

**6 NATION**

- PM takes part in 'Shaurya Yatra' in Somnath, 108-horse brigade part of parade
- ED moves SC against 'interference' by CM Mamata Banerjee

**7 NORTHEAST**

- Deputy CM highlights fiscal discipline and strategic projects ahead of Union Budget 2026-27
- Nagaland Congress launches 45-Day campaign to protect MGNREGA

## Base laid for integrated judicial complex amid Bar Association protest

### Legal fraternity's protest stuns CJI Surya Kanta

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Sunday laid the foundation stone for an integrated Judicial Complex at Rangmahal in North Guwahati, even as the move continued to face strong opposition from the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCB).

The proposed complex, envisioned as a modern judicial city, will also house the principal seat of the Gauhati High Court, which serves Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

The foundation stone was laid in the presence of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Law and Justice minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, judges of the Supreme Court and various high courts, along with several other dignitaries.



The judicial township will be developed over 148 bighas, or around 49 acres, with an estimated cost of Rs 479 crore in the first phase, as approved by the state cabinet last year.

According to officials, the inte-

grated complex will include high court and district court buildings, offices for the judiciary and the bar, and extensive parking facilities for around 900 cars and 400 two-wheelers.

All buildings will be intercon-

nected through bridges and designed with advanced security systems, fire safety measures and disaster-resilient features, with the aim of enhancing judicial efficiency and ensuring faster delivery of justice.

Addressing the controversy surrounding the project, the Chief Justice expressed surprise over the opposition by sections of the legal fraternity.

He said the integrated judicial complex was planned to meet the future needs of the judiciary and the legal profession, and stressed that personal or vested interests should not become grounds for resisting infrastructure development.

He noted that the site was strategically located and would provide comprehensive facilities under one roof, adding that, as head of the judiciary, he (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## New judicial complex should reflect a 'new Assam': Himanta

### 'New bridge to make travel time concern irrelevant'



STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said objections to the proposed integrated judicial complex in North Guwahati over travel time would become irrelevant once the new bridge over the Brahmaputra is inaugurated next month.

Addressing a gathering after Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

laid the foundation stone for the new court campus at Rangmahal in Kamrup district, Sarma appealed to all sections to support the project, which includes relocation of the Gauhati High Court along with district courts and allied facilities.

The move has been opposed by the Gauhati High Court Bar Association. Referring to the protest, the chief

minister said the government respects dissent in a democracy, but maintained that the argument that lawyers would take nearly two hours to reach the new complex would not hold once the Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge is opened by the Prime Minister in February.

He claimed that travel time from the existing high court area near Dighalipukhuri to Rangmahal would be reduced to around 20-25 minutes through the new bridge.

Sarma said the government would assess the decision to build the integrated complex at Rangmahal after March 1.

He also thanked local residents for cooperating in the land acquisition process, noting that land value in the area would rise significantly with upcoming infrastructure projects such as another Brahmaputra bridge and the Guwahati Ring Road. Recalling his own (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## BJP bolsters base in Karbi Hills with mass defections ahead of 2026 polls



HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 11: With the 2026 Assembly elections approaching, the political balance in the Karbi Hills appears to be tilting sharply in favour of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, as large-scale defections continue to weaken the Congress and the All Party Hill Leaders Conference in the region.

In a major political mobilisation at Dongkamukam in West Karbi Anglong on January 10, more than 3,000 leaders, workers and supporters from the Congress and

APHLC formally joined the BJP. The induction programme was held in the presence of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, signalling the BJP's growing organisational strength in the hill districts.

Addressing the gathering, Ronghang criticised the previous KAC leadership, alleging that the Bokajan cement factory was set up without any written agreement with the council, resulting in no revenue benefits for the region. He claimed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Modi, Merz set for crucial talks today

German Chancellor's trip to India comes amid rising geopolitical tension

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Shoring up bilateral ties in trade, investment, critical technologies and defence are set to be the focus of wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Ahmedabad on Monday.

As Merz's trip to India is taking place amid a fractious geopolitical environment, including the US's display of raw military strength to capture Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, the German leader and Modi are also likely to discuss pressing global challenges.

Merz's January 12-13 visit to India will be his first to Asia as the German Chancellor.

Ways to bring peace to Ukraine may also figure prominently in Modi-Merz talks.

The German leader will travel to Bengaluru after concluding his engagements in Ahmedabad.

Besides holding talks with PM Modi, Merz is scheduled to visit the Sabarmati Ashram, participate in a kite festival and attend a skill development event in Ahmedabad, according to officials.



In their talks, Modi and Merz are likely to deliberate on trade and investment ties as New Delhi is looking at deepening economic engagement with Europe against the backdrop of Washington's 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, people familiar with the matter said.

Germany is one of India's most important partners in Europe. It is New Delhi's largest trading partner in the European Union and the bilateral trade in goods and services between the two countries reached USD 51.23 billion in 2024-25.

Germany accounts for roughly one-fourth of India's trade with the EU, reinforcing its position as New Delhi's

leading EU trading partner. The Indo-German trade in services rose by 12.5 per cent in the financial year 2024-25, reaching a record USD 16.65 billion.

The influential European nation is the ninth largest foreign direct investor in India, with cumulative FDI inflows of USD 15.40 billion from April 2000 to June 2025. More than 2,000 German companies are currently operating in India.

Days after Merz's trip, the top leaders of the European Union will visit New Delhi during which the two sides may announce finalisation of the much-awaited India-EU free trade agreement.

India will host French President Emmanuel Macron next month. Macron is visiting India to participate in the AI Summit.

Defence and security ties between the two countries have also been on an upswing. With the easing of export control and expeditious clearing of cases, defence exports from Germany to India have increased.

Both sides have a joint working group on counter (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Congress flags tribal land, livelihood issues in Assam

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 11: The Assam Congress on Sunday said tribal communities in the state were grappling with multiple challenges, including threats to livelihoods and economic marginalisation, largely due to alleged violations and alienation of tribal land and forest rights.

The party said these concerns would figure prominently in its manifesto for the Assembly elections expected in March-April 2026.

The issues were documented in a report prepared by the party's Core ST Study Group and submitted to Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi.

The study group, headed by state general secretary Nirmal Langthasa, was constituted after consultations with leaders from ST-majority Assembly constituencies such as Dimoria, Boko, Dudhnoi and Goalpara West in November last year.

Its mandate was to examine long-standing problems and demands of tribal communities for inclusion in the party's election manifesto.

As part of its work, the group conducted extensive field-level interactions in the four constituencies, holding consultations with tribal organisations, non-governmental groups and individuals from communities including Rabha, Garo, Bodo, Hajong, Amri Karbi, Tiwa and Mising.

The report highlighted alleged transfer of tribal land to non-ST and non-local (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Scientists discover two new frog species in Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, Jan 10: Scientists have discovered two new frog species in Arunachal Pradesh.

The newly identified species - Leptobrachium somani (Soman's Slender Armed Frog) and Leptobrachium mechuka (Mechuka Slender Armed Frog), belong to the slender armed frog genus Leptobrachium.

The discovery was announced in a research paper published in the international scientific journal PeerJ on January 9.

Globally, 39 species of this genus are known, of which only four had earlier been reported from India.

The study was authored by A N Dikshit, Akalabya Sarmah, Sonali Garg, Taje Tajo, Radhakrishna Upadhyaya (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Bandh disrupts life in Kokrajhar after rape case

STAFF REPORTER

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11: Normal life came to a standstill in Assam's Kokrajhar district on Sunday following a bandh called in protest against the alleged rape of a mentally-challenged woman in the Patharghat area.

Markets and commercial establishments remained closed while public transport services were largely suspended in response to the shutdown called by the World Hindu Federation.

To prevent any escalation of the situation, the administration imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and deployed additional security forces at sensitive locations.

Officials said the incident occurred on Saturday and the accused, a resident of Dhubri district, has been apprehended.

The district administration appealed to people to maintain calm and not to fall prey to rumours, warning that strict legal action would be taken against those spreading misinformation.

Citizens were also asked to report misleading content to the district control room.

District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty and Senior Superintendent of Police Akshat Garg held a peace meeting with representatives of political parties, social organisations, student bodies and prominent citizens to ensure that the law and order situation remains

under control. Chakravarty said the administration was closely monitoring developments and had taken all necessary steps to maintain peace and tranquillity.

He added that a Special Investigation Team has been formed to probe the case and ensure justice through due legal process.

The administration has also begun identifying vulnerable areas for the installation of CCTV cameras and street lights.

Appealing for unity and harmony, the district commissioner urged all sections of society to place faith in democratic processes and work together for the development of Kokrajhar, a district known for its diverse communities.

## Nobel Institute says Venezuelan leader Machado can't give Peace Prize to Trump



WASHINGTON, Jan 11: The organisation that oversees the Nobel Peace Prize is throwing cold water on talk of Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado giving her recent award to President Donald Trump.

Once the Nobel Peace Prize is announced, it can't be revoked, transferred or shared with others, the Nor-

wegian Nobel Institute said in a short statement on Friday.

"The decision is final and stands for all time," it said. The statement comes after Machado said she'd like to give or share the prize with Trump, who oversaw the successful US operation to capture authoritarian Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. He is facing drug trafficking charges in New York.

"I certainly would love to be able to personally tell him that we believe — the Venezuelan people, because this is a prize of the Venezuelan people — certainly want to, to give it to him and share it with him," Machado told Fox News host Sean Hannity on Monday. "What he has done is historic. It's a huge step towards a democratic transition."

Machado dedicated the prize to Trump, along with the people of Venezuela, shortly after it was announced. Trump has coveted and has openly campaigned for winning the Nobel Prize himself since his return to office. When it comes to governing Venezuela after Maduro's (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Parv marks 1,000 years since the Somnath temple's invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni

# Dazzling lights, drones, devotion pull massive crowd to Somnath

SOMNATH (GUJARAT), Jan 11: Thousands of devotees thronged the Somnath temple complex on Saturday, staying out well past midnight amid winter chills, drawn by dazzling fireworks, decorations, drone show and religious fervour.

The crowd, which peaked late in the evening shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the ancient shrine as part of Somnath Swabhiman Parv, included locals and long-distance travellers of all ages.

On Sunday, devotees continued to make a beeline for the ancient shrine in Gir Somnath district, adjacent to the Arabian Sea.

Mumbai-based Gujarati couple Ramesh Ravi Vadadoriya and Jaya Ramesh arrived on Sunday morning to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva. "We came to see Baba (Lord Shiva) and seek his blessings. It's cold, but his divine appeal brought us here

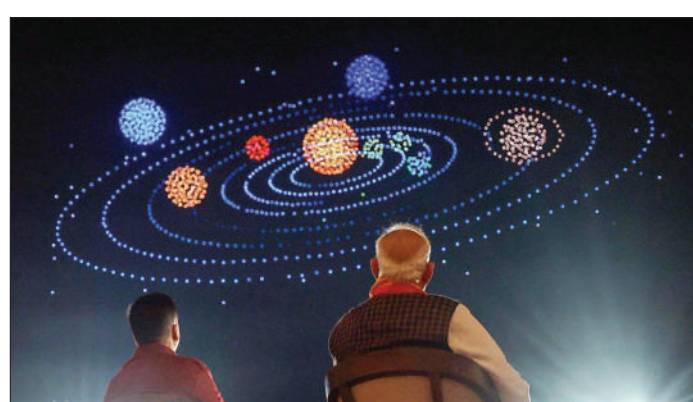
from Mumbai." Vadadoriya, a cloth-seller, told PTI while returning from the shrine.

Modi on Sunday led a 'Shaurya Yatra', which featured a procession of 108 horses, from Shank Circle to Veer Hamirji Gohil Circle here.

On Saturday evening, he participated in 'Omkar Mantra chanting at the Somnath temple, had 'darshan', and also witnessed a grand show featuring an assemblage of 3,000 drones, matching the scale of the gathering on the ground.

Preeti Karelia, along with 24 other women, travelled from Mumbai just to witness the celebrations.

"We came today to see the Somnath temple, to see our prime minister. It is an amazing feeling to witness the celebration. The fireworks, the decoration in the streets leading to the temple, the wonderful drone show only added to the power of divinity that has brought so many



people to the shrine in just one day," Karelia told PTI.

The women-only group described itself as a 'bhajan mandali' from Mumbai.

The main road leading to the temple, from Shank Circle to Veer Hamirji Gohil Circle, has been decked up with flowers and the-

matic decorations.

Mounted lights fashioned in the shapes of 'trishul', 'Om' and 'damru' lined the stretch, complemented by Somnath Swabhiman Parv posters and flower-made 'shiv-alings'.

Large banners across the city bore the festival's name and slogans

such as 'Akhand Somnath, Akhand Bharat' and evocative lines, including 'Prahar se Punurathan ka Sakshi, Main Swayambhu Somnath Hun'.

The ornate gateway near the Shank Circle was decorated with flowers. In the evening, a group of folk dance artists from Karnataka, clad in traditional attire, walked past it, drawing the attention of residents eager to get photos clicked.

As dusk fell and night progressed, the crowds swelled further.

With the prime minister's arrival, a sea of people gathered near the main gates of the temple complex, even as security personnel worked to maintain order.

Visitors on Saturday night included religious figures such as Bhardwaj Giri, who travelled from Bhavnagar, and veteran politician Girish M Kotecha from neighbouring Junagadh district.

Interacting with PTI near the Veer Hamirji Gohil Circle, which has an equestrian statue of the 16th-century Rajput warrior remembered for defending the Somnath temple against invaders, Giri said people like Veer Hamirji fought to "protect the pride of our Hindu shrines".

The entire circle facing the temple complex was illuminated with lights and floral decorations, presenting a striking sight. "It's a celebration of the spirit of Somnath, and you can see the joy among the people on this occasion," Kotecha told PTI.

Even as sections of the crowd departed after 'darshan', cultural programmes and the drone show, more visitors poured in, including a large number of women who braved the early January chill with enthusiasm.

Harsh Shah, who visited the temple complex close to midnight with family members, said, "Somnath

Baba is attracting people, and we came to see the decorations and lights."

A nearly 15-minute drone show featuring several thematic formations, including huge images of Lord Shiva and a 'shivling', and a 3D depiction of the Somnath temple, followed by a dazzling display of fireworks, was an instant show stealer.

PM Modi, who arrived here on Saturday evening on a two-day visit to the temple town, witnessed the show, held as part of the Somnath Swabhiman Parv.

One of the drone formations also depicted the destruction faced by the historic temple over the centuries, as well as its rise and resilience.

The Parv marks 1,000 years since the Somnath temple's invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni, the Prime Minister's Office (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# Modi raises investment pitch, 'Amid great global uncertainty, unprecedented certainty in India'

**RAJKOT, Jan 11:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said India is currently witnessing an era of unprecedented certainty and political stability, a time when the world is experiencing great uncertainty, and appealed to investors to take advantage of various opportunities in the country.

"Amidst great global uncertainty, we are witnessing an era of unprecedented certainty in India. Today, India has political stability and continuity in policies," Modi said after inaugurating the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference (VGRC) for the Saurashtra and Kutch region in Rajkot city.

He said India is the world's fastest-growing large economy and is marching towards becoming the third-largest economy.

"In recent years, India has made very rapid progress, and Gujarat has played a very significant role in this. India is rapidly moving towards becoming the world's third-largest economy, and the figures that are emerging clearly show that the world's expectations from India are constantly increasing," said Modi.

He said the expanding new middle class and their growing purchasing power are among the major factors that have made India a country of immense possibilities.

"Today, India is the world's fastest-growing large economy. The country that manufactures the most vaccines in the world is



India. India's growth revolves around the mantra of 'Reform, Perform, and Transform,' said the prime minister.

Modi said every global expert and global institution is bullish on India today.

He stated that India has become the world's largest consumer of mobile data, and UPI has become the world's number one real-time digital transaction platform.

India is also among the top three countries in terms of solar power generation, while its metro networks are among the top three networks in the world, he said.

"That is why I keep saying that this is the time, and it's also the right time for every investor in the country and the world to take advantage of these opportunities," said Modi.

He also urged the investors to consider investing in the Saurash-

tra and Kutch region, which is emerging as a major centre for accelerating the Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) campaign.

"Saurashtra and Kutch have a huge role to play in making India a global manufacturing hub, and this role is market-driven, which is what instills the greatest confidence in investors," said Modi.

He added that Saurashtra and Kutch are not just regions of opportunity, but have become an anchor region for India's growth.

Modi said Alang in Bhavnagar district is the world's largest ship-breaking yard where one-third of the world's ships are recycled.

"India is one of the largest producers of tiles, and the Morbi district contributes significantly to this. Dholera Special Investment Region is becoming a major centre for modern manufacturing. India's

first semiconductor fabrication facility is being set up in Dholera," he added.

Modi further said this region is providing an early-mover advantage for future technologies, which means the ground is completely ready for your investment to grow in this region.

"The infrastructure is ready, the policy is predictable, and the vision is long-term," he added.

Earlier in the day, Modi inaugurated a trade show at Marwadi University in Rajkot ahead of the VGRC.

More than 1,500 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are expected to be signed with over 110 international buyers from 16 countries, including the USA and several from Europe, participating in the event, while over 1,800 business meetings have been scheduled during the Reverse Buyer Seller Meet (RBSM) at VGRC, officials said.

Leading corporations, such as Torrent Power Limited, KOSOL, Adani Green, Essar Group, Nayara Energy, Jyoti CNC, are participating in the exhibition spread across 26,000 square metres, they said.

More than 400 exhibitors representing a wide range of sectors, such as agro and food processing, fisheries, defence, energy, petrochemicals, engineering, and ports and logistics, have put up stalls at the trade show, officials informed. (PTI)

## Grok AI obscene content issue: X accepts mistake, removes 600 accounts; assures compliance

**NEW DELHI, Jan 11:** Microblogging platform X admitted its mistake and removed about 3,500 pieces of content, as well as deleted over 600 accounts, after the IT Ministry raised concerns over obscene content linked to Elon Musk-backed AI chatbot Grok, government sources said on Sunday.

X has assured the authorities that it would comply with Indian laws.

The action comes amid mounting pressure on Grok from governments worldwide, as regulators intensify scrutiny of the generative AI engine over content moderation, data safety and non-consensual sexually-explicit images that have flooded X over the last few days.

According to Indian government sources, X has accepted its mistake and assured it will comply with Indian laws. Accordingly, it has blocked around 3,500 pieces of content, and over 600 accounts have been deleted. It has also assured that going forward, it won't allow obscene imagery, sources said.

Last Sunday, X's 'Safety' handle said it takes action against illegal content on its platform, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement as necessary.

"Anyone using or prompting Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," X had said, echoing the stance taken by Musk on illegal content.

X is facing a global backlash over the 'digital underdressing' of images through user prompts on the xAI chatbot Grok. It has come under fire from governments across the world, including in Europe and Asia, warning it of consequences if the platform failed to adhere to online safety norms, while public calls for action on both X and Grok over the issue have been growing.

On January 2, the IT Ministry had pulled up X and directed it to immediately remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content generated by Grok or face action under the law.

In the directive, the ministry asked the US-based social media firm to submit a detailed action taken report (ATR) within 72 hours, spelling out specific technical and organisational measures adopted or proposed in relation to the Grok application, the role and oversight exercised by the Chief Compliance Officer, actions taken against offending content, users and accounts, as well as mechanisms to ensure compliance with the mandatory reporting requirement under Indian laws.

The IT Ministry's missive had

noted that Grok AI, developed by X and integrated on the platform, is being misused by users to create fake accounts to host, generate, publish or share obscene images or videos of women in a derogatory or vulgar manner.

"Importantly, this is not limited to creation of fake accounts but also targets women who host or publish their images or videos, through prompts, image manipulation and synthetic outputs," the ministry had said, asserting that such conduct reflects a serious failure of platform-level safeguards and enforcement mechanisms, and amounts to gross misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in violation of stipulated laws.

The government had made it clear to X that compliance with the IT Act and rules is not optional, and that the statutory exemptions under section 79 of the IT Act (which deals with safe harbour and immunity from liability for online intermediaries) are conditional upon strict observance of due diligence obligations.

The government warned X in clear terms that any failure to observe due diligence obligations will result in the loss of the exemption from liability (under section 79 of the IT Act), and that the platform will also be liable for consequential action under other laws, including the IT Act and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. (PTI)

## Gargya Mahindra unveils XUV 7XO, XEV 9S in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 11:** At a glittering launch event held on Sunday evening at the Heritage Udesha Mall premises, Gargya Mahindra unveiled Mahindra's latest offerings, the all-new XUV 7XO and XEV 9S.

The models were launched in the presence of noted Assamese singer Dikshu, adding star appeal to the occasion.

The Mahindra XUV 7XO has been introduced at an introductory price of Rs 13.66 lakh, while the XEV 9S is priced from Rs 19.95 lakh.

Packed with advanced features, both models are expected to make a strong impact in their respective segments, further underlining Mahindra's aggressive product strategy in the Indian automobile market.

The XUV 7XO features a distinctive "Coast-to-Coast" triple 12.3-inch HD screen setup, complemented by a 16-speaker Harman Kardon audio system with Dolby Atmos.

It is offered with 2.0-litre turbo-petrol and 2.2-litre diesel engine options, along with the new DAVINCI adaptive damping suspension and a Level 2+ ADAS safety suite.

Premium features such as ventilated seats for both rows, rear-seat "Boss Mode" and a



540-degree surround-view camera position the SUV as a technology-rich offering.

Built on Mahindra's dedicated INGLO EV platform, the XEV 9S is positioned as a high-performance electric SUV.

It comes with battery options of 59 kWh, 70 kWh and 79 kWh, and can accelerate from 0 to 100 kmph in just seven seconds.

The electric SUV offers a futuristic cabin with a triple-screen dashboard, AR head-up display, panoramic Skyroof, ventilated seats for the first and second rows, and a 16-speaker Harman Kardon sound system with Dolby Atmos.

Features such as a 540-degree camera, Level 2+ ADAS and specialised Camp and PawPal modes

add to its versatility.

Speaking at the launch, Mahindra ASM Simanta S Buzarbaruah expressed confidence in the success of the new models and thanked customers for their continued support, which has helped Mahindra emerge as the second-largest automobile player in the country.

Gargya Mahindra Managing Director Rahul Dev Sharma said that following the success of its first outlet at Bharalukmukh, the dealership is set to open a second state-of-the-art showroom at Mathgharia, Narengi.

He added that the expanded network would enhance customer convenience and contribute to further growth in sales.

Contd. from Page 1...

## Legal fraternity's protest

was duty-bound to consider the requirements of future generations of lawyers. The GHCBA, however, continued its protest against the relocation of the high court from its current location at Uzan Bazar in the heart of Guwahati to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.

Members of the association boycotted the foundation stone laying ceremony and staged a four-hour hunger strike, reiterating their demand that the high court should not be shifted from its existing premises.

GHCBA vice-president Santanu Borthakur said the association was completely against moving the court from its present location and alleged that the government had gone ahead with the project unilaterally despite sustained opposition.

He added that the association was considering challenging the decision in court and that its executive committee would meet soon to decide the future course of action.

The present Gauhati High Court complex comprises a historic building and a modern multi-storey structure built a few years ago, located on either side of Mahatma Gandhi Road and connected by an underground tunnel with escalator facilities.

The Assam government has maintained that the relocation is necessary as part of its broader plan to develop the Brahmaputra riverfront, for which the existing high court land is required.

A new convention centre is also under construction near the old high court complex on the riverbank. Meanwhile, Assam Advocate General Devajit Saikia has criticised the protest, alleging that there is a nexus with political parties behind the opposition.

Despite the resistance, the state government has reiterated its commitment to proceed with the construction of the new judicial township in North Guwahati.

## 'New bridge to make

beginnings as a lawyer at the Gauhati High Court, Sarma said the present premises were no longer adequate to meet future needs.

Emphasising the need to move with changing aspirations, he said the new judicial complex should reflect a "new Assam".

The chief minister added that the state government plans to spend about ₹ 1,700 crore on the project, with work on the first phase already set to begin.

## Congress flags tribal

interests, which it said had led to livelihood insecurity and economic marginalisation.

It also pointed to inadequate political representation, cultural erosion and weakening of indigenous identity as major concerns faced by tribal communities.

Among the key demands raised were stricter enforcement of existing laws to protect tribal land, belts and blocks, and the grant of land titles to genuine tribal forest dwellers.

Other demands included setting up a tribal university in Assam to promote indigenous education and research, granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Amri Karbi community, and bringing the remaining 312 Bodo revenue villages under the Boro Kachar Welfare Autonomous Council.

The report also noted demands for the creation of development councils for plains tribal communities that are currently outside any such framework, to ensure equitable development and institutional representation. The party said the findings would form the basis of a tribal-centric Congress manifesto for the 2026 Assembly elections.

## Modi, Merz set

terrorism. Germany will be deploying a German Navy liaison officer in India's Integrated Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR).

There has been speculation that India and Germany may finalise an inter-governmental agreement during Merz's visit for supplying six stealth submarines to the Indian Navy.

German defence major ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) are holding price negotiations with the defence ministry for an Euro 5 billion deal to supply six stealth submarines to the Indian Navy.

The deal is being billed as one of the biggest 'Make in India' projects in recent years.

The India-German relations are also expanding in a number of other areas, including education, energy, skill development, culture, people-to-people exchanges and technology.

In 2024, the two sides launched the Indo-German green hydrogen roadmap that was aimed at supporting India's ambition for production, usage and export of green hydrogen.

The people cited above said enhancing cooperation in critical technologies may figure prominently in the talks between Modi and Merz.

India and Germany firming up a strategic agenda to enhance Indo-German partnership in the 21st century in 2000. The strategic partnership completed 25 years last year.

Since 2011, the top leadership of the two sides has been undertaking a comprehensive review of cooperation through the Inter-Governmental consultation (IGC framework).

The seventh IGC was held in New Delhi in 2024. (PTI)

## BJP bolsters base

that despite local resources being used, indigenous people were denied employment opportunities.

Projecting confidence ahead of the 2026 elections, the KAAC CEM asserted that the BJP was poised to register a sweeping victory in all five Assembly constituencies of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, attributing the opposition's declining influence to the BJP-led development agenda.

Ronghang also indicated his personal political intentions, stating that he would like to contest the 2026 Assembly elections as a BJP candidate if granted a ticket by the party's high command.

The BJP's sustained industrial drive across Karbi Anglong has steadily consolidated its position, even as the Congress and APHLC struggle to retain their organisational base.

The latest wave of defections is being viewed as a significant setback for the opposition parties and a clear demonstration of the BJP's expanding dominance in the hill districts.

## Scientists discover two

K, James Hanken and S D Biju.

The researchers are from the Systematics Lab, Department of Environmental Studies, University of Delhi, and the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology and the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University.

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein welcomed the discovery, calling it a proud moment for the state.

"The discovery of Leptobranchium somani and Leptobranchium mechuka is a proud moment for Arunachal Pradesh. These newly documented species highlight the rich and still unfolding biodiversity of our state," Mein said in a social media post.

He added that the findings reaffirm the ecological importance of Arunachal's forests and river ecosystems and remind people of their shared responsibility to protect fragile habitats.

According to the paper, the scientists identified the new species while reviewing fresh field collections using a combination of DNA analysis, physical features and behavioural observations.

The study notes that both species belong to the Leptobranchium bompu species group and show clear genetic differences, confirming them as distinct species.

Samples of the frogs were collected from the Lower Dibang Valley and Shi Yomi districts of Arunachal Pradesh, regions known for their dense forests and river systems.

Leptobranchium mechuka has been named after the town of Mechuka in Shi-Yomi district, while Leptobranchium somani honours veteran journalist E Somanath, a former senior special correspondent of the Malayala Manorama.

Experts said the discovery reflects the vast and still unexplored biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

## Nobel Institute says

capture, though, Trump has so far backed someone else: acting President Delcy Rodriguez, who served as vice president under Maduro.

He's called Machado a "very nice woman" but said she doesn't currently have the support within Venezuela to govern. He told Hannity on Thursday that Machado plans to visit next week and referred to a potential Peace Prize offering as a "great honour".

A representative for Machado did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment. (AP)

## Dazzling lights, drones

said on Friday. After Independence, efforts to restore the temple were undertaken by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A key milestone was achieved in 1951 when the restored Somnath temple was formally opened to devotees in the presence of then-President Rajendra Prasad.

Many visitors were also seen clicking photographs with the statue of Patel installed in front of the main ceremonial gate of the temple complex.

The Somnath temple is one of the country's 12 'jyotirlingas' -- holy sites associated with Lord Shiva. Ice-cream vendor Chand Mal, a local who was among the late-night visitors, said he had never seen such crowds before.

"I come here often or on weekends. But I have never seen such a crowd before. It seems unprecedented. It also feels special to get His (Lord Shiva's) blessings," he said.

A series of programmes is being held from January 8 to 11 as part of the Swabhiman Parv.

On Sunday morning, PM Modi took part in the 'Shaurya Yatra', a ceremonial procession organised to honour those who laid down their lives defending the Somnath temple.

He offered prayers at the temple and participated in a public function marking the Somnath Swabhiman Parv before departing for Rajkot. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from MOHAMMAD ABDUL KHOSRU TO ABDUL KHASRU by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

Abdul Khasru  
S/O-L. Mataur Rahman  
Vill: Karaiyani, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

### NAME CORRECTION

I, Jitu Ali, S/O- Elias Ali, R/O- Purani Telahi, P.O.-Bangaldhara, P.S.-Dharantul, Dist- Morigaon (Assam) have corrected my name from Sahidul Islam to Jitu Ali through an Executive Magistrate at Morigaon court. I declared that my actual name Jitu Ali according to my Aadhar card and PAN card. But my name is wrongly mentioned in my LIC policy no- 483908672 as Sahidul Islam instead of Jitu Ali. Jitu Ali and Sahidul Islam is the same and one person.

### SITUATION VACANT

A reputed school in West Bengal requires the following teachers:  
Lower classes, salary 14K with food and accommodation plus TA DA  
Higher classes: Physics, Chemistry and Maths: salary 20 to 22 K plus the above mentioned perks.  
Spoken and written English is a must. KG, LKG and UKG female teachers will be preferable.  
Contact immediately on WhatsApp number 8974562619.  
Send your resume with a photo.  
AUGUSTINE FERNANDEZ  
Principal  
89745-62619/99057-37405

## District officials, political and community representatives call for calm and unity Kokrajhar administration holds peace meeting to ensure law and order



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11:** In view of the prevailing law and order situation following the alleged incident of sexual harassment involving a mentally challenged girl in Kokrajhar on Saturday, a peace meeting was convened on Sunday at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office.

The meeting was chaired by District Commissioner Pankaj

Chakravarty in the presence of Akshat Garg, Senior Superintendent of Police, Kokrajhar; Circle Officers, district officials and representatives of political parties, social organisations, student bodies and leading citizens of the district.

Addressing the gathering, DC Chakravarty stated that the district administration is closely monitoring the situation and has taken necessary measures to ensure public

peace and tranquillity. He informed that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted under the supervision of a DSP to investigate the incident thoroughly and ensure justice through due process of law. He also assured that vulnerable areas are being identified for installation of CCTV cameras and street lights. Emphasising unity and harmony, the DC appealed to all sections of society

to repose faith in democracy and its institutions and to work collectively for the development of Kokrajhar, home to multiple communities living together as one family.

During the meeting, the Circle Officer presented the factual sequence of events related to the incident and the steps taken by the administration to prevent any escalation of tension. SSP Akshat Garg highlighted the issue of rumour-mongering and misinformation, warning against attempts by anti-social elements to provoke public sentiment through unverified information. He urged citizens to verify facts before believing or sharing any news.

Participants unanimously stressed the need to maintain peace, unity and communal harmony and resolved to cooperate with the district administration in ensuring law and order. The administration appealed to the public to remain calm and support efforts to maintain stability in the district.

## Sonitpur reviews CM-FLIGHT scheme implementation

District-level meeting focuses on language training, global employment opportunities for youth

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Jan 11:** A district-level meeting was held on Jan 9 at Conference Hall-II of the Office of the District Commissioner, Sonitpur, to review the implementation strategy and ensure wide publicity of the Chief Minister's Foreign Languages Initiative for Global Human Talent (CM-FLIGHT) scheme among the youth of the district. The meeting was presided over by District Development Commissioner, Sonitpur, Sanjeev Kumar Sharma. Assistant Commissioner Rajen Acharya and District Programme Manager (Skill), Sonitpur, Hemanta Saikia were also present.

During the meeting, it was informed that JACEEX Venture LLP has been empanelled as the training provider under the Assam Skill Development Mission (ASDM) for Sonitpur district for implementation of the CM-FLIGHT scheme. The initiative will focus primarily on Japanese language training along with facilitation of global employment opportunities for eligible



youth.

A detailed presentation on the district-level concept and implementation framework of the CM-FLIGHT programme was delivered by Tushar Tayal, SPOC, JACEEX Venture LLP, Tezpur. The presentation highlighted the training structure, eligibility criteria, overseas placement pathways and strategies for mobilisation and outreach of potential candidates across the district.

Officials from the Industries and Commerce Department, Health Department, Social Welfare Department, Education Department, Information and Public Relations

Office, Employment Office, along with principals and representatives of various colleges of the district and other stakeholders attended the meeting. Participants offered suggestions aimed at strengthening awareness generation and ensuring effective outreach of the scheme.

The meeting emphasised the need for coordinated efforts among all concerned departments, educational institutions and training partners to ensure maximum participation of eligible candidates and the successful implementation of the CM-FLIGHT scheme in Sonitpur district.

## Protests erupt in Kokrajhar over rape case

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11:** Various student bodies and social organisations have strongly reacted to the rape of a mentally challenged young woman on Saturday in Kokrajhar.

On Sunday, a protest was held at Shantinagar in Kokrajhar town demanding the death penalty for the accused. The demonstration was organised by the All Assam Bengali Youth Students Council (AABYSC).

Commenting on sporadic incidents that occurred on Saturday in connection with the case, AABYSC Central vice president Gopal Ghosh alleged that a third

party deliberately orchestrated such incidents to defame the ongoing peaceful protests. He clarified that the protesters were not involved in the attack on a bus carrying school students returning from a picnic that same night and demanded immediate arrest of those responsible for such acts.

Similarly, Baharul Islam Mandal, General Secretary of the North East Minority Students Union (NEMSU), strongly condemned the rape incident but expressed concern over attempts by certain groups to give it a religious angle. He appealed to the District Commissioner and Superintendent of Police to intervene to maintain

peace and harmony in Kokrajhar.

ABMSU president Tyson Husain also condemned the incident and demanded strict punishment for the accused. The All Bodo Minority Students Union (ABMSU) filed an FIR at Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station demanding investigation into the attack on ABMSU member Rashidul Islam, the assault on the school students' bus and an attack on the Jama Masjid.

During a 12-hour Kokrajhar town bandh called by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad demanding justice for the rape victim, tight security measures ensured that no untoward incidents were reported.

## NFR honours excellence at 70th 'Zonal Railway Week Awards'



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 11:** The 70th Zonal Railway Week Awards Ceremony of Northeast Frontier Railway was held at Rang Bhawan, Maligaon on Saturday. The event was presided over by Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager, N F Railway and was attended by Principal Heads of Departments and senior officers from Headquarters. The dignitaries congratulated the award recipients for their dedication, professionalism and exemplary performance in their respective fields.

Officers and staff from various departments of the five divisions and Headquarters of N F Railway were conferred with the presti-

gious Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar (VRSP), 2025, in recognition of their outstanding service, professional excellence and significant contributions towards improving efficiency, safety and passenger services. A total of 49 awardees were honoured for their commendable performance across diverse functional areas.

The recipients included two awardees each from the General Administration, Commercial, Medical and Signal & Telecommunication Departments and one awardee each from the Personnel, Safety, Security and Stores Departments. These officials were recognised for their effective administrative support, customer-oriented services, healthcare

delivery, technical expertise and contributions towards strengthening safety and operational systems of the Railways.

In addition, seven awardees each from the Electrical and Operating Departments, eight awardees from the Mechanical Department and the highest number of 15 awardees from the Civil Engineering Department received the honour. Their sustained efforts in traction and loco operations, train operations and traffic management, rolling stock maintenance, workshops, coaching depots, track maintenance and infrastructure development have played a vital role in enhancing the overall performance and reliability of Northeast Frontier Railway.

Coaching Depot Kamakhya was also honoured with the Best Coaching Depot Award for 2025 under the Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar (VRSP), 2025, in recognition of its outstanding performance and excellence in coaching maintenance and services.

Addressing the gathering, the General Manager and senior officials lauded the awardees for their professionalism, teamwork and continuous efforts in enhancing safety, punctuality and passenger satisfaction across N F Railway. They reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to recognising merit and encouraging excellence among its workforce.

## CSIR-NEIST hosts FSM-BIO-HIM 2026 workshop in Jorhat

Experts stress sustainable faecal sludge management for Himalayan region

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Jan 11:** The CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST) organised a one-day workshop and hands-on training programme on "Aspects of Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) and Bioformulation Utilisation in Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) in the Indian Himalayan Region (FSM-BIO-HIM 2026)" on Saturday.

The workshop was conducted under the patronage of Dr Virendra M Tiwari, Director, CSIR-NEIST, with Dr S Venkata Mohan, Director, CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI), attending as the guest of honour.

In his inaugural address, Dr Virendra M Tiwari emphasised the critical need for sustainable sanitation and waste management technologies in ecologically fragile regions such as the Himalayas. He highlighted CSIR-NEIST's focus on translating scientific research into field-ready solutions, particularly in environmental biotechnology and waste-to-value approaches. Dr Tiwari also stressed the importance of industry-academia collaboration, encouraging research institutions to work closely with companies and startups to enhance technology deployment, productivity and societal impact.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr S Venkata Mohan underscored the importance of systematic faecal sludge and septage management in India, highlighting sanitation coverage, regulatory frameworks and decentralised treatment solutions. He discussed advanced systems such as compact constructed wetland-based treatment plants, the LIAM process, HIM-STP, dry toilet systems and high-rate thermophilic reactors, emphasising their scalability and energy efficiency.

Prof Ajay Kalamdhad of IIT Guwahati, an invited resource person, highlighted sanitation challenges unique to the Himalayan region, including rugged terrain, low temperatures, scattered settlements and the long-standing "build-and-forget" approach to septic tanks. He advocated bioformulation-based solutions using psychrophilic microbial consortia and region-specific strains for applications in septic tank augmen-



tation, FSTPs and co-composting.

Another resource person, Javed Saikia, co-founder of Resolin Tech Pvt Ltd., presented innovations in nutrient recovery from used water, demonstrating how recovered nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium can reduce dependence on chemical fertilisers and enhance agricultural productivity. He also showcased digital monitoring platforms for real-time wastewater quality assessment.

A key highlight of the programme was the hands-on laboratory training session, during which participants received practical exposure to bacterial isolation techniques, chemical oxygen demand (COD) and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) analysis and bench-scale bioreactor setup and operation. The session also included discussions on safety protocols, monitoring and real-world operational challenges.

The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks followed by the distribution of certificates to participants and resource persons.

The programme was funded by the National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India. The workshop was coordinated by Dr Sachin Rameshwar Geed as Convener with Dr Ashutosh Namdeo, Dr Jitendra Singh Verma and Dr Dhanjit Das serving as Co-Convenors.

## Pragya Sadhana Neog launches poetry book 'In the Language of Feathers'

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Jan 11:** Literature, often described as the life-blood of a nation, was celebrated at the launch of the poetry book 'In the Language of Feathers' by Pragya Sadhana Neog, a first-semester graduate student of the English Department, Tezpur University and a resident of Chiring Chapari, Dibrugarh.

The book launch, held at DHSK College (Autonomous), was inaugurated by Principal Dr S K Saikia, who emphasised that literature preserves a nation's language, culture and history. "Many civilizations have disappeared because they failed to preserve written or oral literature," he said, adding that literature forms the roots of a nation and

ensures its survival. Dr Saikia cited world-renowned poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Laxminath Bezbaruah, John Keats, Alexander Pope and Lord Byron, highlighting how literary passion often begins in student life. He encouraged young writers to pursue poetry from an early age, noting that a strong literary foundation can lead to global recognition.

The program was attended by Dr Madhumita Purkayastha, Head of the English Department, who appreciated the growing literary activity among students. Prominent writer Gaurika Baruah Ahmed described Pragya Sadhana as a "voice of the new generation," while Sunil Rajkonwar, vice-president of Jyoti Chitran, praised the college for

fostering an atmosphere of literature and culture.

The event was moderated by Romi Chakraborty, with noted writer Basbi Hazarika Bhattacharya speaking on the societal role of books and literature. Dr Partha Ganguli, vice-principal of DHSK College, lauded Pragya Sadhana's poems and encouraged her to continue her literary journey.

Pragya Sadhana Neog, who has been writing poetry since class six, expressed gratitude to her parents, Indra and Dharani Neog, for their unwavering support and inspiration. The launch was attended by Utpala Borgohain of Dibrugarh University, BCPL engineer Juganta Gogoi, Tilak Mohan and several other dignitaries from Dibrugarh.

## Nath-Yogi community holds grand cultural procession in Bilasipara

Over 25,000 participants display unity and heritage while urging socio-economic development

**HT Correspondent**

**BILASIPARA, Jan 11:** Bilasipara witnessed a historic and vibrant display of unity and cultural pride as the Nath-Yogi community took off a massive cultural procession at Alengmari, organised by the All Assam Nath-Yogi Students' Union. More than 25,000 men and women, dressed in traditional attire, participated in the colourful rally, showcasing the rich heritage and distinct identity of the Nath-Yogi community.

The grand procession was inaugurated by popular actress Mousumi Alifa, known for her role in Zubeen Garg's last film Roi Roi Binale. Speaking on the occasion, the actress said that although the Nath-Yogi community is culturally rich, it has remained backward in several sectors and deserves equal development opportunities along with other communities.

The procession was part of a two-day Annual General Meeting and Nath-Yogi Youth Festival being held at the Shaheed Manbar Nath Samannay Kshetra in Nayapara village of Alengmari. The programme began with the hoisting of the organisational flag by Central president Arvind Nath, followed by the unveiling of the community's cultural flag and floral tributes at the martyrs' memorial. Homage was also paid to Yogi Guru Gorakhnath, legendary singer Dr



Bhupen Hazarika and cultural icon Zubeen Garg. A poetry collection titled Yugir Mahal was released

during a poets' meet held after an interaction with journalists. The first day concluded with a grand cul-

tural evening featuring various performances. On the second day, the massive cultural procession marched through Alengmari with thousands of Nath-Yogi men and women carrying traditional symbols and banners, highlighting their long-standing cultural legacy.

Addressing the gathering, Central president Arvind Nath demanded strong and concrete steps from the Chief Minister for the socio-economic, educational, political, linguistic and cultural development of the Nath-Yogi community. The programme concluded with a public meeting chaired by Arvind Nath, where more than a thousand Nath-Yogi women presented a melodious group song dedicated to the community.

The meeting was addressed by several prominent leaders, including KAC Chief Executive Member Jibesh Ray, BTC Executive Member Karmeswar Ray, AASU president Utpal Sharma, All Assam Tai Ahom Students' Union president Milan Buragohain, Koch-Rajbongshi Students' Union general secretary Balam Barman and leaders of various other organisations. The leaders unanimously called for inclusive and equal development of all communities in Assam.

The two-day event concluded with a colourful cultural programme by invited artistes, marking a memorable celebration of Nath-Yogi heritage and unity.

## DC flags off 1,511-member Bagurumba contingent from Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 11:** District Commissioner of Kokrajhar, Pankaj Chakravarty, on Sunday flagged off a 1,511-member Bagurumba contingent from Karigaon, Kokrajhar, for participation in the prestigious Bagurumba Dhwou 2026. The large contingent includes 23 performers from Nepal and 51 performers from West Bengal. The participants will proceed to Guwahati to take part in rehearsals ahead of the grand cultural event scheduled to be held on January 17, 2026, which will be graced by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi.

To ensure smooth coordination and logistics, Additional Deputy Commissioner Himadri Sekhar Bordoloi, along with Assistant Commissioners Dhrubajyoti Das, Himangshu Kalita, Sourav Jyoti Deuri, Subham Sinha, Abhi Saha and Saroj Kr Deka, are accompanying the contingent. Medical teams, police personnel, nodal teachers and master trainers have also been deployed to ensure the safety, discipline and overall well-being of all participants.

Meanwhile, Legislative Assembly Constituency-level training for Bagurumba Dhwou 2026 was successfully concluded across all five constituencies of Kokrajhar district on Saturday, marking the culmination of extensive preparations for the mega cultural event.

Speaking on the occasion, DC Pankaj Chakravarty said that the Bagurumba contingent from Kokrajhar will join the mega Bagurumba dance presentation in Guwahati in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the region on a national platform.

## Mega Ex-Servicemen rally organised at Dibrugarh

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Jan 11:** In a solemn reaffirmation of its enduring commitment to the veteran fraternity, the Armed Forces organised a Mega Ex-Servicemen (ESM) Rally on Sunday at the Polo Ground, Dibrugarh, under the theme "Nishtha Se Sewa Tak", symbolising the unbroken journey from devoted service in uniform to continued service beyond it. The rally was conducted to honour the selfless service of veterans and to address their welfare and well-being in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

The event witnessed the participation of approximately 7,000 Ex-Servicemen and their family members from various districts of Upper Assam, making it one of the largest veteran outreach initiatives held in the region.

A wide range of welfare-oriented facilities were made available at the rally. These included Grievance Redressal and Pension Assistance Desks, Aadhaar and SPARSH Support Centres to facilitate documentation and pension-related issues and a dedicated Legal Aid Centre to provide guidance on service matters, pensions and entitlements. In addition, a Medical Camp with specialist healthcare support was organised to address the medical needs of Ex-Servicemen and their dependents.

The Mega Ex-Servicemen Rally underscored the Armed Forces' unwavering resolve to uphold the dignity, welfare and honour of veterans, while reinforcing the deep and lasting bond between the nation and those who have served it with courage, dedication and sacrifice.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

There is much pleasure to be gained from useless knowledge. -Bertrand Russell

## Protest against Trump on Jan 20

It's back to the streets, on January 20, for 50501, No Kings, the Women's March and their labour and other allies, campaigning anew against the autocracy of Republican White House occupant Donald Trump. "History is clear: Authoritarianism is defeated by broad, nonviolent movements rooted in solidarity across differences," the organizers announced in unveiling the latest plans for protests, called the Nationwide Free America Walkout. The last round of anti-Trump and anti-authoritarian protests, on October 18, drew seven million people nationwide—the largest demonstration in U.S. history. "No single organization, tactic, or moment will be enough on its own. What this moment demands is coordination—everywhere, all at once," the coalition declared. Attendance is sure to swell, because the websites have yet to post scheduled protests in Los Angeles, Chicago, the Twin Cities, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York City. The closest ones so far to the Big Apple are in Hoboken, N.J., and at Port Jefferson on Long Island. No unions or union-affiliated organizations have signed up as sponsors, but unionists are expected in large numbers. They were a big share of the prior protests, especially the No Kings marches in spring and fall. Then, the Teachers/AFT was a top sponsor and union President Randi Weingarten campaigned for the cause. And SEIU Local 32BJ sent large contingents down from New York.

Most protests will occur on January 20. Boston will host two, one each on January 20 and January 24. The D.C. protest, from 2:30 p.m.-5 p.m., will greet evening rush-hour commuters on M Street near Key Bridge, a main route in and out of the Nation's Capital. While the New Jersey group didn't say so, their January 6 protest falls on the fifth anniversary of the Trump-ordered, aided, incited and abetted insurrection and invasion of the U.S. Capitol. The Trumpists tried to prevent the count of Electoral College votes that gave Democrat Joe Biden the presidency. Trump was so deeply involved in the January 6, 2021 events, former Justice Department Special Counsel Jack Smith testified behind closed doors recently, that Smith had overwhelming evidence to convict him "beyond a reasonable doubt" of leading the conspiracy to violate voters' civil rights and the U.S. Constitution.

Now things are even worse, the organizers of the latest protests warn. "One year into Trump's second regime, we face an escalating fascist threat: Raids on our communities, troops occupying our cities, attacks on immigrants, families torn apart, mass surveillance, and terror used to keep us silent. It is time for our communities to escalate as well," the coalition urged. Across the United States, there has been a rapid consolidation of executive power, the hollowing out of essential public services, the erosion of data protections into a growing surveillance state, and the rise of authoritarian rule rooted in fear, control, and exclusion.

## POST BAG

## Honouring a living archive of Sudhakantha Dr Hazarika's legacy

Sir/Ma'am

The year-long celebration marking the birth centenary of Sudhakantha Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (Bhupen Da) formally began on 8th September 2025. This historic occasion should not remain limited to ceremonial events and cultural performances alone; it must also serve as an opportunity to meaningfully acknowledge those who have played a vital role in preserving, interpreting, and enriching Bhupen Da's artistic and intellectual legacy.

In this context, it is both timely and appropriate for a university in Assam to confer an Honorary Doctorate Degree upon renowned artist and cultural thinker Kamal Katak, a long-time close associate of Bhupen Da.

Kamal Katak shared a deep creative and intellectual association with Bhupen Da over many years. Through this proximity, he acquired rare first-hand knowledge of the ideas, philosophies, social concerns, and creative processes that shaped many of Hazarika's iconic songs. This knowledge is not merely anecdotal; Katak has consistently articulated it through well-researched writings, public lectures, seminars, and cultural forums, offering scholarly interpretations of Bhupen Da's music and thought.

His analytical engagement with Bhupen Da's songs—examining their literary depth, musical structure, and social relevance—often matches, and in some cases surpasses, the academic rigour of formal university research. What distinguishes Katak's work is the authenticity derived from lived experience and direct collaboration, making his insights invaluable for students, researchers, and lovers of Assamese culture alike.

Universities confer honorary doctorates to recognise individuals whose contributions transcend formal academic pathways but significantly enrich knowledge, culture, and society. Viewed through this lens, Kamal Katak's contribution stands firmly within the spirit and purpose of such an honour. He represents a living archive of Bhupen Hazarika's creative journey—an interpreter who bridges artistic practice with intellectual inquiry.

Therefore, during the birth centenary year of Sudhakantha Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, awarding an Honorary Doctorate Degree to Kamal Katak would be more than a personal honour. It would be a meaningful academic and cultural statement—one that affirms Assam's commitment to recognising authentic scholarship, artistic integrity, and the preservation of its rich cultural heritage.

Dr Buljit Buragohain  
Career Counsellor and  
Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering,  
Assam Don Bosco University,  
Airport Road, Azara

## End the Tokenism: NMMS Scholarship Amounts are a Farce

Sir/Ma'am

It is a disgrace that the Central and State governments continue to mock underprivileged brilliance with a measly ₹1,000 monthly pittance under the NMMS scheme. In an era of skyrocketing inflation, what exactly is a student expected to buy with ₹33 a day? It barely covers a single commute, let alone textbooks, uniforms, or digital essentials. By refusing to hike this amount to at least ₹2,000, the Ministry is effectively presiding over an increase in dropout rates among our most meritorious poor. Stop the empty rhetoric about "educational equity" while leaving students to starve for resources. This stagnant funding is not supported; it is an insult. The government must double the scholarship immediately or admit their commitment to education is a sham.

Yours faithfully,  
Dr. Vijaykumar H K  
T-6-327 colony,  
Shaktinagar,  
Karnataka  
Raichur-584170

## Protection of the existence of Assam's indigenous people and political will

The deep anxiety prevailing in the minds of the indigenous people of Assam today regarding their future is not some imaginary fear or emotional rant, but rather a calm and ruthless reality that is gradually engulfing our society. When people are forced to feel like outsiders in their own home, when questions arise every moment about the future of their own language and culture, then it must be understood that somewhere our political and social system has been infested with termites that are striking at our roots. This crisis is not merely one of increasing numbers of people coming from outside or changes in demography; it is the ultimate test of a nation's self-respect and pride, in which we have repeatedly stumbled. Those who have cultivated the fertile soil of Assam for generations, drunk the water of its rivers, and sung the songs of its hills and plains, making this land their own, are worried about their future today primarily because of the short-sightedness, selfishness, and utter lack of mental resolve in our political leadership to take tough decisions. The fact that the protection of the indigenous people has become merely an emotional slogan or bait used only during elections proves that the mindset required to delve into the depth of the problem and seek its solution has not yet emerged in our governing system, and this is the most tragic aspect of our national life.

When we speak of political will, we generally understand it as the government's power to formulate policies or laws, but in a state like Assam, plagued by complex and sensitive issues, its true meaning is far broader, deeper, and more sensitive. True political will is an indomitable courage and moral strength that values the future of the nation a hundred times more than votes or the lure of power, and does not hesitate to lose its throne if necessary. In Assam, over many decades, there have been numerous bloody movements over infiltration and land rights, accords have been signed, floods of promises have been made, yet instead of being resolved, the problems have become increasingly complex, turning into a poisonous wound. The sole and primary reason for this is that whenever the kind of tough and uncompromising measures needed were required, the ruling side adopted a weak stance or remained blind for temporary gains. When a burning issue becomes a source of political profit, that issue is never resolved; rather, keeping it alive becomes the interest of the political class. The crisis of indigenous existence is also slowly moving toward such a stage where it has become merely a topic of discussion and protest. Political parties have well understood that people can easily be attracted to their side by trading in fear and anxiety, applause can be earned through emotional speeches, but they are not mentally prepared for the sacrifice, dedication, and consistency required for real solutions. Due to the lack of political will, our borders are not secure today, our government lands are not free from encroachment, and there is no control of our own people in our markets. The day the government accepts the truth that development in Assam is never possible without comprehensive protection of the indigenous people, only then can we hope for real change.

The relationship of the indigenous people with land or soil is the fundamental basis of our existence and a sacred asset intertwined with the memories of our ancestors. But it is a matter of great sorrow and regret that today the land of Assam is rapidly transferring from the hands of the indigenous people to outsiders at a fierce pace, which is an ominous signal for our future. Not only the government can be blamed for this; we must impartially analyse its underlying causes from social, psychological, and economic perspectives as well. Due to poverty and economic distress, many indigenous people have been forced to sell their ancestral property, and this opportunity has been seized by certain forces that have abundant money but no affection or respect for the culture and

heritage of this land. Political will will be visible only when the government formulates such a strict land policy that the land of the indigenous people truly remains protected, and impermeable legal arrangements are made so that this land cannot go to others under any circumstances. Merely conducting occasional evictions and demolishing some houses does not ensure land protection; for this, a long-term and scientific plan is needed. The government must create so many facilities and markets in agriculture and related sectors that people do not even think of selling land due to want. But in reality, it is seen that in the name of industrialisation, urbanisation, and development, the government itself sometimes destroys agricultural land or hands it over to capitalists. This kind of dual policy sows seeds of distrust toward the government in the minds of the indigenous people. It must be remem-

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

bered that when a nation loses land, it does not merely lose shelter; it also loses its political importance, because in democracy, both numbers and land control play crucial roles. Without economic self-reliance, merely speaking emotionally about protecting existence or raising slogans on the streets is a kind of luxury and foolishness, if not an exaggeration to call it so. If we carefully and impartially observe the market system of Assam today, it becomes clear that its key or control is not in the hands of the indigenous people at all. From small vegetable markets to large shopping malls, wholesale markets, and industries, most are completely controlled by outsiders. This economic dependence has diminished our political power and made us reliant on others. The reluctance of our youth toward work culture, the inferiority complex regarding physical labour, and the greed for easy money are equally responsible for this. But the question of political will arises prominently here too. The government has largely failed in many areas to create realistic schemes and secure markets to foster indigenous entrepreneurs and empower them. The complexity of loan processes, the dominance of brokers in government offices, and bureaucratic entanglements hinder local youth from becoming interested in business. If political leaders truly want the welfare of the indigenous people, they must create such an economic environment where local boys and girls can live with dignity without working under others. Reducing dependence on goods from outside and building a strong market for our own produced items is the call of the time. Only when a nation becomes economically strong can it speak looking others in the eye; otherwise, it will have to live begging forever. A nation living on alms or grants can never win the battle for its existence.

Language and culture are the heartbeat of a nation or the mirror of its identity, but due to the frenzy of today's globalisation and our own neglect, the Assamese language as well as other indigenous languages are facing extreme crisis. The situation where the new generation finds it difficult to speak or write correctly in their mother tongue, and the tendency of parents to speak with children in broken English even if wrongly, carries a terrifying indication for our future. Due to the unnecessary fascination with English-medium schools and the lack of practice of one's own language in the home environment, we are gradually becoming culturally crippled and rootless. In this regard, the role of political will is extremely important and decisive. The government must be strict to the strictest in making the use of indigenous languages compulsory from primary to higher education. Merely enacting laws to ensure the use of one's own language in government work, shop signboards, and public places is not enough; there must also be provisions for punishment for violating those laws, and the administration must be ready

to enforce them. But unfortunately, while our representatives speak loudly about language in the assembly or public forums, in reality, they may prefer to educate their own children outside Assam or in English-medium schools. Because of this hypocrisy, respect for the language among the common people is also diminishing. We all know the saying that if language is lost, the nation is lost, but the number of people who internalise it and turn it into action is negligible. Merely organising Bihu festivals and dancing in spring in the name of culture preservation will not suffice; a stable environment must be created for deep practice and preservation of our literature, art, and folk culture.

Unnatural changes in demography have become the greatest and most dangerous threat to the existence of Assam's indigenous people, and the role of political parties in this matter has always been mysterious and opportunistic. The unchecked infiltration continuing over several decades has turned indigenous people into minorities in many districts of Assam, creating a situation akin to refugees in their own land. This change has not only disrupted social balance but has also permanently altered the equations of political power. When an elected representative's victory or defeat depends on the consolidated votes of a particular group, whose citizenship itself may be doubtful, that representative can never speak in the interest of the indigenous people; rather, they are forced to appease them. This is a major tragedy of our current democracy. Crucial processes like the preparation of the citizens' register or NRC for protecting indigenous existence also seem to have become meaningless due to political entanglements, corruption, and negligence. The transparency, honesty, and dedication required to prepare a pure citizens' register seem to have been buried somewhere in the mud of political interests. Political leaders remained busy blaming each other, spent time debating on TV, but no one could find a path to solution. A notion has now taken root in the minds of indigenous people that neither Delhi nor Dispur has the real will to solve Assam's burning problems. This environment of distrust is pushing society toward a terrifying chaos and despair. Internal divisions, mutual distrust, and utter lack of unity have also weakened the indigenous society from within, greatly aiding political opportunists in fulfilling their interests. The cultural differences among the various ethnic groups living in Assam should have been our strength and pride, but in the current time, they have become weapons of division and causes of conflict. Unless the artificial wall created between tribal and non-tribal people is broken, protecting the common interests of the indigenous people is impossible. Political leaders often want to keep this division alive so that they can extract benefits separately from each group and continue ruling. If today the Bodo, Kochari, Rabha, Mising, Karbi, Ahom, Kalita—all remain busy demanding separate states or separate systems, considering themselves different from others, then who will fight against the main external aggression? We must realise that our fates are tied with the same thread and our enemy is the same. If Assam's existence ceases, no particular community's existence will remain secure. Political will can be fruitful only when people from all sections of society unite and exert pressure on the government. Ruling a divided society is easy, but no one can ignore a united society. Therefore, while seeking rights to self-determination, it is extremely urgent today to remain vigilant so that we do not become disconnected from the main stream and do not give advantage to the enemy.

The education system plays the most important role in shaping a nation's mentality and character, but in our education system, the history, struggles, and values of the indigenous people have not been given the importance they deserve. Although our curriculum teaches about great heroes like

Mahabir Lachit Borphukan, Chilarai, or Sati Sadhani, students are not taught deeply how their sacrifices and ideals are relevant in the present time. As a result, our new generation has become disconnected from its roots and is suffering from a kind of identity crisis. They are as attracted to and imitative of Western or Korean culture as they are uninterested in their own folk culture. To escape this intellectual bankruptcy, a massive educational awakening is needed. A government with political will must bring radical changes in education policy so that seeds of national consciousness, patriotism, and pride germinate in students' minds from school itself. They must be empowered not only with bookish knowledge but with practical knowledge, technical skills, and employment-oriented education so that they do not have to depend on others. When a youth knows his history and believes in his abilities, he will never compromise with his land or identity. Only an intellectually alert and proud society can stand against political deceit. Until the number of thoughtful and rational people in our society increases, we will continue making wrong decisions under the sway of emotions. The sluggish pace, neglect, and endless excuses in implementing legal protective shields, especially Clause 6 of the Assam Accord or other constitutional provisions, have deeply frustrated the indigenous people. Year after year, high-level committees are formed, discussions take place, reports are submitted, but nothing effective happens. Seeing this, it feels as if for the government, these are merely strategies to placate the public and pass time. The unnatural delay in defining 'indigenous' also provides sufficient grounds to suspect political motives. Since this definition could deprive many people of benefits, no political party wants to enter this controversy and lose votes. But the price we are paying for this delay is irreparable and fatal for the future. Today, reserving seats or jobs for the indigenous people is not an act of charity; it is our constitutional right and a condition of our existence. But having to repeatedly take to the streets to establish this right, having to corner the government, is a failure of our democratic system. Political leaders should understand that public patience has a limit. When people's backs are against the wall, when they feel they have nothing left to lose, they are forced to rebel. Therefore, to prevent any unpleasant situation and social conflict that may arise in the future, the government should now take measures with sincerity and honesty.

In conclusion, it is clear that the struggle to protect the existence of the indigenous people cannot be won by depending solely on the government, because the character of governments always changes. For this, every indigenous citizen must personally become alert, responsible, and active. We must resolve not to sell our land for the lure of money, we must develop the habit of speaking with our children in our own language, and we must participate in our economy through physical labour. Political will does not fall from the sky; it is created only from the strong demands, unity, and continuous awareness of the public. If we think our duty ends by merely criticising on social media or sitting in tea stalls, then we are mistaken. We need such a social movement that can force political parties to adopt the indigenous agenda. Challenges will increase in the coming days, demographic pressure will grow further, but our mental strength and unity must remain intact to face those challenges. The Assamese nation or the indigenous people of Assam have passed through many storms of history and will be capable of overcoming this current crisis as well, if there is unity, foresight, and the mindset for hard work among us. Politics will remain, governments will change, leaders will come and go, but our nation and our motherland must endure forever—this eternal truth we must carry in our hearts as we move forward. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## National Youth Day: Reviving Vivekananda's vision for India's youth

By: MR Lahu

India has recently witnessed deliberate political attempts to provoke a Gen Z uprising. Those who planned such movements, similar to incidents in our neighbourhood, sought to incite the youth to revolt against the country, even if their aggression resulted in destruction, as it did in Nepal and Bangladesh. The intention behind such calls was the belief that political establishments could be toppled through intense youth agitation. While the design for such upheavals appeared local, the masterminds behind them were often external. The aspiration was political, and the intention, sinister. The perpetrators understood that aggression capable of overthrowing a government can emerge only from the youth. This underscores the precariousness of being young, a phase so easily influenced by misleading forces.

As we approach another National Youth Day, discourse on the role of youth in nation-building has become increasingly relevant, especially at a time when attempts are being made to divert their immense potential toward destructive ends. Swami Vivekananda's birthday, celebrated as National Youth Day on 12 January, provides the perfect occasion to reflect on this.

Vivekananda, throughout his life, stood for India and its people. His efforts were primarily focused on the complete revival of India's spiritual essence, not only within its socio-cultural framework but also on a global level. He realized that India possessed profound civilizational wealth that the world would one day require, and he believed this to be India's greatest contribution to humanity. His visit to the West was unprecedented; never before had a Hindu saint undertaken such a universal mission. An India subjected to Western sarcasm and condescension rose to cultural prominence as a monk in ochre robes confronted the West's intellectual prejudice and spiritual barrenness. Much was spoken against him, and much against India. The West, deeply invested in the perceived supremacy of its monotheistic spirituality, was left disillusioned.

Vivekananda dismantled these assumptions with remarkable clarity. For the first time, the West experienced a powerful wave of intellectual and spiritual thought challenging its cultural bigotry. Vivekananda keenly sensed the West's contempt for India and its discriminatory attitude toward the East.

Everything he did, he said, was aimed at restoring India's centuries-old spiritual philosophies, brutally suppressed under repeated invasions and British hegemony. He believed that achieving independence was not difficult; governing it wisely would be the greater challenge. His foresight accurately predicted India's freedom. Political will alone, he argued, would not liberate India, its spiritual aspirations had to rise from the ruins of its distorted past. His mission was directed at the youth. His call to them was phenomenal, his vision exceptional, and its essence profoundly veritable. The youth, he believed, were the instruments of national regeneration. "Youth is the best time; the will is strong, faith is strong, and the mind is strong," he reminded India's young minds. A young saint who lived for less than four decades possessed a grand vision that spoke powerfully to India's youth. He declared, "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life, think of it, dream of it, and live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, and every part of your body be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success." Never before, in India's history, such a message had been delivered with visionary zeal and articulated with comparable intellectual clarity and spiritual depth.

The relevance of Vivekananda even today is indisputable. National Youth Day, like any other nationally observed day, cannot pass in silence. It must loudly proclaim what Swami Vivekananda stood for—India's national resurgence. This is a dream we have been nurturing for nearly a decade. Vishwa Guru India is not merely a nationalist fantasy, purportedly decorated with fine political vocabulary. India's global significance and its rise as a spiritual power were realities that Vivekananda foresaw.

Yet, for decades, there was an unforgivable reluctance to institutionalize and streamline the spiritual might that Vivekananda revealed to the world.

India's G20 presidency and its global outreach, guided by the ancient Vedic aphorism "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," have been a resounding retelling of Vivekananda's mission. Though divided on multiple fronts, by region, religion, and faith; the world, Vivekananda believed, had reasons to remain united. There was space for all civilizations to survive and for every belief system to proclaim its depth and veracity. Conflicts in the name of differing faiths, he asserted, were meaningless. Different rivers, flowing through varied terrains, are ultimately destined to reach the same ocean, where differences dissolve and oneness emerges.

Most astoundingly, the journey of an ordinary boy into what he later came to manifest as, began in the courtyard of an illiterate man. A temple priest, outwardly unlettered yet inwardly an ocean of transcendental wisdom, transformed a speck of dust into a spiritual storm. Rooted in the sanctum of Dakshinawar, Ramakrishna embodied a living synthesis of devotion, mysticism, and divine realization. His choice of Vivekananda was precise, nothing short of a divine will. With childlike simplicity and disarming clarity, Ramakrishna articulated the loftiest metaphysical truths, and Vivekananda became his most powerful spiritual instrument—one who would later transform the world's perception of India and secure historic recognition for its ancient wisdom.

An aspirational Gen Z has every reason to look beyond the disruptive influence of political ideologies. Vivekananda envisioned an India that is spiritually elevated, intellectually rejuvenated, emotionally resilient, and socially strengthened. For him, the nation comes first, its survival, with ancient glory restored, is the true path to its global leadership. National Youth Day arrives once again with this profound reminder for the youth of India, the Gen Z, to embrace their potential in shaping a resurgent India.

# Vivekananda's concern for preservation of the inclusivity of Hinduism

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Swami Vivekananda remains one of the most luminous figures in modern Indian history, a spiritual leader whose vision transcended the boundaries of religion, culture, and geography. His life and teachings continue to inspire millions across the world, not only because of his eloquence and charisma but also because of the profound inclusivity embedded in his understanding of Hinduism. At a time when India was grappling with colonial subjugation and the challenges of modernity, Vivekananda articulated a vision of Hinduism that was expansive, universal, and deeply humane. His concept of inclusivity was not a mere intellectual exercise; it was a lived philosophy that sought to harmonize the diverse strands of human faith and experience into a single symphony of spiritual realization. Born in 1863 as Narendranath Datta in Kolkata, Vivekananda was deeply influenced by the teachings of his master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who embodied the essence of religious pluralism by practicing and realizing the truths of multiple faiths. Ramakrishna's insistence that all religions lead to the same ultimate reality left an indelible mark on the young disciple. Vivekananda carried this message forward, but he did so with a modern sensibility, framing Hinduism not as a closed system but as a dynamic, inclusive tradition capable of embracing the whole world. His speeches, writings, and organizational work through the Ramakrishna Mission were all infused with this spirit of inclusivity.

The most iconic moment that demonstrated Vivekananda's vision came at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. Addressing a global audience, he began with the words "Sisters and Brothers of America," a salutation that electrified the gathering and instantly established a bond of fraternity. In his speech, Vivekananda presented Hinduism as a religion that had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. He emphasized that Hinduism does not merely tolerate other religions but accepts them as true and valid paths to the divine. This distinction between tolerance and acceptance is crucial. Tolerance implies a grudging allowance, while acceptance signifies genuine respect and recognition. Vivekananda's Hinduism was inclusive because it acknowledged the legitimacy of diverse spiritual experiences without attempting to subsume them under a single dogma. His inclusivity was rooted in the Vedantic idea that the divine is infinite and cannot be confined to one form, one name, or one doctrine. The Upanishadic declaration "Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti" — Truth is one, sages call it by many names — became the cornerstone of his philosophy. Vivekananda interpreted this not as a passive statement but as an active call to embrace diversity. He argued that just as different rivers flow into the same ocean, different religions converge upon the same ultimate reality. This metaphor captured the essence of his inclusivity: diversity was not a



threat to unity but its very expression. Vivekananda's inclusivity extended beyond the realm of theology into the social and cultural spheres. He was acutely aware of the divisions within Indian society, particularly the rigidities of caste and the marginalization of women and the poor. For him, Hinduism could not be truly inclusive unless it addressed these internal contradictions. He condemned caste discrimination and untouchability, insisting that the essence of religion lay in seeing God in every human being. Service to humanity, he declared, was the highest form of worship. This was not a departure from Hinduism but its fulfillment, for the Vedantic vision of the divine in all beings demanded social inclusivity as much as theological inclusivity. His emphasis on inclusivity also had a global dimension. Vivekananda saw Hinduism as a spiritual force that could contribute to the harmony of nations and cultures. He did not advocate for the supremacy of Hinduism over other religions; rather, he envisioned a world where each faith would enrich the other. He believed that Hinduism's openness to multiple truths made it uniquely capable of fostering dialogue and cooperation among religions. In this sense, his inclusivity was not only about Hinduism but about humanity itself. He sought to build bridges across civilizations, affirming that the spiritual quest was universal and that no culture or religion had a monopoly on truth.

Vivekananda's inclusivity was also intellectual. He engaged with Western philosophy, science, and rationalism, integrating them into his vision of Hinduism. He argued that religion must be compatible with reason and that blind faith was detrimental to spiritual growth. By doing so, he made Hinduism accessible to modern minds, showing that inclusivity also meant openness to new ideas and perspectives. His dialogues with Western thinkers and his writings in English were part of this effort to present Hinduism as a universal religion that could

stand shoulder to shoulder with modernity. At the same time, Vivekananda was careful to preserve the distinctiveness of Hinduism. Inclusivity, for him, did not mean dilution or loss of identity. He celebrated the richness of Hindu traditions, their rituals, philosophies, and cultural expressions, while situating them within a broader framework of universal spirituality. This balance between particularity and universality was the hallmark of his inclusivity. He taught that one could be deeply rooted in one's own tradition while being open to others, and that true strength lay in this rooted openness. The organisational work of Vivekananda through the Ramakrishna Mission was a practical embodiment of his inclusivity. The Mission combined spiritual practice with social service, bringing together monks and laypersons, men and women, Indians and foreigners, in a common endeavor to serve humanity. Its hospitals, schools, and relief efforts were expressions of the belief that spirituality must manifest in inclusivity and compassion. The Mission became a living example of how Hinduism could transcend barriers and work for the welfare of all.

Vivekananda's inclusivity also had a psychological dimension. He emphasized the different yogas — paths of spiritual practice — as ways to accommodate diverse temperaments. Whether one was inclined towards knowledge (jnana), devotion (bhakti), action (karma), or meditation (raja), Hinduism offered a path. This plurality of spiritual disciplines was itself a form of inclusivity, recognizing that human beings are diverse and that no single path can suit everyone. By systematizing and popularizing these yogas, Vivekananda made Hinduism accessible to people of varied dispositions, both in India and abroad. Critics have sometimes argued that Vivekananda's inclusivity was idealistic and that the realities of religious conflict and social inequality cannot be resolved merely by philosophical assertions. Yet his vision was not naïve. He acknowledged

the challenges but insisted that inclusivity was the only sustainable path for humanity. His speeches often warned against fanaticism, sectarianism, and dogmatism, which he saw as the greatest threats to peace. He believed that inclusivity was not a luxury but a necessity, for without it, societies would descend into violence and fragmentation. The relevance of Vivekananda's inclusivity in today's world cannot be overstated. In an age marked by religious intolerance, cultural clashes, and social divisions, his message offers a way forward. His insistence on acceptance rather than mere tolerance, his call to see divinity in every human being, and his vision of religions as complementary rather than contradictory are principles that can guide contemporary societies towards harmony.

Vivekananda's inclusivity challenges us to go beyond narrow identities and to embrace the larger human family. Moreover, his inclusivity resonates with the global discourse on pluralism and interfaith dialogue. Scholars have noted that his theology of religions anticipates modern frameworks of inclusivism and pluralism. He was not content with theoretical models; he embodied inclusivity in his life and work. His ability to engage with Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and secular thinkers alike demonstrated that inclusivity was possible in practice. His legacy continues to inspire interfaith initiatives and movements for social justice across the world. When Swami Vivekananda spoke of education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man," he could hardly have imagined a world of smartphones, virtual classrooms, and artificial intelligence. Yet his vision of character-building, empowerment, and service resonates powerfully in the digital age, especially in South Asia, where millions of young people are navigating the opportunities and challenges of connectivity. His ideas, rooted in timeless values, offer a framework for shaping education and youth

leadership in the twenty-first century. Vivekananda believed that education was not merely about information transfer but about awakening strength, courage, and compassion. In today's digital classrooms, where knowledge is abundant and accessible, his emphasis on character formation becomes even more critical. Online learning platforms can deliver lectures and tutorials, but they cannot by themselves instill resilience or empathy. Integrating Vivekananda's vision means designing digital education that goes beyond content delivery to cultivate values. For instance, digital curricula could embed modules on ethics, mindfulness, and social responsibility, ensuring that students learn not only coding or commerce but also compassion and courage. He also insisted that education must empower individuals to "stand on their own feet." In South Asia, where digital divides persist, this principle translates into ensuring equitable access to technology. Vivekananda's call for inclusivity demands that rural students, girls, and marginalized communities are not left behind in the digital revolution. Governments and institutions can take inspiration from his vision by investing in affordable connectivity, community learning hubs, and vernacular-language digital resources. In this way, digital education becomes not a privilege but a right, fulfilling Vivekananda's dream of empowerment for all.

Vivekananda's faith in youth was unwavering. He declared, "My faith is in the younger generation... they will work out the whole problem, like lions." In the digital era, South Asian youth are uniquely positioned to lead. They are the most connected generation in history, fluent in the languages of social media, online collaboration, and global networking. Yet leadership in this context requires more than technical skill; it requires vision, discipline, and service. Vivekananda's concept of karma yoga—selfless action—offers a model for digital-age leadership. Youth leaders can harness technology not just for personal gain but for social good: creating apps that address local problems, using social media to mobilize communities, or leading online campaigns for justice and sustainability. His reinterpretation of Vedanta as a philosophy of unity also has profound relevance. In a digital world often fragmented by misinformation and polarization, Vivekananda's insistence on the oneness of humanity can guide youth leaders toward inclusivity. Online platforms can be used to foster dialogue across religions, cultures, and nations, echoing his vision of a universal religion rooted in tolerance. South Asian youth, inheritors of diverse traditions, can become ambassadors of this digital pluralism, building bridges rather than walls.

Moreover, Vivekananda's stress on practical spirituality—seeing God in the poor, serving humanity as worship—can inspire digital initiatives that prioritize social impact. In Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, youth-led startups are already using technology to improve healthcare, education, and livelihoods. Embedding Vivekananda's

ethos into these ventures means ensuring that innovation is guided by compassion, not just profit. It means remembering that behind every data point is a human life, and behind every algorithm is a moral choice. The challenges are real. Digital addiction, misinformation, and inequality threaten to undermine the promise of technology. But Vivekananda's ideas provide a compass. His call to discipline can counter distraction; his insistence on truth can combat falsehood; his vision of inclusivity can bridge divides. In this way, his philosophy becomes not a relic of the nineteenth century but a guide for the twenty-first. South Asia, with its vast youth population, stands at a crossroads. The digital era offers unprecedented opportunities, but it also demands leadership that is ethical, inclusive, and visionary. By embracing Vivekananda's ideas, educators can design systems that nurture character alongside competence, and youth leaders can harness technology for service alongside success. His voice, echoing across time, reminds us that the true goal of education and leadership is not merely advancement but awakening—the awakening of strength, compassion, and unity. In conclusion, Swami Vivekananda's concept of inclusivity in Hinduism was a profound and multifaceted vision that encompassed theology, society, culture, intellect, and psychology. It was rooted in the Vedantic insight of the unity of existence and expressed in his call for universal acceptance. It sought to overcome divisions within Hindu society and to build bridges across religions and cultures. It embraced modernity without losing tradition and offered multiple paths for diverse seekers.

Above all, it was a vision of humanity united in its spiritual quest. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, Vivekananda's inclusivity remains a beacon, reminding us that the true essence of religion lies not in exclusion but in embrace, not in division but in unity, not in intolerance but in acceptance. His words at Chicago continue to echo: "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal." These words capture the essence of his inclusivity, a vision that remains as urgent and inspiring today as it was more than a century ago. (Professor Ratan Bhattacharjee is an International Tagore Awardee multilingual writer of short stories and an Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University. His latest publication is *Our Time Revisited* (IIP 2025). Email [prfratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com](mailto:prfratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com))

## National Youth Day: A mirror to India's moral future

By: Satyabrata Borah

Every year on January 12, India pauses to celebrate National Youth Day, marking the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the visionary monk and philosopher born in 1863. This day is far more than a ritualistic tribute to a historical figure; it serves as a powerful reminder of the pivotal role that young people play in shaping the nation's future. Vivekananda did not view youth simply as a phase of life filled with energy and dreams. He saw it as a moral and spiritual force, one capable of lifting an entire civilization out of stagnation and despair.

Born into a time when British colonial rule had eroded much of India's self-confidence, Vivekananda witnessed a society grappling with poverty, caste divisions, superstition, and a deep sense of inferiority imposed by foreign domination. Yet amid this darkness, he placed unwavering faith in the young. He believed that the youth possessed the courage, resilience, and openness needed to challenge outdated norms and embrace bold ideas. His famous exhortation, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached," was directed primarily at them, urging a rejection of mental slavery and a discovery of inner strength. He famously declared, "Strength is life, weakness is death," emphasizing that true power comes from character, discipline, and self-belief rather than mere physical might or external achievements.

What makes Vivekananda's message timeless is his holistic vision of youth empowerment. He insisted that education must go beyond rote learning and job preparation. In his words, "We want that education by which

character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet." He described education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man," a process of uncovering innate potential rather than filling empty minds with facts. This perspective feels especially urgent today, when India's education system often prioritizes competitive exams, rankings, and marketable skills at the expense of critical thinking, empathy, and ethical grounding. While technical proficiency is vital in a rapidly changing world, an education that neglects values risks creating capable individuals who lack a sense of social responsibility or moral direction.

India stands as one of the youngest nations on earth, with a massive demographic advantage that promises economic dynamism, innovation, and global influence. Yet this youthful energy carries risks if left unguided. Recent data shows that youth unemployment (for ages 15-29) hovers around 10-15% in various reports from 2025, with some segments experiencing higher rates, particularly among educated youth and women. Many graduates face prolonged job searches, underemployment, or unstable gig work, leading to frustration and a sense of betrayal after years of hard study. Economic uncertainty, combined with intense competition, has turned ambition into anxiety for countless young people.

Adding to these pressures is the digital age, which has transformed how youth experience the world. Social media offers unprecedented access to knowledge, creativity, and connections, yet it also fuels constant comparison, cyberbullying, and a relent-

less pursuit of likes and validation. Mental health challenges have surged, with studies indicating that a significant portion of young Indians—sometimes estimated at 20-40% in certain surveys—grapple with anxiety, depression, stress, or emotional distress. Reports from organizations like UNICEF highlight that around 7-10% of young people face diagnosable mental conditions, while broader indicators suggest mood swings, burnout, and even rising suicide ideation among students. These issues are not individual failings but symptoms of a society that celebrates external success while often ignoring inner well-being.

Vivekananda's emphasis on inner strength provides a much-needed antidote. He taught that real confidence arises from looking inward, cultivating self-control, and finding purpose beyond fleeting applause. His call to build character through discipline and service could guide young people toward healthier ways of navigating digital pressures. National Youth Day should spark honest conversations about mental health support in schools and colleges, including counseling services, emotional education, and environments that prioritize well-being over relentless performance.

Gender equality forms another cornerstone of this reflection. Vivekananda held women in profound respect, viewing their upliftment as essential to national progress. He believed that the advancement of any society could be measured by how it treats its women, and he advocated strongly for their education, arguing that educated mothers shape stronger future generations. He asserted that women must receive education and then

be left to solve their own problems in their own way. Today, while young women in India are breaking barriers in education, sports, business, and politics, they still confront systemic hurdles: safety concerns, workplace discrimination, cultural expectations, and unequal opportunities. Empowering young women is not just a question of justice; it is fundamental to balanced social transformation.

Democratic engagement among youth also demands attention. Many feel disillusioned by corruption, polarization, and the sense that their voices go unheard. Vivekananda saw freedom as inseparable from responsibility, urging young people to participate actively and constructively in public life. National Youth Day could inspire greater civic involvement, from community service to informed debate, helping youth reclaim their role as accountable citizens.

The environmental crisis adds yet another layer of urgency. Climate change, pollution, and resource strain threaten the very world young people will inherit. Globally and in India, youth have led powerful movements demanding accountability from governments and industries. Vivekananda's idea of service—to society and, by extension, to nature—resonates here. Young environmental activists embody the fearless engagement he championed.

Regional disparities cannot be overlooked. In areas like the North East, youth migration for jobs often disrupts cultural roots and community stability. A truly national approach must embrace diverse experiences, tailoring opportunities to local contexts rather than imposing uniform solutions.

Vivekananda rejected blind imitation of foreign models, urging a synthesis of global ideas with indigenous wisdom. Today's youth navigate a similar balance: embracing technology and modernity while staying grounded in ethical and cultural values. Tradition and progress need not clash; they can enrich each other when approached with intellectual honesty.

Institutions bear heavy responsibility in this awakening. Families, schools, universities, media, and governments all shape how youth see themselves and their duties. Do these systems foster independent thought, or do they encourage conformity? Do they empower or exploit youthful energy? Honest self-examination by these institutions is essential.

As India faces global uncertainties—economic shifts, technological disruptions, geopolitical tensions—the moral and intellectual resilience of its youth will prove decisive. Youth are not passive inheritors of tomorrow; they actively mold the present. Vivekananda's faith in them was rooted in a deep conviction: when individuals awaken to their inner divinity, they can overcome historical limitations and act with courage and compassion.

National Youth Day is therefore more than a commemoration. It holds up a mirror to society, asking whether we are truly equipping young people for the responsibilities ahead. Are we nurturing free thinkers, ethical actors, and selfless servants? The answers will define not only the future of India's youth but the moral compass of the nation itself. In honoring Swami Vivekananda, we remember that nation-building is an ongoing journey. Each generation must

renew society's ethical foundations through reflection, action, and service. The youth stand at the heart of this renewal, bearing both immense promise and profound responsibility. How we support, trust, and truly listen to

them will determine the quality of India's conscience for generations to come. Let this day inspire not just celebration, but genuine commitment to awakening the vast potential within India's young hearts and minds.



## I-PAC RAIDS

## ED moves SC against 'interference' by CM Mamata Banerjee; WB govt files caveat

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: The Enforcement Directorate has approached the Supreme Court alleging interference and obstruction by the West Bengal government, including by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in its probe and search operation at the I-PAC office and premises of its director Pratik Jain in connection with the coal pilferage scam.

The West Bengal government has also filed a caveat in the top court seeking that no order should be passed without hearing it in connection with Enforcement Directorate (ED) raids against political consultancy firm I-PAC.

A caveat is filed by a litigant in high courts and the Supreme Court to ensure that no adverse order is passed against it without it being heard. The ED has also alleged that the chief minister entered the raid sites and took away "key" evidence, including physical documents and electronic devices from the premises of I-PAC and obstructed and interfered with the investigation in the case.

The probe agency further claimed in its plea that the chief minister's presence at the search

site and the alleged removal of documents had an intimidating effect on officers and seriously compromised the agency's ability to discharge its statutory functions independently.

The probe agency has alleged repeated obstruction and non-cooperation by the state administration and sought directions for an independent inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), contending that a neutral central agency is necessary in view of the alleged interference by the state executive.

According to sources, the ED's plea is likely to be mentioned for an urgent hearing on Monday.

Prior to approaching the Supreme Court, the ED on January 9 approached the Calcutta High Court, seeking a CBI probe against Banerjee, alleging that she, with the aid of the police, took away incriminating documents from the agency's custody during the raid at Jain's home.

However, the high court has adjourned the matter due to commotion in the courtroom and listed the ED's plea for hearing on January 14. The plea of ED in the apex

court follows events from last Thursday (January 8) when the agency conducted searches on the premises of I-PAC and its director as part of a money laundering probe into an alleged multi-crore rupee coal pilferage scam.

During the search operation, Banerjee reached the IPAC office along with senior party leaders and confronted ED officials and allegedly took away documents from the premises. Banerjee has accused the central agency of overreach.

The West Bengal police has also registered an FIR against ED officers. The ruling All India Trinamool Congress has denied the ED's allegations of obstruction and approached the Calcutta High Court in connection with the raids.

The TMC has further alleged that the ED action against the I-PAC, the election consultant of the party, was aimed at accessing confidential election strategy material.

The party has maintained that I-PAC functions as its election strategist and that the ED's action was intended to disrupt its electoral preparations rather than pursue any bona fide investigation in the case. (PTI)

PM takes part in 'Shaurya Yatra' in Somnath, 108-horse brigade part of parade  
Modi marks 1,000 years since Somnath attack

SOMNATH (GUJARAT), Jan 11: A group of men playing 'damru' and 108 horses drawn from different parts of Gujarat were part of the Somnath temple's Shurya Yatra on Sunday which saw Prime Minister Narendra riding an open-top vehicle.

The yatra began from Shankh Circle, and the Prime Minister travelled the nearly one km stretch towards Veer Hamirji Gohil Circle that faces the Somnath temple complex.

A group of men playing the 'damru' formed part of the parade and preceded the prime minister's vehicle in sequence.

Modi carried a drum in his hand, which he played briefly at the beginning of the procession before handing it over to security personnel.

The crowd, which lined the streets on both sides, cheered and many showered floral petals as the procession moved ahead, while artists performed on different dance forms of India on various stages mounted at regular intervals



along the parade route.

The brigade of 108 horses stood out in the procession whose riders wore a starch white shirt paired with khaki trousers and saffron headgear.

"These horses and their riders have been drawn from different areas of Gujarat. We belong to the Gujarat Police and rehearsed for it in the last ten days. I am a constable working in Patan district, and feel proud to be part of this Shaurya

Yatra," Bharat Kumar Jatubhai told PTI, as he patted his horse named 'Garud'.

The Gujarat Police constable said his steed is 17 years old, and a mixed Kathiawari and Marwari breed.

"About ten horses are drawn from Patan district," he said.

Prime Minister Modi, who arrived here on Saturday evening on a two-day visit to the temple town, witnessed the show, held as part of

the Somnath Swabhiman Parv. In a post on X, he had said, "Feeling blessed to be in Somnath, a proud symbol of our civilisational courage."

One of the drone formations also depicted the destruction faced by the historic temple over the centuries, and its rise and resilience.

The Parv marks 1000 years since the Somnath temple's invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni, the Prime Minister's Office said on Friday.

After Independence, efforts to restore the temple were undertaken by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A key milestone was achieved in 1951 when the restored temple was formally opened to devotees in the presence of the then president Rajendra Prasad.

A series of programmes is being held from January 8 to 11 as part of the Swabhiman Parv.

Prime Minister Modi will offer prayers at the temple after the procession and later participate in a public function marking the 'Somnath Swabhiman Parv', before departing for Rajkot. (PTI)

## Expelled Cong MLA Rahul Mamkootathil arrested in sexual assault case, remanded to jail

PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA), Jan 11: Expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil was arrested in connection with a sexual assault case after being taken into custody from Palakkad in the small hours on Sunday, police sources said. He was shifted to a police camp here on Sunday morning, they added.

According to police, a third sexual assault case was recently registered against the Palakkad MLA following a complaint filed by a native of Pathanamthitta district on January 8. The woman, who is currently in Canada, gave her statement to the police via video conference.

According to sources, the complainant is a married woman who became acquainted with Mamkootathil in 2024 following issues in her marital life.

She told the police that Mamkootathil allegedly raped her at a hotel in April 2024 after promising to marry her. The remand report claims that she was brutally assaulted before the rape incident.

When she became pregnant, Mamkootathil allegedly refused to take responsibility and threatened her to undergo an abortion, police said. The victim also claimed that Mamkootathil took money from her on several occasions.

After registering the case, the police kept Mamkootathil under surveillance, following which a six-member team led by a Deputy SP reached the hotel room where he was staying at around 12.15 am, sources said. He was taken into custody from the hotel at around 12.30 am and shifted to the Pathanamthitta police camp at about 5.30 am.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing two other cases of a similar nature against him, has also been entrusted with the investigation of the latest case, sources said. SIT head G Poonguzali arrived at the police camp and is interrogating Mamkootathil.

After the preliminary interroga-

tion, his arrest was recorded.

After a medical examination, he was produced before a magistrate who remanded him to judicial custody. SIT has filed an application seeking his custody, which will be considered on Monday.

Mamkootathil has also filed a bail petition, which will also be considered on the same day, police said.

Later, he was shifted to Mavelikara Sub Jail in Alappuzha district. Sasthamangalam Ajith Kumar, lawyer of Mamkootathil, said that arrest and remand were not the end of the legal process.

Responding to queries on his contention that the arrest was unnecessary, Kumar said the MLA had conveyed to the investigation team his willingness to cooperate with the probe.

"In one case, he has already been granted bail. In another case, the Kerala High Court has given interim relief against arrest. The court imposed certain conditions while granting anticipatory bail, and he had contacted the investigation team to inform them about the time and place at which he could appear," Kumar said.

He further said the police had already informed Mamkootathil about appearing before them. "If it is a different case, they can always ask him to appear," he added. The Kerala High Court had earlier granted interim protection from arrest to Mamkootathil in the first case, which relates to allegations of rape and forcing a woman to undergo an abortion.

In the second case, a sessions court in Thiruvananthapuram had granted him anticipatory bail.

Following the allegations, the Congress expelled Mamkootathil from the party.

Mamkootathil successfully contested the by-election from Palakkad last year after Congress leader Shafi Parampil, who had earlier represented the constituency, won the Lok Sabha by-poll from Vadakara in Kozhikode district. (PTI)

## Odisha aircraft crash landing: Two passengers airlifted to Mumbai, one in ventilator support

BHUBANESWAR, Jan 11: Two passengers injured in the emergency crash landing of a small aircraft near Rourkela in Odisha were airlifted to Mumbai for treatment, while another injured person is under ventilator support, a senior official said on Sunday.

At least six people, including two pilots, were injured when a nine-seater aircraft of India One made an emergency crash landing near Rourkela in Odisha on Saturday afternoon. Speaking to media persons at the accident spot, Odisha's government's Commerce and Transport Department principal secretary Usha Padhee said that two injured passengers (a couple), on their personal wish, were airlifted to a hospital in Mumbai this morning.

"The two passengers were under

treatment in a private hospital in Rourkela. They wanted to go to the Mumbai hospital for further treatment. After getting clearance from the Rourkela hospital, they left for Mumbai," she said.

According to another officer, the duo went to Mumbai at their own cost. Similarly, another injured passenger is under treatment with ventilator support, Padhee said, adding, "We hope that the passenger will recover soon, as the concerned person was under treatment in the same hospital in the past." If required, the state government will provide air ambulance for transportation of injured passengers, she said.

A team of medical experts has been formed, which is continuously monitoring the health condition of the injured persons admitted in a

private hospital in Rourkela, Padhee said.

Odisha's Directorate of Aviation, in a statement, said that the health condition of all six people, including two women and two pilots injured in the crash landing of an aircraft in Rourkela, was "safe and stable". "As per the latest health bulletin, all passengers are safe and stable. One passenger remains under close and continuous medical observation".

IndiaOne Air Cessna Grand C208B aircraft had crash landed near Rourkela on Saturday with six persons, including two pilots and four passengers on board. The aircraft departed Bhubaneswar in the afternoon, and the crew declared a 'Mayday' to Rourkela ATC and made a forced landing at 1:20 pm in an open area near Kansor, the DGCA said. (PTI)

## Mahayuti unveils Mumbai poll manifesto, promises tech-led governance, action against Bangladeshis

MUMBAI, Jan 11: The Mahayuti alliance on Sunday unveiled a wide-ranging manifesto for the upcoming civic body elections in Mumbai, promising technology-led governance to make it a "global powerhouse", a 50 per cent concession on fares for women in BEST buses and "freeing" the city from Bangladeshi migrants.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who unveiled the document, said the BJP-Shiv Sena-RPI (A) alliance would combine "Japanese technology" with local administration to tackle chronic civic problems and bring services to citizens' mobile phones.

The manifesto has emphasised the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to curb corruption, speed up clearances and improve service delivery.

"The city has seen 25 years of inefficiency in civic governance, and now I want to tell people to give us the opportunity to bring transparency in civic administration," he said.

"Our goal is a corruption-free municipal corporation," Fadnavis said, outlining a "Municipality on



your Mobile" initiative and an AI-driven platform to fast-track building approvals and ensure transparency in the real estate sector. He also pledged AI labs in all municipal schools to equip students with future-ready skills.

Transport and women's safety figured prominently in the manifesto.

Fadnavis said the alliance aims to expand the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) fleet from around 5,000 to 10,000 buses,

switch to electric vehicles and introduce a 50 per cent concession on fares for women travellers.

He said new "midi" and "mini" services would improve last-mile connectivity around Metro and railway stations.

"We will free Mumbai of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. With the help of IIT, we will develop an AI tool to identify Bangladeshi migrants," Fadnavis said.

He stated that ₹ 17,000 crore had been pledged for a climate action

plan, under which a circular economy will be prepared.

Speaking about the Dharavi Re-development Project, Fadnavis said an ecosystem will be created to ensure the upgradation of micro businesses in the area, and even ineligible residents will be included.

The manifesto has also mentioned a "flood-free Mumbai" plan, promising the city would be free from inundation within five years by adopting Japanese techniques and collaborating with institutions such as IIT and VJTI for measures.

Fadnavis said that a research group from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) will study the city's topography, and that the plan included constructing four new underground floodwater tanks and re-venting existing drainage lines, alongside expediting work on the BRIMSTOWAD 2 project.

He further said that civic hospitals will be upgraded to the level of AIIMS, and a health card facility will be launched in which the medical history of every Mumbaiikar will be digitalised to expedite treatment. (PTI)

should apologise, he charged.

The Delhi BJP leaders, including Law Minister Kapil Mishra, using the clip, had alleged that Atishi insulted Guru Tegh Bahadur in the Assembly during a debate on a programme organised by the Delhi government to mark the 350th martyrdom day of the ninth Sikh Guru last November.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that AAP will have to apologise for using abusive words against the Guru.

"Leader of the Opposition Atishi in the Delhi Assembly used abusive words about our Gurus, and when BJP leaders raised this issue, Arvind Kejriwal got an FIR registered against Kapil Mishra by the Punjab Police, which the Punjab Police has no authority to do," Sachdeva said in a post on X in Hindi. (PTI)

## 6 years after law amended, Centre yet to constitute ACI

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: As many as six years after the law was amended, the central government is yet to constitute the Arbitration Council of India to regulate and promote institutional arbitration in the country. Senior Union law ministry officials said it took years for corporates and public sector undertakings to shun ad-hoc arbitration and go far institutional arbitration to settle commercial disputes.

The proposed arbitration council is mandated to regulate institutional arbitration. "But when institutional arbitration has not taken shape in India, who would the arbitration council regulate? Now it has taken shape and within this year, the proposed council will be set up," an official said. But a former Union law secretary had a contrary view.

"The provision for institutional mechanism by the arbitration council of India was made by amending the Arbitration Act way back in 2019. It has been more than six years now and the proposed council has not yet been constituted. It is adversely affecting making India as a hub of international arbitration," former Union law secretary P K Malhotra told PTI. (PTI)

## Keep swimming: Shubhanshu Shukla's 'Finding Nemo' lesson for youngsters

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: Learn to bounce back from failures, never be satisfied and keep moving towards progress. These were the mantras for success shared by astronauts Shubhanshu Shukla and Prasanth Nair in an interactive session with youngsters here on Sunday.

At the ongoing Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue here, Shukla recalled the message from the movie "Finding Nemo" -- "keep swimming", "never give up" -- and urged the youngsters from across the country to give their best to the tasks chosen by them to achieve success.

"We should learn to realise what we have. We actually try to focus on what we do not have. Respect what you have, make the best of it and success will keep coming back to you without even asking," said Shukla in a fireside chat at the event organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

Nair, who also trained with Shukla for the Axiom-4 mission last year, urged the youngsters to



keep 'Bharat' as the role model and an inspiration, and work for the welfare of the country.

"My role model is this great country, Bharat. All great souls who have walked on this soil have been energised by this place. Whenever you do anything, do remember (that) it is not a single person that will bring you to Viksit Bharat, it is the entire na-

tion. "Keeping Bharat as your biggest inspiration, whatever you do, do it for the betterment of Bharat Mata," said Nair, one of the four astronauts selected for the Gaganyaan mission.

Earlier, Shukla shared his experiences from his 18-day stay at the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 mission.

As a young child, he said, he was fascinated by an air show, but he became a fighter pilot by accident as he filled a form for a defence course, taking a cue from his friends.

"I never thought as a child that I would be an astronaut. I do not believe in 'what ifs'. Somehow, I tend to believe in what is it with you right now and what can you do with it," he said.

Shukla said his learnings from his stay onboard the ISS would go a long way in India developing its own space station.

On astronaut selection, he said one trait considered during psychological assessment is resilience and how a candidate navigates failures.

"Learn how to navigate failures. There will be self-doubt. But one or two moments of failure do not define you. How you bounce back from failure, how you move on from failures or success to the next step is the key," he said.

"Never be satisfied, always keep moving towards progress," Shukla said. (PTI)

## ED may attach AI Falah University campus under anti-money laundering law

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: The AI Falah University campus in Haryana's Faridabad, which came under the scanner of investigating agencies after the Red Fort area blast, could be attached by the Enforcement Directorate under the anti-money laundering law, official sources said on Sunday. The ED is investigating if funds for the construction of the varsity were sourced from alleged proceeds of crime, the sources told PTI.

AI Falah Group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui was arrested by the ED in November on money laundering charges linked to cheating with students of the educational institutions run by his AI Falah Trust. The federal probe agency claimed that the educational institutes did not have the required valid accreditation for teaching.

According to the sources, a part of the "proceeds of crime" (illicit funds under the PMLA) identified in this case are suspected to have been pumped into the construction of various buildings of the university located in the Dhauj area of Faridabad. The agency is undertaking a process to identify and value various movable and immovable assets of the AI Falah Trust which owns all its educational institutions and the university.

Once the probe ends, an order will be issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to provisionally attach the assets found to be derived or created from the proceeds of crime, the sources said.

It is understood that the students of the university may be allowed to study uninterrupted, even after the attachment, in the interest of their academics.

An attachment is done to ensure that the proceeds of crime are not dissipated, sold off or transacted.

A government appointed receiver can be restituted or

vested with the administration of the AI Falah University campus after the provisional attachment attains finality. This way the education of the students will not suffer even as the criminal action and prosecution may continue, the sources said. The ED, while seeking the remand of Siddiqui in November from a court, had said that the university and its controlling trust, under the direction of Siddiqui, generated "proceeds of crime" of at least ₹ 415.10 crore by "dishonestly" inducing students and parents to part with money on the basis of false accreditation and recognition claims.

The agency, as per the sources, is also investigating at least five instances where documents related to the General Power of Attorney (GPA) for acquiring some land parcels in Delhi are alleged to have been forged at the behest of the trust linked to Siddiqui.

The university's role emerged during the probe into a "white-collar" terror module in which more than 10 people, including three doctors, have been arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and Jammu and Kashmir Police. Umar-un-Nabi, a doctor at the AI Falah medical college, became the suicide bomber when he detonated an explosive-laden car on November 10 last year outside the Red Fort here, killing 15 people. The ED has taken cognisance of two Delhi Police FIRs to register its case against Siddiqui and the AI Falah Group on November 14 under the PMLA.

The agency informed the court that the university and its controlling trust, under the direction of Siddiqui, generated "proceeds of crime" of at least ₹ 415.10 crore by "dishonestly" inducing students and parents to part with money on the basis of false accreditation and recognition claims. (PTI)

# Deputy CM highlights fiscal discipline and strategic projects ahead of Union Budget 2026-27

Arunachal urges centre's support for key infrastructure in pre-budget meet

**ITANAGAR, Jan 11:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein has requested the Centre's support for the state's key infrastructure priorities while highlighting its strong record of fiscal discipline during the pre-budget consultation for the Union Budget 2026-27. The consultation was chaired by Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi.

The high-level meeting on Saturday was attended by governors, chief ministers, deputy chief ministers, and finance ministers of states and union territories, along with senior officials of the finance ministry, to discuss priorities, fiscal challenges and policy inputs for framing the forthcoming Union Budget.

During the consultation, Mein said that despite Arunachal Pradesh's remoteness and long-standing developmental challenges, the state has made steady progress in recent years and continues to follow strict fiscal discipline in line with the Arunachal Pradesh Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2006. He added that the state has been



meeting all its committed liabilities on time.

Placing the state's requirements before the Centre, the deputy chief minister highlighted priority infrastructure projects, including the augmentation of water supply and drainage systems in Itanagar and other urban areas. He also emphasised the strategic importance of the Rupai-Wakro-Parashuram Kund railway line, noting that the

project would significantly improve connectivity, strengthen border infrastructure and promote religious tourism in Arunachal Pradesh. Mein added that the railway project has already received clearance from the Ministry of Defence.

The deputy chief minister further drew attention to the state's limited access to externally aided projects and underscored the need

for continued support from the Centre to bridge resource gaps and sustain the current development momentum.

Reiterating the state government's approach, Mein said Arunachal Pradesh remains committed to fiscal prudence and close coordination with the Centre to accelerate inclusive and sustainable development across the state. (PTI)

# VB-GRAM-G Bill opposed for threatening rural employment and livelihoods

## Nagaland Congress launches 45-Day campaign to protect MGNREGA

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Jan 11:** The Dimapur District Congress Committee on Saturday launched the 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram campaign' to highlight the potential adverse impact of the proposed VB-GRAM-G Bill on rural employment, income security and socio-economic stability in Nagaland and across India.

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhavan Dimapur, DCC president 'Kutoho Chishi' said the bill threatens the core principles of MGNREGA by potentially limiting job guarantees, reducing funding, or altering implementation in ways that could exclude vulnerable rural workers.

"The campaign aims to mobilise public opinion and sensitise the media about the importance of preserving MGNREGA in its original form to protect the right to work as enshrined in our Constitution," Chishi said. He added that the initiative also advocates for the withdrawal of the VB-GRAM-G Bill



and restoration of MGNREGA's original provisions to ensure uninterrupted employment opportunities for rural communities.

Over the next 45 days, the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee plans to conduct peaceful, non-violent protests across the state using constitutional methods to express dissent and demand accountability from policymakers.

The Congress urged the govern-

ment to reconsider the bill's implications and engage with stakeholders to safeguard rural workers' interests. Citizens, civil society organisations and local communities have been called upon to participate in 'panchayat-level outreach, ward-level sit-ins on Martyrs' Day and district-level dharnas from January 31 to February 6 to protect MGNREGA and uphold the dignity of labour.

# Pema Khandu, Kaling Moyung congratulate newly elected PRI leaders



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Jan 11:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state president Kaling Moyung on Saturday congratulated all newly elected Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) leaders on the successful completion of the Gram Panchayat Chairperson (GPC) and Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC) elections across the state. Both leaders appealed to the elected representatives to work with commitment towards development and welfare of the people.

In a message, Chief Minister Pema Khandu extended his heartfelt congratulations to all the newly sworn 27 Zilla Parishad Chairpersons and 2,108 Gram Panchayat Chairpersons across Arunachal Pradesh. He stated that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, grassroots institutions have been empowered to play a pivotal role in nation-building.

"I am confident that all the

newly elected representatives will work with dedication and a strong sense of public service to accelerate development and inclusive growth in their respective areas," the Chief Minister said. He further wished them success as they embark on the important responsibility of serving the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

BJP state president Kaling Moyung also congratulated the elected Gram Panchayat Members, Zilla Parishad Members, corporators and councillors for their victory and appreciated the smooth, peaceful and successful conduct of the election process without any major law and order issues. He expressed gratitude to around forty thousand employees, security personnel including CAPF, APP, IRBn, APPBn, forest guards, uniformed personnel from Tax and Excise, ITW and others who discharged their duties with commitment and responsibility to ensure peaceful elections.

Moyung said that the GPC and

ZPC elections were held successfully across the state and noted that out of 27 districts, the ruling BJP secured ZPC positions in 25 districts, except Keyi Panyor and Papum Pare. He informed that the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) candidate was elected as ZPC in Keyi Panyor, while the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) won in Papum Pare district.

Congratulating the people of the state, Moyung thanked them for giving a clear mandate and landslide victory to BJP candidates and NDA alliance partners. He also informed that the election of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) will be held at the DK Convention Centre on January 12. In the Gram Panchayat polls, the ruling BJP won over 6,000 of the total 8,208 seats across the state. In the Zilla Parishad Member elections, the party secured 170 of the 245 seats, including 44 that were won unopposed.

Thanking the people for reposing faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Pema Khandu and the BJP, Moyung made a sincere appeal to all elected GPCs and ZPCs, irrespective of party affiliation to remain committed to social welfare and development of their respective jurisdictions. He urged them to work without discrimination based on caste, creed, community or political affiliation and to ensure balanced development for the benefit of poor and needy people.

He further said that with election comes increased responsibility and appealed to all elected representatives to put in their best efforts for economic development and social change through effective implementation of various central and state-sponsored welfare schemes.

# Fuel prices soar in Manipur valley amid indefinite pump shutdown

**IMPHAL, Jan 11:** Fuel prices in Manipur valley have skyrocketed on the black market after oil pumps closed indefinitely starting Saturday. Petrol, which was selling at ₹ 120 per litre in the morning, rose to ₹ 130 per litre by the afternoon. Analysts warn that if the pumps remain shut for several more days, diesel and petrol prices could surge even higher, providing brisk business for black marketers.

The shutdown follows a bomb attack on M/S Elidas Fuel Station at Moirang Thana Leikai in Bishnupur district on January 8. In protest, the Manipur Petroleum Dealers Fraternity (MPDF) announced on Friday that fuel pumps would remain closed indefinitely.

The perpetrators of the attack remain unidentified. On Friday, long queues of vehicles were seen rushing to refill fuel before the shutdown took effect.

The MPDF has submitted a written petition to the Governor, urging enhanced security for fuel pumps and dealers. The fraternity warned that under the current conditions, they cannot continue operations and requested measures to prevent similar attacks in the future. (NNN)

# Nagaland University researchers discover new plant species

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Jan 11:** Nagaland University researchers Vieneite-o Koza and Joynath Pegu, under the guidance of Dr Gyati Yam, have discovered a new plant species during field surveys conducted between 2023 and 2025 in the Kavinhou community reserved forest,

Khezhakeno village, Phek district, Nagaland.

The newly identified species, 'Hoya nagaensis' (Apocynaceae: Asclepiadoideae), underscores the ecological richness of Nagaland's high-altitude forests and reinforces the state's status as a biodiversity hotspot in Northeast India.

# Tirap holds first Zilla Parishad, Gram Panchayat meetings

**HT Correspondent**

**KHONSA, Jan 11:** The first meeting of the Zilla Parishad was held on Saturday at the Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall, Khonsa, with the participation of all Zilla Parishad Members. During the meeting, the election of the Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC) was conducted successfully. Simultaneously, the first meetings of the Gram Panchayats were held with the participation of all Gram Panchayat Members (GPMs). During these meetings, the elections of Gram Panchayat Chairpersons (GPCs) were carried out under the supervision of the concerned Member Secretaries.

The oath of office was administered to the Zilla Parishad Members (ZPMs) and the Zilla Parishad Chairperson by the ADC-cum-DPDO-cum-Member Secretary, 15-Tirap Zilla Parishad, Namneet Singh, IAS. Similarly, the oath of office was administered to all Gram Panchayat Members and Gram Panchayat Chairpersons by their respective Member Secretaries.

Following the oath-taking ceremony, the Deputy Commissioner of Tirap District, Liyi Bagra, congratulated the newly elected Zilla Parishad Chairperson of Tirap District, Adv. John KK Matey, along with all newly elected ZPMs, GPCs and GPMs.

The Deputy Commissioner briefed the newly elected representatives on their roles and responsibilities and urged them to work collectively for the welfare of the people and the holistic development of Tirap District. He also advised the members to thoroughly familiarise themselves with the relevant guidelines governing Panchayati Raj Institutions and assured them of full cooperation and guidance from the district administration, including all concerned officers and Heads of Departments.

The election process was conducted smoothly under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner, Tirap District, Liyi Bagra, with direct supervision by ADC Namneet Singh, IAS and with active support from all Member Secretaries of the respective Panchayats.

Oath-taking ceremonies and distribution of certificates were also held in other Panchayat Blocks of the district. These were administered by the respective Returning Officers of Deomali, Soha, Khonsa, Khela-Bunting, Borduria, Kapu, Bari-Basip, Dadam, Lazu and Tutnu Blocks.

State earns accolades for innovation, community development and sustainable tourism

# SKOCH Awards: Meghalaya wins one gold, two silvers

**SHILLONG, Jan 11:** Meghalaya has won one gold and two silver honours at the SKOCH Awards, showcasing excellence in innovation and inclusive development, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Sunday.

Meghalaya won Gold Award on Mushroom Development Centre at Upper Shillong for its work as a Shiitake Production and Training Centre, which has helped promote skill development, value addition and income generation among farmers.

The state also secured two Silver awards. The Mawlai Community and Rural Development (C&RD) Block was recognised for its community-driven development initiatives, while the Directorate of Tourism's Nongwar Tourism Project was honoured for promoting sustainable, community-based tourism while preserving local culture and natural heritage.

"Meghalaya Shines at the SKOCH Awards with One Gold and Two Silver Honours, showcasing excellence in innovation and inclusive development."

"The Gold Award was awarded to the Mushroom Development Centre, Upper Shillong, for its outstanding work as a Shiitake Production and Training Centre. The Silver Awards were for the Malai C&RD Block, recognising its impactful community-driven development



initiatives, and for the Tourist Directorate's Nongwar Tourism Project, which highlights the state's efforts to promote sustainable, community-based tourism while preserving local culture and natural heritage," the CM posed on X.

Congratulating the departments, field func-

tionaries and community members involved, the CM said the recognition reflects Meghalaya's focus on people-centric development models.

He said the state has been prioritising innovation, sustainability and grassroots participation to ensure inclusive growth. (PTI)

# High-powered committee formed to oversee Hornbill Festival policy decisions

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Jan 11:** The Governor of Nagaland has constituted a 16-member high-powered standing committee to oversee the Hornbill Festival, providing overall policy guidance, strategic direction and inter-departmental coordination with Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio as its chairman, an official statement said.

The committee, set up on Friday, will be responsible for formulating a strategic vision, approving major initiatives and partnerships, monitoring progress against defined outcomes, allotting festival sites and regulating rates for materials sold and events during the festival.

A convener and festival director will be appointed from among the committee members to manage operational aspects.

In addition, the committee will oversee corporate social responsibility contributions, sponsorships and approvals for any events promoting music, culture or related activities in the Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, outside the Hornbill Festival period. The body aims to ensure smooth management, transparent policy decisions and enhanced inter-departmental coordination for the iconic festival, which celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland.

# 10 people arrested in connection with communal violence in Tripura's Unakoti

**AGARTALA, Jan 11:** Ten people were arrested in connection with the communal clashes in Tripura's Unakoti district, police said on Sunday.

The violence happened on Saturday in Saidarpur in the Kumarghat sub-division over the collection of 'chanda' or subscription for a local temple, they said.

Superintendent of Police Avinash Kumar Rai told PTI that no fresh violence has been reported with paramilitary forces conducting foot patrolling in the sensitive areas.

"Ten people have been arrested for their alleged link to the violence. Prohibitory orders under section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita remain in force in the area and internet service continues to remain suspended. We will review the situation in due course and decide if the restrictions can be eased, he said.

Rai said four police personnel were injured in the clashes, apart from six civilians.

Congress legislature party leader Birajit Sinha alleged that he was stopped from visiting the violence-affected area.

"We were going to meet the affected villagers at Saidarpur after yesterday's clashes, but were prevented by the police, who cited security reasons. I strongly protest this," he told the reporters.

Leader of Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury slammed the BJP-led government, alleging that it failed to protect the lives and properties of people of the minority community.

"When Kumarghat was burning, the chief minister was busy leading a roadshow in Kanchanpur in North Tripura. He has not made any statement against the communal violence," he said.

Stat BJP president Rajib Bhat-tacharjee condemned the violence and lauded the role of the police for taking action against the perpetrators. (PTI)

## Daryl Mitchell's quickfire 84 lifts New Zealand to 300/8 against India in 1st ODI

**VADODARA, Jan 11:** Daryl Mitchell stood tall with a stroke-filled half-century to help New Zealand post 300 for 8 in the first One-Day International against India here on Sunday.

Mitchell, ranked world No. 3 behind India superstars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, lived up to expectations with a gritty knock which gave New Zealand a much-needed impetus amid middle order collapse.

Mitchell clobbered five fours and three sixes to make 84 off 71 balls after New Zealand middle order failed to build on an ideal start given by Devon Conway (56 off 67 balls; 6 fours, 1 six) and Henry Nicholls (62 off 69 balls; 8 fours).

Openers Conway and Nicholls had put on 117 runs to defy India for the first 21 overs, but Harshit Rana's (2/65) second spell of 2-0-13-2 turned the tables and the home side chipped away with regular strikes.

New Zealand skidded from 117 for no loss in the 22nd over to 198 for five in the 38th. But Mitchell forged vital stands to come to their rescue, while debutant Kristian Clarke struck three late fours to make 17-ball 24 not out.



In the 22nd over, Rana took pace off the ball to break the century partnership between Conway and Nicholls. An innocuous off-cutter, bowled away from the batter saw

Nicholls reaching out for it, only to get an edge that carried to the wicketkeeper for India's first breakthrough.

In the 24th over, Rana mixed up

the slower ones with a few in excess of 140 kmph to keep the Kiwis guessing. On the final delivery of the over, he had Conway's inside edge crashing into the wickets.

But India and Rana would not have had to wait for a breakthrough had Kuldeep Yadav (1/52) hung on to a regulation catch at third man in the fifth over, when Nicholls was on five.

Siraj sent down a slower one which had Will Young feathering one behind the wickets, while Prasad Krishna (2/60) cleaned up Mitchell Hay (12) in the 37th.

Under the weather for the last few days, Glenn Phillips appeared a tad sluggish in his brief stay which was ended by Kuldeep, and a brilliant direct hit by Shreyas Iyer from long-on caught Kiwi skipper Michael Bracewell short of his crease.

Earlier, Conway began with a drive down the wicket for his first boundary while Nicholls took his time to get going, and used the sweep shot well at times to find the odd boundary.

The duo grew in confidence to bring out the sweep and reverse sweeps with perfection while rotating the strike well to put on the century stand (PTI)

## Mortara secures Mahindra's first podium of Formula E season



**MEXICO CITY, Jan 11:** Mahindra Racing secured their first podium of the latest Formula E season as Edoardo Mortara finished second in round two of the electric racing series here.

The Indian team's other driver, Nick De Vries, could not finish the race held on Sunday.

Citroen Racing's Nick Cassidy made up 12 positions in a calculated, pitch-perfect drive to win the race ahead of Mortara and reigning champion Oliver Rowland from Nissan.

"Nick had a really good race. We started to struggle mid-way through the race, unfortunately it didn't give us the opportunity to launch in the last laps. I'm very happy with P2 and this podium, and some solid points for us," said Mortara after the race.

Mahindra Racing, who have been part of the FIA sanctioned world championship since its inception, have committed to the series' Gen4 era (2026-27 onwards) after due deliberation. (PTI)

## Paes, Gopichand join sports minister Mandaviya for 56th edition of 'Sundays on Cycle' initiative

*'A healthy body is the foundation of strong leadership'*



**NEW DELHI, Jan 11:** Tennis legend Leander Paes and badminton great Pulella Gopichand joined sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya for the 56th edition of 'Sundays on Cycle', which is a fitness initiative of the sports ministry, here.

Fit India's flagship mass fitness movement 'Sundays on Cycle' (SoC), made a comeback to the national capital on Sunday. More than 1000 people, including 500 young leaders from across the country, participated in the fitness festival, followed by a Cycle Rally, beating the 6 degree winter cold at 7am.

The young leaders, who were here to participate in the three-day Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue, a national platform meant to identify and promote youngsters who want to be part of public life, took part as special invitees.

The Sundays on Cycle was held across 15000 locations, with Bhopal organising a mega event which was graced by Madhya Pradesh's Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Vishvas Kailash Sarang, who flagged off the cycling rally alongside actress Payal Rohatgi and a distinguished line-up of athletes, including Olympian judoka Garima Choudhary.

"A healthy body is the foundation of strong leadership. Cycling teaches us powerful leadership lessons—it tells us when to pedal fast, when to slow down, and most importantly, how to maintain balance to keep moving forward in life," said Mandaviya here.

Appreciating the Minister's vision of launching the Sundays on Cycle initiative, Gopichand said, "It is motivating to see a Minister not just putting so much thought to make fitness a part of everyday life, but also leading the entire movement from the front. The fact that he himself participates in this event on Sunday morning after a hard week's work speaks volumes about his commitment to creating a Fit India."

"Today we have fun on our fingertips so we have forgotten to have fun in nature, to step out and be part of the outside world, so I appreciate those who have turned up here today."

Speaking about the importance of creating community fitness campaigns such as Fit India, Paes said, "No one can do fitness alone, you need to motivate each other and be part of the community because fitness is not just about having a strong body but also a fit mind which can be achieved when we participate in community events as this one."

"I congratulate the Sports Minister Sir for creating something so unique, and to think this is happening parallelly across the country, it's phenomenal."

Adding to the festive atmosphere, the morning featured an enthusiastic Zumba session, calming yoga practices, and captivating electric Mallakhamb and rope-skipping performances by athletes, drawing loud applause from the crowd.

Fit India Ambassadors Timsy Bector and Divya Ahuja also shared important fitness tips for winter, stressing on the need for continued exercises and easy warm-ups at home, even for those who are aged and cannot step out of home.

In Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Sports Minister Vishvas Kailash Sarang echoed the mantra of 'Fit India, Hit India' given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"I congratulate the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Sports Authority of India for giving out the nationwide message of fitness through this cycling movement," he said.

More than 1500 people participated in the Bhopal event. (PTI)

## Jurel replaces injured Pant in India's ODI squad for NZ series



**VADODARA, Jan 11:** Dhruv Jurel on Sunday replaced an injured Rishabh Pant in India's ODI squad for the three-match series against New Zealand. Jurel, who has been in stellar form in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, has joined the squad for the series beginning here on Sunday.

Pant suffered a side strain while batting in the nets on Saturday.

"Wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant felt a sudden onset discomfort in his right lateral abdominal area while batting in the nets during India's practice session on Saturday afternoon at the BCA Stadium, Vadodara," said the BCCI.

"He was taken for MRI scans immediately and the BCCI Medical Team had a detailed discussion with an expert on his clinical and radiological findings. Pant has been diagnosed with a side strain (Oblique Muscle Tear) and is subsequently ruled out of the ODI Series."

"The Men's Selection Committee has named Dhruv Jurel as Pant's replacement, and Jurel has linked up with the squad." Jurel will be the reserve wicket-keeper batter in the ODI squad. He goes into the series at the back of six fifty-plus scores in seven innings including two hundreds.

India's updated ODI squad: Shubman Gill (C), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul (WK), Shreyas Iyer (VC), Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohd Siraj, Harshit Rana, Prasad Krishna, Kuldeep Yadav, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Arshdeep Singh, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel (WK). (PTI)

## Padikkal, Sarfaraz in focus as Mumbai meet Karnataka in VHT quarters

**BENGALURU, Jan 11:** Sarfaraz Khan and Devdutt Padikkal would be expected to extend their breathtaking form when domestic heavyweights Mumbai and Karnataka meet in the Vijay Hazare Trophy quarterfinals here on Monday.

The second quarterfinal between Uttar Pradesh and Saurashtra will also be held at the Centre of Excellence on Monday.

Karnataka's solitary loss in the group stage came in their final league game on January 8 but they would be confident of bringing their A game to the fore against Mumbai.

With 640 runs in seven innings, including four hundreds and a half century, Padikkal is the tournament's leading run-getter. If he continues to be a run machine, it would be tough for the selectors to ignore him as they look towards the 2027 ODI World Cup after the T20 showpiece is out of the way in a couple of months' time.

Sarfaraz too is knocking on the doors by extending his sensational T20 form to one-day cricket.

In the unexpected loss against Punjab in the final league fixture, Sarfaraz smashed the fastest fifty by an Indian in men's List A cricket. Though Mumbai lost the inconsequential game, it was yet another reminder from Sarfaraz to the selectors of his special abilities in the shorter formats.

In the other quarterfinal between Saurashtra and Uttar Pradesh, the latter will be the favourites having stayed unbeaten in the league stage, the only side to have done so across the four groups.

However, they would need to do without the services of Dhruv Jurel who has linked up with the Indian ODI squad following a side strain to Rishabh Pant.

Jurel had amassed 558 runs in seven innings over the course of the league stage and was simply unstoppable.

Saurashtra, after losing two of their first three games, won their last four to qualify for the last-eight stage. (PTI)

## Sabalenka wins Brisbane final amid frosty exchange with Kostyuk

**BRISBANE, Jan 11:** Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka has captured her second consecutive Brisbane International title, and 22nd overall, with a straight sets victory over Marta Kostyuk on Sunday.

It was the third year in a row Sabalenka appeared in the final and the Belorussian player looked in comfortable surroundings as she closed out a 6-4, 6-3 victory in just 1 hour and 17 minutes at Pat Rafter Arena.

The Brisbane International is a tuneup event for this year's Australian Open, which begins Jan. 18.

**High intensity final**

Kostyuk went hard early by attacking Sabalenka's second serve, clawing back an early break with sublime drop shots that briefly rattled the world's top-ranked player.

However, the Belorussian's relentless intensity and match-smarts proved decisive as she exploited the oppressive Brisbane humidity with punishing baseline rallies to clinch the opening set in 40 minutes. As Kostyuk wilted under the physical strain, Sabalenka accelerated in the second set.

With a mix of raking groundstrokes and deceptive drop shots, she forced a mounting error count from the Ukrainian to close out the



match without dropping a set all week.

**Frosty post-match atmosphere**

After sealing the victory, Sabalenka looked down the court at Kostyuk and kissed both biceps - a likely nod to previous comments by the Ukrainian that she possessed higher testosterone levels than other players.

Kostyuk has said the comments made in an interview last year had been taken out of context, but further the tensions between the pair since the Ukrainian's refusal to shake Sabalenka's hand after a match at the French Open in 2023.

The exchange resulted in a frosty post-match presentation. During the trophy ceremony, Kostyuk

spoke passionately about her homeland but notably declined to mention Sabalenka by name.

"I want to say a few words about Ukraine," Kostyuk said. "I play every day with a pain in my heart. There are thousands of people who are without light and warm water right now, it's minus 20 degrees outside right now, so it's very, very painful to live this reality every day. I was incredibly moved and happy to see so many Ukrainian fans and flags here this week ... Slava Ukraini."

Sabalenka, meanwhile, congratulated Kostyuk, stating she hoped they would meet in another final soon. She also took a cheeky dig at her boyfriend Georgios Frangulis during her victory speech.

"Hopefully soon I will call you somehow else," Sabalenka said looking at Frangulis in the player's box. "That just put extra pressure, right?"

Later Sunday, top-seeded Daniil Medvedev played Brandon Nakashima in the final of the men's tournament at Brisbane.

The former No. 1-ranked Medvedev is seeking his 22nd career title, while it will be Nakashima's first ATP Tour final in four years. (AP)

## Bencic rallies past Swiatek to give Switzerland lead in United Cup final

**SYDNEY, Jan 11:** Belinda Bencic rallied from a set down to stun No. 2-ranked Iga Swiatek 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 to give Switzerland a surprise lead over Poland in the final of the United Cup on Sunday. Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka, who will retire at the end of this season, played Hubert Hurkacz later Sunday, with the Polish player needing to win to keep his country in the tie.

Bencic, who had won all four of her singles and four mixed doubles matches this week, came into her match against Swiatek having lost her last five matches against the former No. 1-ranked player. It looked as if

that trend was going to continue as Swiatek started strongly and claimed the opening set 6-3 at Ken Rosewall Arena. But the No.11-ranked Bencic shifted the momentum by winning nine consecutive points to open the second, evening the match in a swift 33-minute set.

The decisive third set hinged on a crucial break at 2-1, where Bencic capitalized on a powerful forehand to seize control. While Swiatek fought to save two match points with consecutive aces, her effort was hampered by an uncharacteristic 36 unforced errors, compared to just 10 from Bencic. (AP)

## Think Kohli retired from Tests early but has hunger to continue till 2027 WC: Donald

**CAPE TOWN, Jan 11:** South African pace legend Allan Donald perceived that Virat Kohli retired from Test cricket a touch sooner, but said the star Indian batter has the hunger to keep himself going till the 2027 ODI World Cup.

Donald, who had developed a cordial relationship with Kohli while working as the bowling coach of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in IPL 2014-15, cited for the batter's excellent work ethics to back his thought.

"You know, I don't think I've ever seen hunger in a player other than Virat. I've got massive respect for him. I often talk about it in the dressing rooms and chats about being a champion trainer. There's no one that trains as hard as him. He is just a machine," Donald told a select media gathering during SA20.

"I actually miss him in the Test match arena. I think he's retired too early, but yeah, I look with no doubt we will see him in the white-ball arena in the World Cup very, very soon," he added.

Donald said South Africa has picked a balanced and strong unit which has the capability to play well in the upcoming T20 World Cup, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

"It's going to be a heck of a tournament



in India, isn't it? South Africa picked a very strong squad. There might always be question marks about who's not going and who should have gone and all that kind of stuff. I

think India have got the best T20 wickets on the planet. It's just so hard for any bowler and I've seen it in the IPL with scores 124 in a power play. That's just where the skill

of batting has gone.

"If you can win the inches from a bowling point of view and plot your way very carefully and smartly, then, you know, it's going to come down to that again. So, I hope to see South Africa in the final as well," he said.

**'SA20 going to get bigger'**

The 59-year-old was delighted to see the progress SA20 has made over the last four seasons, and expressed confidence that the league will further develop in the years to come.

"We've been waiting for this for quite some time now. I was fortunate enough last year to be with Durban Super Giants and being in their dressing room. It feels like an IPL atmosphere. And not that this tournament will be as big as the IPL but from a South African point of view, this is as good as it gets."

"High-class cricketers, some young stars coming that I haven't seen. You know, they discovered only a few weeks ago this little pacer Mokoena from nowhere. I've not seen him at all."

"And here he is on the biggest stage against some of the finest cricketers in the world. So it's just a great vibe really. It's very special. And yeah, I hope this thing gets bigger and bigger," he signed off. (PTI)