the winners of the clash between Chinese Taipei's Chen Zhi Ray/Lin Yu Chieh and sixth seeds Fajar Alfian/Fikri Muhammad of Indonesia.

However, it was curtains for ace Indian men's player Lakshya Sen and young Ayush Shetty who both lost at the pre-quarterfinal stage.

Sen, who had broken the three-year jinx of first-round exits in the tournament when he defeated Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh on Wednesday, succumbed in the pre-

quarterfinals to Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu 22-22 15-21 in 53 minutes.

Shetty went down fighting against top seed Shi Yu Qi of China 18-21, 21-18, 12-12 in a 70-minute slugfest.

**Sindhu vs Miyazaki**

It was Sindhu, 30, who continued to impress on comeback by notching her second win against Miyazaki to take her career head-to-head to 2-1 against the Japanese teenager.

Sindhu raced to a 5-1 lead and then reeled off 13 consecutive points to surge to a commanding 18-4 advantage, before comfortably closing out the opening game in no time.

The second game was also largely one-sided, though the 19-year-old Miyazaki briefly stayed in touch trailing by just a point at 8-9. However, Sindhu drew on her vast experience to pull away with a six-point lead at 17-11 and wrapped up the match with ease.

In the doubles clash, Satwik and Chirag seized early control, opening up a 6-3 lead before stretching it to 12-9. The Malaysians responded with three straight points to close the gap, but the Indians quickly reasserted themselves to move ahead 16-12.

Junaidi and Roy briefly threatened a turnaround when they edged ahead 18-17, only for Satwik and Chirag to shut the door decisively, reeling off four points on the trot to pocket the opening game.

In the second game, the Malaysians stayed in touch till 8-8. From there, the Indians stepped up the tempo, pulling away to 11-8 at the interval and then 15-9 before cruising to a comfortable finish. (PTI)

# England's Harry Brook apologizes for nightclub incident in New Zealand before Ashes

**SYDNEY, Jan 8:** England's Harry Brook apologized on Thursday for clashing with a nightclub bouncer in October during the tour of New Zealand that preceded the Ashes series that Australia comprehensively won 4-1.

London's Telegraph reported that Brook, the England white-ball captain, was hit by a bouncer after being denied entry to the club in Wellington on Oct. 31, the day before the third and last one-day international against New Zealand.

Brook was fined about 30,000 pounds (\$40,300) at the time and given a final warning for his future conduct. He was not stripped of the white-ball captaincy.

The incident was revealed after England lost the fifth and final Ashes test by five wickets in Sydney. Brook was also the test vice-captain.

"I want to apologize for my actions," Brook said in a statement. "I fully accept that my behavior was wrong and brought embarrassment to both myself and the England team. Representing England is the greatest honor of all, which I take seriously, and I am deeply sorry for letting down my teammates, coaches and supporters." (AP)

# FIR against national shooting coach for sexual assault of minor; NRAI suspends him

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** A prominent member of India's shooting coaching staff, Ankush Bhardwaj, has been suspended by the national federation after a minor shooter accused him of sexually assaulting her during the National Championships last month.

NRAI (National Rifles Association of India) confirmed that an FIR has been filed against Bhardwaj in Faridabad. Bhardwaj, a resident of Mohali, has been booked under Section 6 of POCSO Act (aggravated sexual assault), and Section 351(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (criminal intimidation).

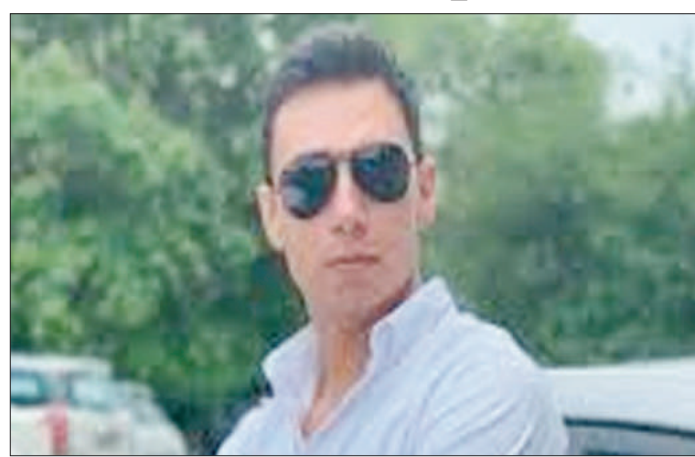
"NRAI has suspended him and we will issue a show-cause notice," NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia told PTI.

"He has been suspended on moral grounds. Now, he has to prove himself innocent. Till the inquiry is not completed, he will not be associated with any coaching activity," he added.

Bhatia said NRAI had recommended Bhardwaj for a place in the 37-strong coaching team after the Paris Olympics in 2024.

"It was on the recommendation of the NRAI that he was appointed by SAI as one of the coaches. It is a case of sexual harassment which happened in Surajkund," said Bhatia.

Sports Ministry, taking cog-



nizance of the alleged crime, said, "All stakeholders have to share responsibility of ensuring that youngsters who place their faith in coaches and systems don't have to go through something like this."

According to the FIR filed by the victim, she was targeted last month during the National Championships at the Karni Singh Range.

The girl, who has been training with Bhardwaj since August last year, stated that she was left traumatised by the incident and spoke up in front of her mother on January 1 after being persistently probed.

In her FIR, the 17-year-old has alleged that Bhardwaj used to call her for training at venues such as

Mohali, Patiala, Dehradun and Delhi but she would always return home the same day.

However, on the day of the incident, the victim said she went to the Karni Singh Range unaccompanied in a taxi to compete in the Nationals.

The girl said that when she was about to leave for home after finishing her competition, the coach asked her to stay back to analyse her performance.

She stated in her complaint that the coach first requested her to meet him at the lobby of a hotel in Surajkund area of Faridabad. However, upon her arrival, he allegedly coerced her into coming up to his room, claiming a more focused discussion was required. (PTI)

# 10-year medal strategy set to be unveiled at Ahmedabad Sports Governance Conclave

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** India's medal strategy for the next 10 years, which has been seen and approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will be unveiled at a Sports Governance Conclave being organised by the Sports Ministry in Ahmedabad on Friday.

The Conclave will be attended by representatives of National Sports Federations (NSFs), the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Sports Ministry.

"The 10-year medal strategy is ready, it has been seen and approved by the Prime Minister. And we will unveil it at the conclave in Ahmedabad," a sports ministry official said on Thursday but did not reveal the specifics of the plan.

"The meeting is intended to align federations with long-term national goals, rather than short-term or event-specific planning," the source added.

The conclave will also focus on a collective review of India's preparedness for major international sporting events in the coming years.

Ahmedabad will be hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and is also bidding to host the 2036 Olympics. The Olympic bid is currently on hold after the International Olympic Committee paused the host selection process to review its criteria. (PTI)

# Top-ranked Sabalenka calls season schedule 'insane,' plans to skip tournaments to avoid burnout

**BRISBANE, Jan 8:** Aryna Sabalenka describes the tennis schedule as "insane" and said she'll risk fines in order to skip tournaments to avoid injuries or burnout.

For all those concerns, though, the world's top-ranked woman is happy to have as much competition as possible before the season-opening Grand Slam in Australia.

Sabalenka beat Sorana Cirstea 6-3, 6-3 on Thursday to move into the Brisbane International quarterfinals, where she'll take on fifth-seeded Madison Keys almost a year after losing to her in the Australian Open final.

Keys, her left leg heavily taped, came back from a set and a break down to beat 12th-seeded Diana Shnaider 6-7 (5), 7-6 (5), 7-6 (4) on Thursday.

"Always good to start the year with a little bit of drama," Keys said in a post-match interview after three hours on court. "Glad we got that out of the way."

Keys had only two matches after her first-round exit at the U.S. Open, so she's looking for plenty of time on court before her title defense at the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 18. Her career breakthrough at a major came at the expense of Sabalenka's bid for an Australian Open three-peat.



Keys got more time on court in Brisbane than she bargained for in three tiebreakers, a medical timeout to have her upper left leg taped after the second tiebreaker, and a third set lasting 69 minutes.

The American missed two match points in the 10th game of the third set but made sure of it in the deciding tiebreaker. It continued her winning streak in Australia that includes titles in Adelaide and at Melbourne Park in 2025.

"It's (only) been like four weeks since we last played but it's just always kind of getting your feet wet again and trying to find some good level. Being able to win matches in Week 1 is always really important."

Sabalenka started 2025 with a victory in Brisbane and ended it with a runner-up finish at the WTA Finals in November. She played 16 tournaments for a 63-12 record and capped the year in the Battle of the Sexes against Nick Kyrgios.

Long season After beating Cirstea, Sabalenka was asked whether as the No. 1 player she might try to manage her schedule like Serena Williams did at times.

"Well, the season is definitely insane, and that's not good for all of us, as you see so many players getting injured," Sabalenka said.

"What Serena did, the rules were different. Right now, like last season, by the end of the season, because I didn't play enough of 500 (level) events, they fine us with points."

Sabalenka said the "rules are quite tricky" with mandatory events but she still planned to skip some events "in order to protect my body."

"Even though the results were really consistent, but some of the tournaments I had been playing completely sick or I've been really exhausted from overplaying. So this season we will try to manage it a little bit better."

Major preparations Despite criticizing the season length, Sabalenka said the strong draw in Brisbane makes it the ideal warmup for the Australian Open.

"By having (so) many top players you have in the draw, it definitely helps to prepare better for the Australian Open," Sabalenka said. "It's important to have quality matches just so you're preparing yourself mentally for fights, for battles."

"I like to challenge myself. I like to have great battles, especially heading to the Grand Slam."

She considers the quarterfinal against Keys more of a chance to improve her game than a chance for revenge for last year's Australian Open final.

"It's going to be, as always, a great battle, really aggressive tennis," she said. "I'm excited to face her."

The winner will advance to a semifinal against third-seeded Elena Rybakina, who beat No. 15 Paula Badosa 6-3, 6-2, or No. 11 Karolina Muchova, who beat seventh-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-4, 7-5. (AP)