6 WORLD

- Death toll in Iran protest crackdown is reportedly at 5,002 as Trump says US 'armada' approaching
- Venezuela opens debate on an oil sector overhaul as Trump seeks role for US firms

8 NATION

- Issues fresh notices to Anil Ambani, ADAG in PIL alleging fraud
- Full dress rehearsal of 77thR-Day parade held amid rain, flypast curtailed

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Assam voters marked 'shifted', 'dead' in electoral rolls revision

EC warns against misuse of Form 7

GUWAHATI/ MORIGAON, Jan 23: Faridud Eunush is among six voters in his household in Assam's Morigaon district, but three of them have been shown as having 'shifted' from their address, according to a notice received from authorities during the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in the state.

Shocked to find their names marked as 'shifted', Eunush and his siblings attended a hearing on Thursday with documents to prove they still reside in Mikirbheta circle of Morigaon Assembly constituency.

"The notice was most shocking. We three were shown as 'shifted', while the rest of the family remained residents of the same address," Eunush told PTI over phone.

"But more concerning was the fact that the Electoral Registration

Officer (ERO) refused to tell who had filed the complaint against us. He said we would have to file an RTI application to know the complainant's name, which we submitted immediately," he claimed.

Like Eunush and his siblings, thousands across the state have reportedly received notices based on applications filed through Form 7, which deals with proposed inclusion or deletion of names from the existing electoral rolls.

Many claimed that they received notices which showed them as marked 'death' even as they appeared in flesh and blood at their hearings.

By using Form 7, one can request for deletion of own's name for any of three reasons – permanently shifted, already enrolled or not Indian citizen.

Similarly, any voter of that constituency can apply for deletion of names of others on basis of any of five reasons – death, under age, absent/ permanently shifted, already enrolled, or not Indian citizen.

"The names are not stuck off merely on basis of receipt of a Form 7 application. The persons concerned are served notices and given ample scope to prove that they remain bona fide voters of that area," a state Election Commission official said.

However, the large number of notices issued this year has triggered apprehensions of misuse of the provision for vested interests, especially with the Assembly elections scheduled within the next couple of months. The state EC official *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

32 opposition workers join BJP in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 23: In a boost to the Bharatiya Janata Party in Karbi Anglong, as many as 32 workers from opposition parties formally joined the BJP on Friday.

The joining ceremony was held at the private residence of Richard Tokbi, Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

The new entrants are largely from the Duarbagori MAC constituency and include 22 former Congress members and 10 former members of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference.

Their induction is being seen as a notable shift in the local political landscape.

Among those who joined the BJP were several prominent local leaders, including Robinson Singnar, former APHLC Bokajan LAC vice president *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Assam to set up Centre of Excellence in collab with World Economic Forum

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the state is set to establish a Centre of Excellence in collaboration with the World Economic Forum (WEF), marking a significant step towards strengthening Assam's global economic engagement and policy innovation.

Sharing details of his interactions on the sidelines of the WEF Annual Meeting in Davos in a social media post, Sarma said the decision was taken during a meeting with the WEF leadership team.

The proposed Centre of Excellence will focus on a theme of both national and state importance, aligning Assam's development priorities with global best practices and emerging economic trends.

"We have decided to set up a Centre of *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Assam successfully concluded debut participation at WEF: CM

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the state has successfully concluded its debut participation at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos, unlocking new investment opportunities and strengthening Assam's global economic outreach. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said he wrapped up Assam's "successful Davos debut" after engaging with a wide cross-section of global business leaders, *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Jorhat admin forms committee to document 1977 aircraft crash involving Morarji Desai

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 22: The Jorhat district administration has constituted a committee to visit and document the site of the 1977 aircraft crash in western Jorhat that involved former Prime Minister Morarji Desai, following renewed efforts by local residents to formally preserve the memory of the incident.

The crash took place on the evening of November 4, 1977, around 7.30 pm amid heavy rainfall at Tekelagaon under Khongia Mouza in western Jorhat.

The aircraft was carrying then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, who was scheduled to attend a public meeting at Court Field in Jorhat.

Among those on board were Arunachal Pradesh chief minister PK Thungon, Intelligence Bureau Director John Lobo, MP RK Khirimi, Sarvodaya leader Narayan Desai, Desai's son Kranti Bhai Desai, and several senior Indian Air Force officers, including Wing Commander CID Lim (VM).

While most of the occupants survived, five crew members lost their lives in the accident.

Despite long-standing demands from local residents for official recognition of the incident, the issue remained largely unaddressed *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Newly constructed bridge over Namdung collapses near Gaurisagar

HT correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 23: A newly constructed bridge over the Namdung river on the NH-37 bypass near historic Namdung Silsaku, close to Gaurisagar, collapsed around noon on Friday, raising serious questions over construction quality and alleged corruption in the four-laning project of the highway.

The bridge, part of the crucial 44-km NH-37 bypass stretch, had not yet been opened to the public.

The incident has dealt a setback to recent claims by the Union Minister for Road Transport regarding the opening of the new highway within the next three months.

Local residents alleged that substandard materials were used in the construction of the bridge.

Padum Saikia, a local resident and senior journalist, told The Assam Tribune that the construction company

had reportedly used 6 mm and 9 mm rods for the structure, along with inferior-quality materials, leading to its collapse within three years of construction.

He added that local children often play under the bridge and narrowly escaped a *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'Netaji ensured we remain a part of India': Himanta on Bose's birth anniversary

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid tributes to Subhas Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary on Friday, recalling his contribution in ensuring that Assam remained a part of India during Partition.

He said Bose's efforts negated Muhammad Saadullah's "nefarious intentions" of merging Assam with East Pakistan.

"Tributes to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his Jayanti," Sarma said in a post on X. "Netaji ensured we remain a *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Page 2 Jan 24_Normal Pages 1/23/2026 9:30 PM Page 1

Economic leaders at Davos say global growth is resilient despite disruption from Trump

DAVOS, Jan 23: Leading global economic policymakers at the World Economic Forum in Davos urged countries and businesses to filter out the turmoil from a week of clashes with the Trump administration and focus on boosting growth and fighting inequality in a world where trade will continue to flow, and international cooperation is still badly needed.

The global economy is showing unexpected resilience despite the noise, European Central Bank head Christine Lagarde, International Monetary Fund head Kristalina Georgieva and World Trade Organisation head Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a panel discussion. But while growth is holding up, troubles like worrisome levels of government debt and inequality loom.

That resilience is holding up despite disruptions from US trade policy under President Donald Trump, who roiled the weeklong forum with threats to impose tariffs on countries supporting Greenland against a US takeover bid, then withdrew the tariff proposal.

What is now needed, they said, are efforts to boost growth to offset heavy debt levels around the world and ensure that disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence don't worsen inequality or devastate labour markets. And Europe needs to boost productivity and improve its business climate for investment.

Georgieva said the IMF's recently raised forecast of 3.3 per cent global growth for this year was "beautiful but not enough... do not fall into complacency."

She said that level of growth wasn't enough to wear down "the debt that is hanging around our necks" and that governments need to take care of "those who are falling off the wagon."

"We have to look at Plan B, or Plans B," said Lagarde. "I think we've had a lot of noise this week... and we need to distinguish the signal from the noise... we should be talking about alternatives."

She responded to the "Europe bashing" heard during the summit by saying, "We should say thank you to the bashers" for underlining Europe's need to improve its investment climate and promote innovation.

Lagarde downplayed a provocative speech at the forum from Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who called Trump's approach a "rupture" with an international order based on rules, trade and cooperation and said that way of doing business was "not coming back." "From an economic and business point of view, we depend on each other," she said.

Okonji-Oweal pointed out that 72 per cent of global trade still takes place under WTO rules, where countries agree to charge all trading partners the same tariffs. That's despite "the biggest disruption in 80 years."

"Resiliency is built into the system, and that is showing up," she said. She conceded that "I don't think we'll go back to where we were."

Georgieva offered a historical perspective: "We have always traded, and we will always trade. Trade is like a river, water. You put an obstacle, and it goes around it. Yes, it would be different, but there would always be the necessity of Dr Ngozi to look over world trade."

Georgieva also conceded things had changed for good: "How many of you have seen the movie,' The Wizard of Oz?'.... We are not in Kansas anymore." (AP)

RBI announces liquidity injection measures of over ₹ 2 lakh cr

MUMBAI, Jan 23: The Reserve Bank on Friday said it will inject over ₹ 2 lakh crore of liquidity into the system through a slew of avenues.

"On a review of current liquidity and financial conditions, the Reserve Bank has decided to conduct the ... operations to inject liquidity into the banking system," an official statement said.

The measures include a 90-day Variable Rate Repo (VRR) operation for an amount of ₹ 25,000 crore to be conducted on January 30, 2026 and a USD/INR buy-sell swap auction of USD 10 billion or ₹ 91,000 crore for a tenor of 3 years to be held on February 4, 2026.

The central bank will also undertake government bond purchases under the open market operations route of an aggregate amount of ₹ 1 lakh crore, according to the statement.

This will include buying ₹ 50,000 crore each of bond buys on February 5 and February 12, it said.

Detailed instructions for each of the measures will be issued separately, the central bank said, assuring support whenever required.

"The Reserve Bank will continue to monitor evolving liquidity and market conditions and take measures as appropriate to ensure orderly liquidity conditions," it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

EC warns against

told PTI that instances have come to light where the same complainant has filed applications for deletions of names of several persons in the same constituency.

"In certain cases, it has been found that the complainant, when contacted, said he or she had filed no such application, and someone else had used their details to fill up the form," he said.

Citing an instance from Bilasipara Assembly constituency, the official said multiple Form 7 applications were purportedly filed by one Karan Ray seeking deletion of nine voters' names.

Ray, along with the nine persons, appeared before the authorities and submitted that he had not filed any objections and that his name was used unauthorisedly. The objections were subsequently declared invalid.

Affirming the Election Commission's commitment to an error-free electoral rolls, the official said ample opportunity would be provided to persons against whom deletion requests had been received.

District election officers in places like Morigaon, Goalpara and Dhubri have issued public notices to assuage apprehensions and assert that anyone found filing frivolous applications through Form 7 is liable for penal action.

"If anyone is found using the Form 7 without valid grounds for request of deletion of name, action will be initiated against them," the official added.

While the last date for submitting claims and objections under the ongoing SR got over on Thursday, the process of hearing based on these will continue till February 2.

The final electoral rolls will be published on February 10.

The draft rolls, published in December, reflected a total of 2,52,01,624 electors, representing a 1.35 per cent increase from the previous final rolls published in January 2025. (PTI)

32 opposition workers

and advisor for APHLC Duarbagori; Khoysing Kathar, president of Thedong PCC; Narson Phangcho, vice president of PCC at Thedong polling station; and Rosison Tokbi, general secretary of Deithor PCC.

Welcoming the new members, Richard Tokbi said their decision reflected growing public confidence in the development-oriented governance of the BJP.

He attributed the shift to the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and KAAC Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, whose initiatives, he said, have strengthened trust at the grassroots level.

The programme was attended by several local leaders and party functionaries, including VDC chairman Sarkoi Rongphar, Deithor Town Committee vice chairman Stone Son Rongpi and Duarbagori Mandal secretary Mongolsing Rongpi, who were present to witness the induction.

Assam to set up

Excellence in Assam in collaboration with the World Economic Forum on a theme of national and state relevance. This initiative will help the state benefit from global knowledge networks and policy expertise," the chief minister said.

Sarma also underlined that Assam is building a long-term partnership with the WEF, which will enable the state to continuously leverage major WEF platforms, including its annual summits in Davos and other international forums.

According to him, this sustained engagement will provide Assam greater visibility among global investors, policymakers and thought leaders.

During his Davos interactions, the chief minister reiterated that Assam, despite being a relatively small state, follows a focused and inclusive investment approach.

He said the state treats every investor as a "VIP investor" and ensures personalised attention to each proposal, irrespective of size.

Highlighting the Northeast's growing economic significance, Sarma noted that the region is witnessing rapid infrastructure expansion, reflected in rising cement consumption and increased industrial activity.

He also pointed to Assam's untapped potential in sectors such as hydrocarbons, renewable energy, tourism and agri-based industries.

The chief minister said the Centre of Excellence, coupled with Assam's engagement at global platforms like the WEF, would help the state design forward-looking policies, attract quality investments and integrate more closely with global value chains.

Sarma added that Assam's presence at Davos is not merely symbolic but aimed at forging concrete partnerships that translate into employment, infrastructure growth and long-term economic resilience for the state.

'Netaji ensured we

part of India by visiting the State & assembling all leaders under the leadership of Gopinath Bardoloi to form a Govt & negate Sadullah's nefarious intentions of merging Assam with East Pakistan," he added. (PTI)

Newly constructed bridge

tragedy on Friday as they were attending Saraswati Puja celebrations at their school.

Residents also recalled a previous incident in which a local youth, Satyajit Das, died about a year ago after a guard wall collapsed on him nearly 200 metres from the Namdung site.

They alleged that despite repeated complaints, the construction company involved at that time failed to address concerns over safety and quality.

According to locals, the original construction company, GDCL, was terminated by the government, and the work was recently re-allotted.

The NH-37 bypass project falls under the SARDP-NE scheme and is being executed in EPC mode.

The government has reportedly already paid ₹944.83 crore in compensation for the Jorhat–Demow stretch, acquiring 316.44 hectares of land for the project.

Sources claimed that due to alleged irregularities and poor workmanship by some contractors, the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited had to reassign contracts, resulting in substantial additional expenditure.

Large portions of the 44-km stretch reportedly required re-filling with suitable soil after excavating substandard subsoil, leading to further delays and cost overruns.

The bridge collapse has intensified demands for a thorough inquiry into the quality of work, accountability of contractors and officials involved, and immediate measures to ensure public safety on the highway project.

Jorhat admin forms

for decades. The matter gained fresh momentum after the crash anniversary was observed as a memorial day on November 4, 2025, at Trinamul Jatiya Vidyalaya.

Subsequently, a committee was formed to pursue formal commemoration, and memoranda were submitted to the President of India, the Prime Minister, the Assam chief minister and the chief secretary of Assam.

Acting on a communication from the chief secretary's office, the Jorhat District Commissioner sought detailed written proposals from the committee on measures to preserve the memory of the incident.

The proposal was submitted by committee president Sebin Bora and working president Mamon Devi.

Following the District Commissioner's directive, Additional District Commissioner Pankaj Bora convened a meeting at the District Commissioner's conference hall on Thursday.

The meeting was attended by the Teok MLA, the Chief Executive Officer of the Jorhat Zila Parishad, the Superintendent of Police, officials from the revenue department, engineers from the Public Works Department, Public Health Engineering Department and APDCL, along with officials from the education, tourism, cultural development and museum departments.

Representatives of the 69 No. West Khongia Gaon Panchayat and members of the memorial committee were also present.

The District Commissioner directed the formation of a site inspection committee comprising government officials and representatives present at the meeting.

The committee has been instructed to visit the crash site between January 26 and January 31 and submit a detailed report thereafter.

During the meeting, committee president Sebin Bora briefed officials on the circumstances surrounding the crash and developments since then.

Committee spokesperson Ramen Saikia informed that the bicycle used to transport Prime Minister Morarji Desai to the Air Force Hospital at Rowriah after the crash is preserved at the Jorhat District Museum. Museum officer Avantika Parashar confirmed that a medical certificate issued by the Air Force Hospital documenting Desai's treatment is also housed in the museum.

Assam successfully concluded

policymakers and changemakers. He said the engagements have paved the way for significant outcomes that will benefit the state in the long term.

"Wrapped up Assam's successful Davos debut as I met over 200 business leaders and interacted with a host of changemakers. I head back to Bharat with a lot of learning and with a lot of new opportunities unlocked for Assam," Sarma said, adding that the outcomes of the visit would be shared after his return to the state.

According to official details, Assam signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth around Rs 1 lakh crore during the Davos meetings, reflecting strong global investor confidence in the state's growth potential and policy framework.

The chief minister held over 35 bilateral meetings with leading industry representatives across sectors such as infrastructure, energy, manufacturing, technology and agri-based industries.

During the visit, Sarma also met diplomats from more than 20 countries, highlighting Assam's strategic importance in India's Act East Policy and its emerging role as a gateway to Southeast Asia.

These interactions, officials said, focused on exploring opportunities for trade, investment, technology transfer and cultural exchanges.

In addition, the chief minister participated in three multilateral sessions, where he highlighted Assam's development journey, investment-friendly policies and the Northeast's growing economic relevance.

He reiterated that Assam follows a focused investment approach, treating every investor with equal importance.

Sarma said the Davos engagements were aimed not merely at attracting investments but also at gaining global insights, best practices and partnerships that can help shape Assam's future growth.

He added that the state's presence at the global forum marks a new chapter in its efforts to integrate with global value chains.

The Chief Minister's participation at Davos is being seen as a milestone in positioning Assam as an emerging investment destination on the global stage.

PwC launches AI framework to unlock USD 550 bn in five sectors

DAVOS, Jan 23: PwC India on Friday unveiled an AI framework here to unlock USD 550 billion by 2035 in five key sectors of agriculture, education, energy, healthcare and manufacturing.

Launching the report, AI Edge for Viksit Bharat, at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here, PwC said India is positioned as a potential global benchmark for how emerging economies can deploy artificial intelligence in a manner that is both transformative and equitable.

"AI is more than a technological leap; it's a nation-building force. It gives us the power to reimagine growth not just in GDP terms, but through a people-first lens," PwC India Chairperson Sanjeev Krishan said. "By investing in infrastructure, talent, and governance, we can ensure that innovation and equitable development move hand in hand. This is how we shape a Viksit Bharat that leads the world," he added.

PwC said its economic modelling shows that AI can be a driver of sectoral growth, from boosting crop productivity and reducing agri-waste to improving school governance, cutting power theft, accelerating disease detection, and enhancing manufacturing quality.

Unveiling the report, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "AI is revolutionising all spheres of life, and we are embedding it in governance to democratise its impact. We have done well in creating a strong digital infrastructure, and we are now in a position to leverage data to drive deeper digitisation." (PTI)

DLF to enter senior living homes segment with launch of ₹ 2K cr worth project in Gurugram

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Realty major DLF Ltd on Friday said it will launch this quarter a senior living housing project in Gurugram with an estimated revenue potential of around ₹ 2,000 crore as part of its expansion plan.

With this upcoming launch, India's largest real estate company will be entering the senior living housing segment.

In a conference call with analysts, DLF Ltd Managing Director Ashok Tyagi asserted that the housing demand in Gurugram, the company's stronghold, continues to be robust, especially for credible developers.

He expressed confidence that the company would be able to meet the pre-sales target of ₹ 20,000-22,000 crore during this fiscal, despite poor sales bookings in the latest December quarter.

"We stay confident to meet the original sales bookings guidance," Tyagi told analysts.

Explaining the reason for lukewarm sales of mere ₹ 419 crore in the third quarter, he said the company paused sales bookings in its ongoing ultra-luxury residential project 'The Dahilas' at Gurugram last quarter and also did not launch any new housing project.

On the launch pipeline, DLF Ltd's arm DLF Home Developers Ltd MD, Aakash Ohri, said that the company has started selling apartments in 'The Dahlias' project from this quarter. The rates have gone up in this project by more than 25 per cent from the pre-launch, which happened in the October-December period of 2024.

Ohri highlighted that a renowned NRI has recently bought a property in this project, but did not name the buyer.

In October 2024, DLF launched its 17-acre super-luxury housing project 'The Dahlias' at DLF Phase 5 in Gurugram, comprising 420 apartments and penthouses. Around 220 apartments have been sold for ₹ 15,716 crore in the Dahlias project till December.

That apart, he said, the company would soon launch a senior living project in Gurugram with an estimated sales value of ₹ 2,000 crore.

Later this year, the company plans to launch more projects in Gurugram, Mumbai, Panchkula and Goa.

On Thursday, DLF reported a sharp fall in sales bookings to ₹ 419 crore during the third quarter of this fiscal from a record Rs 12,039 crore in the year-ago period.

DLF Ltd's sales bookings fell 16 per cent to ₹ 16,176 crore in the first nine months of this fiscal from ₹ 19,187 crore in the year-ago period.

During the last 2024-25 financial year, the company achieved a record sales bookings of ₹ 21,223 crore.

DLF Group is primarily engaged in the business of developing and selling residential properties (the Development Business) and developing and leasing commercial and retail properties (the Annuity Business).

It has developed more than 185 real estate projects totalling more than 352 million square feet.

DLF has 280 million square feet of development potential across the residential and commercial segments. It also has an annuity portfolio of over 49 million sq ft. (PTI)

Rupee hits all-time low of 92/USD; settles at 91.90 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 23: The rupee hit a historic low of 92-a-dollar on Friday and gained marginally to settle at 91.90 against the American currency, amid selling pressure from foreign funds and risk-off sentiment in global markets.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee gave up early gains and hit a record low of 92 per US dollar in intraday trade due to weak domestic markets and persistent foreign fund outflows.

Moreover, gains in crude oil prices and a surge in US treasury yields weighed on the rupee.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.45 and then gained ground to touch an intraday high of 91.41 against the greenback.

It fell to an all-time intraday low of 92.00 before settling for the day at a record closing low of 91.90, down 32 paise from its previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and ended with a gain of 7 paise at 91.58 against the US dollar.

The previous all-time low was recorded on January 21, when the rupee plunged 68 paise to close at 91.65 against the American currency.

The rupee has slumped by 202 paise, or over 2 per cent, so far this month. In 2025, the domestic unit had plunged 5 per cent on unabated foreign fund outflows and dollar strength.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias due to selling pressure from FIIs and risk-off sentiments in the global markets. Dollar demand from hedgers and imports may further pressurise the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan.

However, a weak dollar and any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 91.60 to 92.30, Choudhary added.

According to Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, the rupee succumbed to the weight of voracious dollar demand from importers and corporates ahead of the long weekend and the upcoming Union Budget.

"This fragility intensified as domestic equities faced a fresh bout of liquidation, erasing Thursday's tentative recovery. The outlook for spot USD-INR remains resolutely bullish; we anticipate the pair may eclipse the psychological 92 threshold while finding the support at 91.10," Parmar said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent higher at 98.36.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.03 per cent higher at USD 64.72 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex tanked 769.67 points to settle at 81,537.70, while the Nifty dived 241.25 points to 25,048.65.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth ₹ -4,113.38 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Reserve Bank data released on Friday showed the country's foreign exchange reserves jumped by USD 14.167 billion to USD 701.36 billion during the week ended January 16.

The overall reserves had increased by USD 392 million to USD 687.193 billion in the preceding week. (PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

I YAHAYA KHAN, age about 26 years, S/O- Samsul Huda, Vill.- Dakhin Samarali, P.O- Choudhury Bazar, P.S.- Murajhar. Dist.- Hojai (Assam)That, My Father's actual and correct name is Samsul Huda. Which is recorded in my all relevant documents. That, in my H.S.L.C Certificate Vide SL. No- C127914, Roll-B17 628 No-0485, wherein my father's name has been recorded as Samsul Hoda instead of His actual and correct name Samsul Huda. That both. Samsul Huda and Samsul Hoda are the names of one and same person, i.e. my father's name.

Yahaya Khan

E-AUCTION FOR MISECELLANEOUS STATIC SERVICE ASSETS OVER LUMDING DIVISION

E-Auction for Misecellaneous Static Service Assets over Lumding Division for a period of 05 (Five) years. **Rate Unit:** Annual Licensing Fee. **Trips/Days.** 1826.

Auction Catalogue No. MSS-LMG-LMG-03-

SN	Lot No./category	Description
AA/1	MSS-LMG-LMG-SS-30-26-1 (Misc-Static-Services-Salon Services)	A proposal to conduct e-Auction for Setting up of Salon Service at Lumding Railway Station for a Period of 05 (Five) Years

Auction Start Date & Time: **11.00** hrs. **and closing** at **11:30** hrs. of **06-02-2026.** Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.

Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website **www.ireps.gov.in** for more details.

Divisional Railway Manager (C), Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

Serving Customers With A Smile

Suspension of EU duty benefits to impact only 2.66 pc of India's exports: Commerce ministry

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The suspension of duty benefits by the European Union under a scheme will impact only 2.66 per cent of India's exports to the EU, the commerce ministry said on Friday.

The European Union's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is a unilateral trade preference scheme, under which the EU grants reduced or zero customs duties to imports from developing and least-developed countries.

The European Commission has adopted a regulation which has laid down rules for the suspension of specific tariff preferences for certain GSP beneficiary countries, including India, for the period 2026-2028. The regulation formally entered into force from 1 January 2026 until 31 December 2028. The commerce ministry said under the new GSP treatment, agricultural lines are not graduated, so they will continue to enjoy duty benefits under the scheme.

In the non-agricultural sector, only leather has been reinstated.

The graduation process is based on the competitiveness of the country's exports, which is periodically reviewed by the EU. India's graduation over time is on account of the increasing competitiveness of its exports. It added that the suspension covers thirteen specific GSP sections, such as mineral products; chemicals; plastics, textiles, ceramic products; glass and glassware; pearls and precious metals; iron, and steel. In 2023, EU imports from India amounted to about 62.2 billion euros. Of this, only 12.9 billion euros were eligible under the EU's standard GSP framework. (PTI)

Page 3 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 20:54 Page 1

TMC MP raises concerns over Assam's special electoral roll revision

Sushmita Dev seeks extension for objection hearings, calls for NRC data correlation

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Trinamool Congress MP Sushmita Dev on Friday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, raising "serious concerns" over the ongoing Special Revision of Electoral Rolls in Assam.

In her letter, Dev claimed that "huge amounts of objections" had been filed under Form-7 to delete names from the voter list, alleging that these forms were being filed in bulk and in many cases, the complainants were either untraceable or had denied filing them. She noted that the Draft Electoral Roll was published on December 27, 2025 and the Form-7 filing process ended on January 22, 2026, raising concerns about the feasibility and accuracy of the process.

Dev enclosed a public petition from Masughat Gram Panchayat under 117-Borkhola LAC, alleging that one "Mohanlal Das, Block Level Agent (a BJP activist) has filed 22 Form-7 objections, which are false," calling it an attempt to harass genuine voters.

She highlighted that the last date for hearings and disposal of objections is February 2, 2026, with final publication scheduled for February 10, 2026. Given the high volume of objections, Dev questioned whether notices could be served in person by BLOs across Assam and hearings held within the tight timeline, citing figures from several LACs, including 15,304 objections in 118-Silchar, 9,671 in 116-Katigorah and 10,249 in 38-Barkhetri LAC.

Criticising the Special Revision process as "hurried" and "extremely haphazard," she urged the Election Commission to extend the hearing period by seven days to ensure all individuals can defend their right to vote.

Dev also referenced the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, pointing out that the NRC exercise, which took over six years has not been fully notified and questioned why NRC data was disregarded in updating the voter list. She demanded that the Election Commission correlate the NRC with the voter list to ensure names found in the NRC are retained and noted that 19 lakh individuals excluded from the NRC currently have no legal remedy to challenge their status. "The Supreme Court has clearly stated that until the final NRC list is notified, no regressive measures can be taken against any person excluded," she concluded. (PTI)

ECI launches ECINET as international experts discuss election innovation and transparency

India adopts Delhi Declaration at Global Election Conference

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 23: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday concluded the three-day India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, with the unanimous adoption of the Delhi Declaration 2026.

The closing session was chaired by Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr Vivek Joshi. Heads of 42 Election Management Bodies (EMBs) from over 70 countries, senior election officials and experts participated in the conference.

The Delhi Declaration 2026 is built on five key pillars: Purity of Electoral Rolls, Conduct of Elections, Research and Publications, Use of Technology and Training and Capacity Building. Participating EMBs resolved to work collectively to strengthen democratic processes, enhance transparency and promote professionalism in election management.

During the conference, ECI also launched ECINET, its one-stop digital platform for election-related information and services. The event witnessed extensive deliberations through 36 thematic groups focusing on global electoral standards, best practices and innovations.

Nearly 1,000 delegates, including international participants from 42 EMBs and 27 countries, attended the conference, making it the first and largest of its kind.

The conference reaffirmed India's commitment to fostering international cooperation and advancing democratic values through innovation, training and shared best practices.

Khatkhati Police seize opium, arrest 2 in Punjab smuggling case

HT Correspondent

KHATKHATI, Jan 23: In a successful operation against narcotics, the Khatkhati Police seized a significant quantity of illegal opium and poppy straw during a routine check on Friday. Two individuals from Punjab were apprehended in connection with the smuggling attempt.

The seizure took place near the State Bank of India (SBI) branch under the jurisdiction of Khatkhati Police Station. Acting on routine surveillance, a police team intercepted a truck (registration number PB 65 AN-1277) traveling from Dimapur toward Bokajan.

Upon searching the vehicle's cabin, officers recovered 2.26 kg of opium and 178 grams of poppy straw.

In this connection, the police have detained two individuals identified as Gurpreet Singh (55), son of Nirmal Singh, resident of Badali, Kharar, Mohali, Punjab and Kulvinder Singh (35), son of the late Harbans Singh, resident of Jandiala, Jalandhar, Punjab.

The operation was led by Khatkhati Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Surya Kumar Bora, alongside Sub-Inspectors Debasish Bora, Gobin Kakoti, and other personnel. The contraband was officially seized in the presence of the Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Bokajan, Rustam Raj Brahma and independent witnesses. Authorities have confirmed that a thorough investigation is underway to uncover further links in the smuggling network.

DHAC hands over appointment letters to 31 young footballers in Dima Hasao

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: In a significant move aimed at empowering the youth and strengthening sports at the grassroots level, the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC) on Thursday handed over appointment letters to 31 outstanding football players of the district. The beneficiaries included one player from the CEM's Cup, two from the MAC Cup and 28 players from the Inter-Polling Football Tournament.

The initiative marks an important step towards encouraging sports among the younger generation, nurturing local talent and steering youth away from negative influences by providing meaningful opportunities through sports.

The ceremonial distribution programme was attended by Chief Executive Member (CEM) of DHAC, Debolal Gorlosa, along with DHAC Chairman Mohet Hojai, Deputy Chairman Amin Leinthang, Dima Hasao BJP Prabhari Vijay Kumar Gupta, Dima Hasao District BJP president and MAC Dhriti Thaosen, Executive Members Probita Johori, Samuel Changsan, Niranjan Hojai, Paudaming Nriame, Manjit Naiding, Biswajit Daulagupu, Zosumthang Hmar and several MACs and CDC Chairmen from different constituencies.

Addressing the gathering, CEM Debolal Gorlosa stated that the core objective of this initiative is to boost and empower youth by strengthening sports talent at all levels. He emphasised that sports not only build discipline and teamwork but also channel youthful energy in a positive direction, keeping young people away from harmful activities. Reiterating his commitment towards the youth of Dima Hasao, the CEM remarked, "Promise made, promise kept," and urged the players to shoulder responsibility for society and the nation.

Mystery over inspector's silence amid false allegation row at Darrang school

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, Jan 23: The controversy surrounding Baruajhar Higher Secondary School in Assam's Darrang district has intensified, with growing suspicion over the Inspector of Schools' inexplicably passive role amid allegations of a fabricated complaint against an assistant teacher. The issue has triggered widespread outrage, raising concerns over possible conspiracy, administrative negligence and misuse of authority.

The episode dates back to October 27, 2025, when a Class 9 girl student allegedly submitted a written complaint to the Inspector of Schools through the school's Academic In-charge, Barkat Ullah. The complaint accused assistant teacher Fakaruddin Ali of inappropriate physical contact during class and claimed that the student was being threatened to leave the school if the issue was not addressed. However, neither the Academic In-charge nor the Inspector of Schools reportedly took any visible action, allowing the matter to remain unresolved.

The situation escalated on December 17, 2025, when the student's mother visited the school and questioned other Class 9 students regarding Fakaruddin Ali's character. As no corroborative complaints emerged, the mother reportedly confronted Academic In-charge Barkat Ullah, alleging that he had frequently visited their home and attempted to persuade the family and the student to lodge a serious complaint against Fakaruddin Ali to facilitate his transfer.

On December 22, the student's mother and brother again appeared at the school and spoke to journalists, levelling serious allegations against Barkat Ullah and his wife. They claimed the couple had visited the student's home, drafted a false complaint against Fakaruddin Ali and pressured the girl to sign it. These allegations were later denied by the student herself.

Adding to the controversy, the student reportedly went missing on December 15, 2025. Her boyfriend later alleged the involvement of the Academic In-charge. Following the incident, a local NGO and the All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) demanded an impartial investigation and submitted a petition to the Inspector of Schools. However, when the Inspector visited the school on January 7, 2026, critics alleged that the hearing was one-sided, with Barkat Ullah being shielded while Fakaruddin Ali's defence was ignored.

Earlier, in December 2025, Fakaruddin Ali had submitted a petition to the Inspector of Schools seeking a thorough inquiry into the allegations against him and action against those responsible. Subsequently, the Inspector reportedly delegated the task of interacting with the student's side to a village headman (Gaoburah) and Barkat Ullah's nephew, Zumar Ali, further fuelling allegations of bias. The delegation has reportedly failed to ascertain the facts so far.

The matter took a dramatic turn on January 5, 2026, when the missing student returned home. Speaking to this correspondent, she denied ever submitting the complaint and alleged that Barkat Ullah and his wife had repeatedly coerced her. She claimed they had provided a drafted script for the complaint, which she refused to write. According to her, another Class 9 student, identified as Rejina, allegedly wrote the complaint and forged the signatures of both the girl and her father.

The student further alleged that the Academic In-charge and his wife encouraged her to elope with a boy she liked, arranging the logistics and warning her that failure to do so by December 19, 2025, could put Barkat Ullah's job at risk. Shockingly, soon after making these revelations, the student reportedly went missing once again under mysterious circumstances.

As the situation grows more complex, the continued silence of the Inspector of Schools has drawn sharp criticism from parents, educators, and local residents. The academic environment of the school has been severely affected, with the controversy dominating discussions among students and guardians. With Barkat Ullah set to retire later this month, questions continue to swirl over the alleged orchestration of events and the motives behind the purported attempt to implicate a fellow teacher.

Karbi Anglong to celebrate 16th National Voters' Day on Jan 25

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 23: In pursuance of directives issued by the Election Commission of India and the Government of Assam, the District Administration of Karbi Anglong will observe National Voters' Day (NVD) on 25th January 2026 across the district.

The 16th National Voters' Day will be celebrated with the theme "My India, My Vote." Various voter awareness and educational activities, including debates, discussions, competitions and other programmes will be organised, especially in schools and educational institutions. The District Commissioner of Karbi Anglong has instructed all government offices, departments and institutions to actively participate in the observance and to administer the Voters' Pledge to all officers and staff at around 11:00 AM on 25th January 2026, or at a suitable time during the day. In case of non-working days, the pledge may be administered on 23rd January 2026, as per guidelines.

All offices have also been directed to ensure proper use of the National Voters' Day logo and to publicise the activities through official platforms, including social media, using the hashtag #NVD2026. The District Administration has appealed for collective participation to make the observance of National Voters' Day meaningful and successful.

Dibrugarh to host Purvanchal Hindu Sammelan on Jan 25

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 23: The Dibrugarh Purvanchal Hindu Samaj has announced the upcoming 'Purvanchal Hindu Sammelan', scheduled for January 25, as part of efforts to promote social unity and cultural awakening. The convention will be held at the Jalan Nagar School Playground in Dibrugarh and is envisioned as a platform to strengthen Sanatan culture and reinforce communal harmony in the region. Organisers said the event seeks to mobilise the community towards collective awakening, encouraging citizens to rise above personal biases and social divisions.

Addressing the press, the organisers highlighted that the convention aims to infuse "new energy" into the social fabric of Upper Assam. Jun Talukdar, president of the Dibrugarh Purvanchal Hindu Samaj, along with Secretary Amit Sawasi, formally invited the public to participate, urging widespread attendance.

Stakeholder workshop held at Demow BPHC on zero snakebite deaths

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 23: Under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Zero Death Project, the Snakebite Awareness Response Prevention and Action (SARPA) Assam Team of Demow Model Hospital-cum-Community Health Centre organised a Stakeholder Workshop on Co-Development of Implementation Strategies for the ICMR Centre for Advanced Research Project titled "SARPA: Zero Snakebite Death Initiative; Community Empowerment and Engagement for Mitigation of Snakebite Envenoming" at Demow Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC) on Thursday.

. Addressing the gathering, Dr Surajit Giri, Co-Principal Investigator of the SARPA Assam Team, stated that ICMR aims to undertake research on achieving zero snakebite deaths. He highlighted that Demow Model Hospital-cum-CHC has achieved zero snakebite deaths for five consecutive years from 2021 to 2025. He further informed that the model was initiated in 2018, which led to the successful reduction of snakebite fatalities, prompting ICMR to adopt the model for wider research.

Dr Giri said that the research project will be conducted for four years from 2026 to 2029. Through a PowerPoint presentation, he explained the objectives of the ICMR Zero Death Project and sensitised participants on the do's and don'ts after a snakebite. He also appealed to the stakeholders for their continued cooperation in achieving the project's goals.

Dr Gayatri Senapoti, Nodal Officer of Snakebite, Dr Bijit Borah, Incharge SDM and HO, Puspanjali Saikia, Assistant Matron of Demow Model Hospital-cum-CHC and Somikshya Borboruah, president of Demow Anchalik Panchayat, also spoke on the occasion.

The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks by Sukanya Bhagawati, Project Technical Support III of the SARPA Assam Team.

Three-day Horticulture Fair kicks off at Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 23: The 26th Horticulture Fair commenced at Nagaon Swahid Bhavan on Friday. The fair was organised by the District unit of the Assam Horticulture Society in collaboration with the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Shillongani, the District Agriculture Department, Assam Agriculture University and Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nagaon.

Piyush Chandra Roy, president of the Nagaon District Horticulture Society, inaugurated the fair by unfurling the flag, while Devashish Sarma, Nagaon District Commissioner, opened it to the public in the afternoon. Local MLA Rupak Sarma attended the occasion as the chief guest and emphasised the significant role of horticulture in strengthening the economy and generating employment opportunities. Other dignitaries present included Ambika Mazumdar, Chairperson of Nagaon Municipal Board, officials from the concerned departments and Manjura Mohan Kalita, president of the Assam Horticulture Society. The fair will continue until January 25 and will be open to visitors in the afternoon.

Saraswati Puja celebrated in Demow schools and homes

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 23: Saraswati Puja was celebrated in educational institutions and homes across Demow and its surrounding areas on Friday. Devotees invoked the blessings of Goddess Saraswati to enhance learning and knowledge. Students offered prayers to the goddess and later, young boys and girls took to the streets in colourful attire, celebrating the occasion with enthusiasm. The pleasant weather added to the festive spirit. After the Puja concluded, prasads were distributed among the students in the educational institutions.

Patriotic events mark Parakram Diwas with tributes and cultural programmes

129th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose celebration

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: The 129th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was observed with great respect and patriotic spirit in Haflong with celebrations held across the country. The programme was organised by the Bangali Kalyan Parishad, Haflong in collaboration with the Bangali Parishad Assam, Dima Hasao District Committee.

The observance began with a motor rally through the main streets of Haflong with participants carrying portraits of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and raising patriotic slogans. Netaji's valour, nationalist zeal and monumental contribution to India's freedom struggle were remembered as a source of inspiration for generations.

The main programme was attended by Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC), Debolal Gorlosa, as the Chief Guest. Floral tributes were paid to the statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose located at Haflong Market. The CEM was accompanied by DHAC Chairman Mohet Hojai, MACs Ratan Jarambusa and Herojit Jidung, Dima Hasao BJP vice president Liton Chakraborty and other dignitaries.

Following the tribute, a meeting was held at the Cultural Institute Hall, Haflong. After the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, speakers deliberated on the life, ideals and struggles of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Addressing the gathering, CEM Debolal Gorlosa highlighted the significance of the day, emphasising Netaji's patriotism, bravery and sacrifices for the nation and urged the younger generation to draw inspiration from his life. The DHAC Chairman and other speakers also addressed the gathering, underlining the importance of Netaji Jayanti.

Netaji Jayanti, officially known as Parakram Diwas (Day of Valour) is observed annually on January 23 to commemorate the birth of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a towering figure in India's freedom movement. He played a pivotal role in the struggle for independence, served as the head of the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) and was the founder-head of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind.

In the evening, the celebrations concluded with the lighting of lamps at Netaji's statue, followed by a colourful patriotic cultural programme. Prominent local artists showcased their performances and a prize distribution ceremony was also held, adding vibrancy to the day-long observance.

Our Nagaon Correspondent adds: The 130th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was celebrated with great fervor in Nagaon on Friday. The event was organised by the Nagaon District Committee of the All Assam Linguistic

Minority Development Board in collaboration with the Nagaon Municipal Board.

Speaking as the chief guest, local MLA Rupak Sarma paid floral tribute to Netaji's statue and said Netaji was a national hero who fought against the mighty British Empire and inspired Indians to strive for freedom. Sarma highlighted Netaji's courage, patriotism and strong will, stating that his ideals would continue to inspire generations.

Similar celebrations were held at Chokitup Middle English School, where a function was organised by the Chokitup Youth Association. Senior scribe Kanak Hazarika emphasised Netaji's role in India's struggle for independence and his vision for a strong and self-respecting India.

The celebrations were also marked by the Sadou Asom Gramya Puthibhoral Santha and other organisations with various events including tree planting, cleanliness drives and cultural programmes.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary was celebrated with a range of events across Nagaon, reflecting his enduring legacy as a national hero and inspiration to Indians.

Also, a grand art competition was organised at the Sadhana Sanskritik Academy, Dhing, in association with My Bharat Kendra, Nagaon under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Govt of India.

The programme was graced by Amit Kuri, Junior Development Officer (Planning Service) under APSC, as the special guest. Speaking on the occasion, Kuri encouraged the students to embody the courage and vision of Netaji in their creative pursuits. The competition was judged by Debasish Bora, a noted art teacher, who praised the high level of creativity displayed by the students of Arogya Yoga Kendra and Sadhana Sanskritik Academy. The entire programme was efficiently coordinated by Rupjyoti Kar.

Page 4 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 17:37 Page 1

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.
- Milton Berle

Mayawati wants to revive BSP's dalit base

BSP supremo Mayawati has made it clear to all political parties as well as her voters that she is very keen to revive her party to stake claim to power in 2027 assembly polls. Fed up being sidelined and dubbed as B team of BJP for past many years, Mayawati now wants to play major role in forthcoming assembly polls. On her birthday on January 15, Mayawati made significant announcement that her party will contest elections on its own. She completely ruled the possibility of joining NDA or INDIA bloc. In order to revive the magic of 2007 when her party came on its own, Mayawati appealed to powerful community to join hands with her. While addressing party leaders Mayawati appealed for revival of old glory and capture the power in 2027. Mayawati is keen to revive the powerful combination of dalits, Muslims and Brahmin. Mayawati is aware of the disenchantment in Brahmin community feeling marginalised in present BJP government headed by a Thakur chief minister Yogi Adityanath. The frustration in Brahmin community came out in open when a group of MLAs held the meeting to discuss the issues of being marginalised. Brahmin community leaders complain that the community was not given adequate share in the governance whether in the government or in the administration by the BJP government where a Thakur is the chief minister.

With her nephew Akash Anand as national coordinator, Mayawati is focussing on strengthening the organisation to win the elections. BSP national president and four-time chief minister Mayawati has revived the bhaichara samiti at ground level to reach out to Brahmins, Muslims and backwards. In order to win over the support at the ground level Mayawati is now focussing on local issues and party workers have been directed to sensitise people about their problems. Congress Party is looking towards Priyanka Gandhi for the revival of the party for 2027 assembly polls. Party leaders want bigger role for Priyanka Gandhi in UP. That is why party launched a 100 day program on January 12 birthday of Priyanka Gandhi to take up various issues to strengthen the organization and reach to people at ground level.

Congress is organising series of Samvidhan Samvad Mahapanchayats all over the state to tell people that the role of the Constitution is being undermined by the BJP government. The first Mahapanchayat will be held in Sitapur.The party has also decided to up the issue of MANREGA which promised jobs in rural India stated by UPA government now undermined by BJP government. Congress will launched save MANREGA campaign all over the state. As a part of 100-day program all MPs and MLS and other senior leaders have been directed to hold meeting, rallies and corner meetings to target failure of Central and state governments. Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka will also attend various programs in selected district including Samvidhan Samvad Panchayats and other programs to reach out to backward communities.

Global supply chains enter era of structural volatility, says WEF report

By Satyaki Chakraborty

Global value chains have entered an era of structural volatility, according to a World Economic Forum report released today, forcing companies and governments to reevaluate how and where they invest and produce. The report finds that nearly three in four business leaders now prioritize resilience investments, with 74% viewing resilience as a driver of growth.

Set against a backdrop of geopolitical fragmentation, accelerating technological change and mounting resource constraints, the new report – Global Value Chains Outlook 2026: Orchestrating Corporate and National Agility – developed in collaboration with Kearney, examines how companies and governments can remain competitive as disruption becomes a permanent feature rather than a cyclical shock. "Volatility is no longer a temporary disruption; it is a structural condition leaders must plan for," said Kiva Allgood, Managing Director, World Economic Forum. "Competitive advantage now comes from foresight, optionality and ecosystem coordination. Companies and countries that build these capabilities together will be best positioned to attract investment, secure supply and sustain growth in an increasingly fragmented global economy."

The scale of the shift is already evident. In 2025 alone, tariff escalations between major economies reshuffled more than $400 billion in global trade flows, while disruptions across major shipping routes pushed container shipping costs up 40% year on year, signalling a decisive move away from short-term shocks towards enduring uncertainty. At the same time, manufacturing output across advanced economies is growing at its weakest pace since 2009, while more than 3,000 new trade and industrial policy measures were introduced globally in 2025 alone – more than three times the annual level recorded a decade ago. Together, these forces underscore why supply chain resilience has become a central determinant of national competitiveness and corporate strategy.

A central feature of the report is the launch of the Manufacturing and Supply Chain Readiness Navigator, a new digital tool that translates these insights into actionable intelligence. Drawing on leading global indices, the Navigator supports strategic decision-making on industrial policy and manufacturing footprint design. Governments can use it to diagnose competitiveness gaps and prioritize reforms, while companies can assess infrastructure readiness and ecosystem maturity when making location and investment decisions.

The report also highlights how targeted national approaches are already shaping manufacturing competitiveness. In Ireland, enterprise-led upskilling through Skillnet Ireland links government, business and educators to deliver subsidized training aligned with industry needs. In China, large-scale investment in digital infrastructure under the New Infrastructure initiative has enabled real-time industrial connectivity through widespread 5G deployment. In Qatar, a national dashboard tracking essential food items in real time strengthens supply security by enabling early intervention, buffer stocks and rapid, data-driven responses to disruption.

"Supply chain disruption in 2026 will be constant and structural. Geopolitical fragmentation, shifting trade rules and labour shortages are all redefining how value is created and moved," said Per Kristian Hong, Partner, Kearney. "For supply leaders, the priority is no longer forecasting disruption, but redesigning operating models to function under permanent uncertainty. That means moving away from efficiency-driven supply chains and towards adaptive networks that can be reconfigured with optionality as conditions change." (IPA Service)

The commercial prospects of Assam as the gateway to Northeast India

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

A close look at the map of Assam makes one thing strikingly clear: this landmass serves as the most strategically important economic corridor or trade route for the entire Southeast Asia, with no alternative currently available to India. The phrase "gateway to Northeast India" has been heard since childhood, but its true economic significance often remains hidden behind emotional rhetoric and political slogans. In reality, this concept of being a gateway forms the backbone of Assam's economy and the foundation of its future prosperity. After the narrow Siliguri Corridor or "Chicken's Neck," Assam's location connects the mainland of India to the other six northeastern states—Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya—establishing the state as the unspoken guardian of the entire region and its only reliable transit point or transportation hub. In today's global economy, where supply chain management has gained greater importance than mere production, this geographical advantage places Assam at the threshold of immense commercial potential.

Virtually every essential commodity required in the northeastern market—from rice and pulses to luxury cars and cement for house construction—must pass through Assam's territory. This transit opportunity turns Assam not merely into a revenue collection center but offers a rare chance to transform it into a logistics hub, warehouse, and distribution center for the whole region. The question, however, is whether we have merely used this geographical advantage as a slogan or have truly succeeded in deriving economic benefits from it. If we remain only gatekeepers at the door, there will be no gain for us; our benefit will come only when we become participants in the trade of every item passing through that door.

In recent years, revolutionary changes have occurred in Assam's infrastructure sector, particularly with the construction of new bridges over the Brahmaputra and the expansion of four-lane national highways, giving the idea of commercial potential a new dimension and paving the way to transform Assam into a modern economic powerhouse. Bridges such as the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge, Bogibeel Bridge, Kaliabhomora Setu, and the new parallel bridge to Saraighat should not be viewed merely as transportation facilities; they are actually economic arteries that are converting Assam into a "high-speed economic zone" or fast-paced economic domain in the Northeast. Goods that once took three or four days to reach the easternmost parts of Arunachal Pradesh or interior areas of Nagaland from Guwahati now reach their destinations within 24 hours due to improved road transport. As a result, transportation costs for businesses have decreased, and the risk of goods spoilage has diminished. This transformation has made Assam an attractive destination for the country's leading logistics companies, as evidenced by the massive warehouses emerging in areas like Amingaon, Changsari, or Borjhar. Companies such as Flipkart, Amazon, and major FMCG firms have now realized that establishing a central distribution hub in Assam is far more profitable than dispatching goods from Kolkata to capture the northeastern market. The construction of India's first multimodal logistics park at Jogighopa is a landmark step that will connect rail, waterways, and roadways at a single point, turning Assam not only into a trade center for India but also for Bhutan and Bangladesh. If this infrastructure is utilized effectively, Assam has the full potential to evolve from a mere transportation route into a major commercial gateway in South Asia.

The relevance of the "Act East Policy" should no longer be confined to diplomatic discussions or government files; the time has come to analyze it from a business perspective, as this policy recognizes Assam as the doorway to Southeast Asia. Assam is the only Indian state (with Arunachal and Manipur also playing roles, though Assam remains the central hub) that can establish direct land connectivity with rapidly growing economies such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Once the Asian Highway or international roadways are fully constructed, it will become possible to drive from Guwahati to Bangkok, creating unprecedented opportunities in trade. However, a major caution is necessary here—opening roads alone does not guarantee trade; trade requires produced goods. If we are not careful, these international routes could become a curse, as cheap products from China or Thailand might flood our markets and overwhelm local industries. Therefore, to leverage the gateway advantage, roads alone are not enough; what is needed is a strong "export-oriented mindset." Success will depend on how we can upgrade our produced tea, organic agricultural products, eri-muga silk fabrics, or food items to international standards and sell them in markets like Bangkok or Yangon. Assam must not remain merely a route for importing others' goods; it must become a route for exporting our own goods. Only then will the true benefits of the Act East Policy reach the common people of Assam. For this policy to succeed, Assam's young entrepreneurs must learn the language and rules of international trade and develop a mindset capable of competing in the global market.

Looking at Assam's economic history, it becomes evident that since the British era, this region has been treated merely as a source of raw materials—whether crude oil, coal, or tea leaves. To a large extent, this colonial economic structure persists today, where our resources are sent out, processed elsewhere, and returned packaged at ten times the price to our own markets. To maximize commercial potential, this old cycle must be broken, and emphasis must be placed on "value addition" or value-added industries. For example, Assam produces abundant bamboo, yet we still use it primarily as raw material or for paper pulp. However, with modern methods, bamboo can produce flooring tiles, fabrics, and even ethanol—products with demand worth billions in the global market. Similarly, if we establish large-scale food processing industries in Assam for the region's abundant fruits such as pineapple, orange, lemon, or chili, we could export juice, jam, jelly, pickles, or sauces not only across India but also to neighboring countries. The expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery and new bio-refinery projects in Assam are positive steps in this direction, but they are not sufficient. Our goal must be to create an industrial environment where "Made in Assam" becomes not just a government slogan but a powerful market brand. When Assam's raw materials are processed within the state, fully packaged, and sent to markets, only then will the economic benefits reach the local people, providing a permanent solution to unemployment.

The tourism industry is another strong pillar of Assam's commercial potential, yet unfortunately, we have confined it largely to viewing rhinos in Kaziranga and visiting Kamakhya Temple. Twenty-first-century tourism means not just sightseeing but a massive service industry. By leveraging Assam as the gateway to Northeast India, we can develop it into a center for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism. Given Guwahati's superior communication and infrastructure compared to other states, there is immense potential to host national and international conferences, trade fairs, or corporate meetings here. In addition, Assam holds bright prospects in medical tourism. The numerous super-specialty hospitals now established in Guwahati attract not only patients from Assam but also from Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. When a patient arrives from outside, accompanying family members stay in hotels, hire vehicles, shop, and thereby increase cash flow in sectors not directly related to tourism. Similarly, if we develop cruise tourism or river tourism centered on the Brahmaputra River on the model of Europe's Danube or Rhine rivers, it could attract wealthy tourists from around the world. Tourism should not be viewed merely as entertainment but as an "exportable service." Only then can genuine commercial gains be derived from it.

Of course, several real and formidable challenges lie in the path of Assam's bright commercial potential, which cannot be denied. The foremost among them is the annual problem of floods and erosion, which destroys our hard-earned infrastructure every year and deters external investors. Before any major industrialist invests crores in Assam, they think ten times whether roads to their industry will remain blocked during the monsoon months or whether their factory will submerge underwater. This uncertainty slows the pace of Assam's industrial development. In addition, legal complexities in land acquisition, a culture of protests or movements (though significantly reduced nowadays, old perceptions linger in investors' minds), and bureaucratic sluggishness all spoil the business environment. To create an "Ease of Doing Business" environment, the government must eliminate corruption and delays at every level—from obtaining land pattas to electricity connections—not just open online portals. Ensuring uninterrupted power supply is another crucial condition, as no modern industry can profit while relying on generators. To truly make Assam a gateway, permanent and scientific solutions to these foundational problems are essential; otherwise, we will continue discussing potential without achieving anything in reality.

The most important factor determining Assam's commercial future is its human resource or the skills of the new generation. No matter how many grand highways or bridges we build, if modern-minded entrepreneurs capable of using them for business are not created in our society, all these infrastructure benefits will be reaped by outsiders. In today's digital age, the definition of business has changed; it is now possible to sit in Guwahati and sell goods in London or New York. Building a skilled youth force proficient in e-commerce, digital marketing, logistics management, and the rules of international trade is the greatest need of the present time. Our education system still fosters only a job-oriented mindset, where after obtaining degrees, boys and girls frantically search only for government jobs. Without changing this mindset, Assam can never become a business center. The government and society together must create an environment where starting a "start-up" or new business is considered more respectable than holding a job. Our youth must realize that the smartphone in their hands is not merely an entertainment device but brings the entire world market within their reach. When our boys and girls can produce, brand, manage logistics themselves, and place Assam's goods at the world's doorstep, only then will the name "gateway" become meaningful for Assam.

In conclusion, Assam's commercial potential as the gateway to Northeast India is limitless, but transforming this potential into reality requires dispassionate planning, hard work, and a visionary outlook. The geographical position provides us with a divine gift, but making proper use of that gift is our own responsibility. The current central and state government policies are business-friendly, but their effective implementation at the grassroots level requires public cooperation and awareness. Instead of remaining merely a market, we must elevate ourselves to a productive and exporting state. By maintaining good relations with neighboring countries, strengthening our infrastructure, and properly developing human resources, Assam can certainly emerge as a major economic power in South and Southeast Asia. Times have changed, and this is the most opportune moment for the Assamese nation to advance toward economic self-reliance in step with these changing times. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Growth at the crossroads of fiscal discipline

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Assam Budget for the financial year 2025–26, presented by Finance Minister Ajanta Neog on March 10, 2025, arrives at a critical juncture for the state's economy, marked by strong growth impulses alongside persistent fiscal pressures. With the Gross State Domestic Product at current prices projected at ₹ 7,41,626 crore, reflecting a robust growth rate of 15 percent over 2024–25, the budget seeks to consolidate recent economic momentum while gradually restoring fiscal discipline after a year of significant slippages. The overall framework of the budget reveals an attempt to strike a careful balance between social welfare commitments, developmental spending, and adherence to fiscal responsibility norms mandated under the Assam Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2005.

Assam's recent economic performance provides the macroeconomic backdrop to the budget. In 2023–24, the state's GSDP at constant prices grew by an impressive 13.3 percent, notably higher than India's GDP growth of 9.2 percent in the same year. Sectoral trends, however, indicate uneven growth dynamics. Agriculture recorded a sharp rebound with a growth rate of 17 percent in 2023–24 compared to 6.9 percent in the previous year, reaffirming its central role in the state economy where it contributes 35 percent of GSDP at current prices. The services sector emerged as the primary growth engine with a striking expansion of 24.3 percent, accounting for 46 percent of the economy, while manufacturing contracted by 6.4 percent after registering double-digit growth in 2022–23. Per capita GSDP rose to ₹1,58,807 in 2023–24, a 19 percent increase over the previous year, though it continues to lag behind the national average of ₹ 2,15,935, underscoring structural challenges in income convergence.

On the fiscal front, the budget estimates total expenditure excluding debt repayment at ₹ 1,46,642 crore in 2025–26, representing a decline of 3 percent from the revised estimates of 2024–25. This moderation follows a sharp expansion in spending during the previous year, when revised expenditure reached ₹ 1,51,481 crore. In addition to this, the state plans to repay debt worth ₹ 9,343 crore. Receipts excluding borrowings are projected at ₹ 1,19,244 crore, a modest increase of 4 percent over the revised estimates of the previous year. The state targets a revenue balance with neither surplus nor deficit, a significant improvement from the revenue deficit of 0.8 percent of GSDP, amounting to ₹ 5,368 crore, recorded in 2024–25 at the revised stage. Despite this improvement, the fiscal deficit for 2025–26 is pegged at 3.7 percent of GSDP or ₹ 27,398 crore, higher than the 3.5 percent threshold set for states, though partially justified by provisions allowing additional borrowing for power sector reforms.

The composition of expenditure reveals both continuity and adjustment in spending priorities. Revenue expenditure

is estimated at ₹ 1,17,226 crore, almost unchanged from the previous year, reflecting the rigidity imposed by committed expenditures such as salaries, pensions, and interest payments. Capital outlay, which signifies investment in asset creation, is budgeted at ₹ 29,364 crore, a decline of 13 percent from the revised estimates of 2024–25, when capital spending had surged sharply. In the previous year, sectors such as urban development, energy, and health witnessed substantial increases in capital outlay, indicating a front-loading of infrastructure investments. Loans and advances by the state are projected at ₹52 crore in 2025–26, significantly higher than the revised estimates of the preceding year, though they remain a relatively small component of overall expenditure.

A critical constraint on fiscal flexibility arises from the growing burden of committed expenditure. In 2025–26, Assam is expected to spend ₹ 72,065 crore on salaries, pensions, and interest payments, accounting for 61 percent of its revenue receipts. Salaries alone constitute 34 percent of revenue receipts, pensions 18 percent, and interest payments 9 percent. This represents a marginal improvement from 2023–24, when committed expenditure absorbed 66 percent of revenue receipts, yet the underlying trend remains concerning. Interest payments have risen sharply from ₹ 3,205 crore in 2017–18 to ₹ 8,139 crore in 2023–24, growing at an annualised rate of 17 percent, outpacing the growth of revenue expenditure. The Comptroller and Auditor General has cautioned that the rapid accumulation of public debt, which grew at an annualised rate of 20 percent during the same period, will intensify pressure on future budgets.

Sector-wise allocations in the 2025–26 budget reflect a mix of expansion and rationalisation. Education, sports, arts, and culture receive ₹ 26,156 crore, accounting for nearly 18 percent of total sectoral expenditure, higher than the national average allocation by states. Significant funds are earmarked for government primary schools and assistance to non-government secondary schools. Social welfare and nutrition receive ₹ 13,482 crore, with the Orunodoi scheme alone allocated ₹ 5,000 crore and child welfare ₹ 2,238 crore, reinforcing the state's emphasis on direct benefit support. Transport expenditure declines to ₹ 11,509 crore, though capital outlay on roads and bridges remains substantial at ₹ 9,703 crore. Health and family welfare see a reduction to ₹ 8,902 crore, with allocations for rural and urban allopathic health services forming a major share. Notably, water supply and sanitation witness a dramatic increase to ₹ 5,378 crore, reflecting heightened focus on infrastructure in this critical sector, while rural development spending contracts sharply to ₹ 4,962 crore.

On the revenue side, total revenue receipts are estimated at ₹ 1,17,226 crore in 2025–26, with the state's own resources contributing 37 percent and transfers from the centre accounting for the remaining 63 percent. The state's share in central taxes is projected at ₹ 44,494 crore, an increase of 11 percent over the previous year's revised estimates, while grants from the centre are estimated at ₹ 29,548 crore. Assam's own tax revenue is expected to reach ₹ 34,823 crore, growing by only 2 percent, and declining as a share of GSDP to 4.7 percent, compared to 5.3 percent in 2024–25. State GST remains the largest contributor, followed by sales tax or VAT and state excise. While revenue from taxes on vehicles is projected to rebound strongly, collections from stamps duty and registration fees are expected to decline significantly.

The budget also outlines several policy initiatives aimed at inclusive growth. The Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan seeks to empower self-help groups by providing ₹ 10,000 as seed capital and facilitating subsidised bank-linked loans of ₹ 25,000 upon utilisation. The Chief Minister's Jibon Prerna scheme offers monthly financial assistance of ₹ 2,500 for up to one year to graduates from government institutions, along with a one-time grant of ₹ 25,000 for research scholars. Food security measures under the National Food Security Act include subsidised provision of masur dal, sugar, and salt, backed by an allocation of Rs 370 crore, highlighting continued attention to basic welfare needs.

From a medium-term perspective, the budget's success will depend on Assam's ability to sustain economic growth while gradually reducing fiscal vulnerabilities. Outstanding debt is estimated at 25.7 percent of GSDP in 2025–26, marginally higher than the previous year, and contingent liabilities in the form of government guarantees add further risk. While the achievement of a zero revenue balance marks an important milestone, the persistence of a relatively high fiscal deficit and the dominance of committed expenditure underscore the need for structural reforms in revenue mobilisation and expenditure efficiency. The Assam Budget 2025–26 thus represents a cautious step towards fiscal consolidation, anchored in a growth-oriented vision but constrained by legacy challenges that will require sustained policy attention in the years ahead. ***(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)***

Page 5 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 17:19 Page 1

Daughters of tomorrow: Honoring National Girl Child Day

By: Satyabrat Borah

National Girl Child Day is observed every year on January 24 in India, a dedicated occasion that highlights the value, rights, and potential of girls while addressing the persistent challenges they face in society. Initiated in 2008 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development under the Government of India, this day emerged as a response to deep-rooted gender inequalities that have long affected the lives of female children across the country. The primary aim was to generate widespread awareness about the disparities girls encounter from birth through adolescence and into adulthood, including issues related to education, health, nutrition, safety, and equal opportunities. Over the years, it has evolved into a platform for advocacy, celebration, and policy reinforcement, reminding the nation that investing in girls is essential for social progress, economic growth, and sustainable development.

The origins of National Girl Child Day trace back to a period when India grappled with alarming demographic trends, particularly the declining child sex ratio. Census data from previous decades revealed a worrying preference for sons in many communities, leading to practices such as female foeticide and infanticide that skewed the natural balance of genders. By launching this observance in 2008, the government sought to counter these harmful attitudes through sustained public campaigns and community engagement. The date of January 24 was chosen deliberately, though no specific historical event ties directly to it in the context of girls' rights, it has become a symbolic marker for renewed commitment each year. Since its inception, the day has aligned with broader national efforts to promote gender equality, often coinciding with initiatives that emphasize the slogan "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," meaning Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child. This campaign, launched in 2015, built upon the foundation laid by National Girl Child Day and intensified focus on multi-sectoral actions to improve the survival, protection, and empowerment of girls.

The significance of this day lies in its role as a catalyst for change in a society where girls have historically been undervalued in comparison to boys. In many parts of India, cultural norms rooted in patriarchal traditions have perpetuated discrimination, viewing daughters as economic burdens rather than assets. Such mindsets have contributed to practices like unequal access to food and healthcare within families, limited educational opportunities, and early marriage. National Girl Child Day serves as an annual reminder that girls possess the same inherent worth as boys and that their well-being directly impacts the nation's future. When girls are educated and healthy, they grow into empowered women who contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and the economy. Studies have consistently shown that educated women tend to have smaller families, better health outcomes for their children, and higher participation in the workforce, creating a positive ripple effect across generations.

One of the most critical areas highlighted on this day is education, which remains a powerful tool for breaking cycles of disadvantage. Despite notable improvements in recent decades, disparities persist, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. Enrollment rates for girls have risen significantly at primary and secondary levels, yet retention and completion rates continue to lag due to factors such as household responsibilities, distance to schools, safety concerns, and societal pressures. Programs aimed at providing scholarships, free textbooks, uniforms, and midday meals have helped increase participation, but challenges like child marriage and adolescent pregnancies often interrupt schooling. On National Girl Child Day, schools, NGOs, and government bodies organize events such as essay competitions, rallies, seminars, and cultural programs to inspire girls to pursue learning and to encourage parents to prioritize their daughters' education. These activities foster a sense of pride and possibility among young girls, showing them role models from diverse fields who have overcome barriers through determination and support.

Health and nutrition form another cornerstone of the day's focus. Girls in India often face nutritional deficiencies that begin in childhood and worsen during adolescence, affecting physical growth, cognitive development, and reproductive health later in life. Anemia, stunting, and underweight conditions remain prevalent in many areas, exacerbated by cultural preferences that allocate better food portions to boys. National Girl Child Day campaigns emphasize the need for balanced diets, regular health check-ups, and access to sanitary products, which are crucial for maintaining dignity and preventing school dropouts during menstruation. Government schemes like the Integrated Child Development Services provide supplementary nutrition and health monitoring for young children, including girls, while awareness drives on this day push for behavioral changes at the family level to ensure equitable care.

Child marriage continues to pose a severe threat to girls' futures, robbing them of childhood, education, and autonomy. Although prevalence has declined substantially over the past two decades, millions of girls still enter marriage before the legal age of 18. Rural areas and states with lower socioeconomic indicators report higher rates, where poverty, lack of education, and traditional beliefs drive families to marry daughters early, often to reduce financial burdens or secure alliances. The consequences are profound, including higher risks of domestic violence, early pregnancies with complications, and limited economic independence. National Girl Child Day serves as a platform to advocate for stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage, community interventions to delay unions, and empowerment through skill-building and vocational training. Celebrations frequently include pledges from community leaders and youth to end this practice, reinforcing collective responsibility.

Safety and protection against violence are equally vital themes. Girls face risks ranging from domestic abuse and sexual harassment to trafficking and online exploitation. The day promotes discussions on creating safe environments in homes, schools, and public spaces, alongside legal awareness about rights and helplines. Initiatives like self-defense workshops and gender-sensitivity training for boys help build a culture of respect and equality from an early age.

Over time, National Girl Child Day has witnessed evolving themes that reflect contemporary priorities. While specific themes vary annually, they consistently revolve around empowerment, brighter futures, and inclusive growth. Recent years have emphasized digital inclusion, leadership roles, and resilience in the face of global challenges. These themes guide events organized by ministries, state governments, and civil society, ranging from policy dialogues to grassroots rallies. Media campaigns amplify messages through television, radio, and social platforms, reaching millions and shifting public perceptions.

Government schemes play a pivotal role in translating the day's spirit into tangible outcomes. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative remains central, focusing on awareness generation, multi-sectoral actions, and monitoring of key indicators like sex ratio and school enrollment. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana encourages savings for girls' education and marriage, while schemes for maternal and child health ensure better prenatal and postnatal care. Conditional cash transfers and incentives for families that educate daughters further support long-term change. These programs demonstrate a commitment to systemic support, complementing the symbolic importance of January 24.

Progress in recent years offers reasons for optimism. The child sex ratio has shown improvement in several regions, reflecting reduced son preference due to legal enforcement and awareness. Literacy rates among females have climbed, and more girls are entering higher education and professional fields. Women now occupy prominent positions in politics, science, sports, business, and arts, serving as inspirations for younger generations. Yet gaps remain, with regional variations highlighting the need for targeted interventions in underserved areas.

National Girl Child Day reminds society that true equality requires ongoing effort. It calls upon families to nurture daughters with the same care as sons, communities to challenge discriminatory norms, and institutions to provide equitable resources. By celebrating girls' achievements and addressing their challenges, the day fosters a vision of an inclusive India where every girl can thrive without limitations imposed by gender.

As the nation observes this day each year, it renews its pledge to protect, educate, and empower its girls. The journey toward gender parity is far from complete, but the collective resolve demonstrated on January 24 provides hope and momentum. When girls are valued and supported, they become architects of a stronger, more just society, proving that empowering one half of the population uplifts the whole. Through continued advocacy, policy innovation, and cultural transformation, India moves closer to realizing the full potential of every girl child, ensuring that future generations inherit a world of equal opportunities and boundless possibilities.

Daughters of Bharat: Nari Jeevan Hai Teri Yahi Kahani .....

By: Er Prabhat Kishore

Increasing gender-based problems affect girls in every aspect of social and cultural environment. To grow into active, efficient and confident women, girls must be raised in an environment that provides them with respect, dignity and fair opportunities. But in Bharat, the deprivation and suffering caused by poverty for most girls is further aggravated by customs and beliefs. These beliefs often define the role of women and make them inferior to men.

The status of women in the society can be easily judged from the status of girls. It is a well-known fact that thousands of girls grow up in very difficult circumstances. Education is considered unnecessary for them; they remain unhealthy due to malnutrition and a large number of them die premature deaths. They have to do hard labour and are married at an early age. They live in a very discriminatory environment at the physical, mental and sexual levels. Education is the only panacea through which girls and women can initiate the process of social change. Education has the power to play such a mediating role that can eliminate gender discrimination and awaken sociality among girls and boys.

Childhood development is important

Keeping in mind the distortions caused due to gender discrimination in childhood, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) declared the year 1990 as the "Year of the Girl Child" and 1991-2000 as the "Decade of the Girl Child". The Government of India has also developed a national plan to improve the current status of girls and adolescent women. The most important development period for any person is childhood. The pace at which physical, mental, personal and social development occurs in childhood is not possible in the later years of life. The rapid development and flexibility of childhood also makes this period largely vulnerable. This neglected situation can also be affected by prejudice and neglect. As a result, the girl trapped in the cycle of deprivation throughout her life continues to sink and is unable to become a part of the mainstream of society. On the other hand, this feeling of tenderness provides a wonderful opportunity to eradicate deficiency from its roots. If the health, educational and social needs of girls are taken care of, the foundation of an educated progressive woman can be laid. UNICEF declared during the "Inter Regional Consultation on Girl Child" held in 1994 that the life-cycle perspective is the most progressive policy for women's development.

More than 1,20,00,000 girls are born every year in Bharat. About 25 per cent of these girls die before their fifteenth birthday and one third of them die in the first year of infancy. Age-specific mortality rates show that at every age level up to the age of 35, more women die than men. Girls are more likely to die than boys in Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Region, religion, caste and poverty affect mortality rates. The more vulnerable the position of

women, the higher will be the deaths at birth. A girl born in Uttar Pradesh can expect to live up to 54 years, while a girl born in Kerala is likely to live up to 74 years.

In most countries, the sex ratio is in favour of women, but in Bharat the sex ratio has been declining decade after decade. Except Kerala, the sex ratio remains pathetic in other states. In the 2001 census, the sex ratio (per thousand males) among the total population was 933, among the Scheduled Castes it was 922, and in the Scheduled Tribes it was 972. According to the 2011 census, the sex ratio in the total population is 940.

Table – 1 – Sex Ratio

Year	Females/1000 Males
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	927
2001	933
2011	940

Table-2 - Projected Infant Population (0-14 years, in thousands)

Year	Boys	Girls
1981	140321	131697
1986	148151	140415
1991	152784	144965
1996	157998	149670
2001	157606	149556
2011	194351	178093
2021	183695	166295

One of the main reasons for the skewed sex ratio is the large number of deaths at a very young age due to malnutrition. Levinson's study of malnourished children in Punjab in 1974 also revealed that there is gender-based bias in nutrition and health care. Stunted growth due to nutrition and undernutrition result in the body structure not developing fully in adulthood. In both cases, there is a possibility of having low birth weight babies. Malnourished girls grow up to become malnourished women and this cycle of malnutrition continues from generation to generation. Girls are breastfed for a shorter period of time than boys. Also, due to low purchasing power, girls are fed a low-calorie diet as well as fewer supplements and solid food.

According to a study, the number of malnourished girls is 2 to 3 times that of boys. In category 2 and 3 of Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai metropolises, malnutrition was higher among girls than boys. When there is a severe shortage of food grains, it has a more negative impact on the situation of girls.

According to the "All India Market Survey" conducted in 21 states and union territories in 1990, there is no gender difference in terms of diseases, but inequalities are clearly visible in their duration and care. Girls are Also discriminated against within family across demographic group. Fewer girls are found in state health centre in most of the states of the country and less money is spent on their health. Across all classes of families, girls are treated by less qualified doctors than boys. This difference is more prominent in Odisha, Haryana and Punjab. According to the Khanna study, the first son and the first daughter have equal chances of survival. Mothers in the age group of 15 to 29 have a 70 percent chance of their second or third daughter dying before the age of 5.

Girl literacy is an indicator of social development

Girl literacy is an important indicator of social development. Female literacy has many beneficial effects on development. Universalization of primary education requires reducing the gap in participation between boys and girls. Although social prejudice against women will not be eliminated through the educational system alone, positive steps can be taken to raise their status through education. School is the only institution where girls acquire qualities like self-esteem, self-confidence, decision-making ability and skills.

However, after independence, there has been a gradual increase in enrolment of girls in schools. In 1950-51, this number was 54 lakh and 5 lakh respectively at primary and upper primary level, which increased to 500.81416 Lakh and 308.21906 Lakh respectively in 2024-25. The percentage of girls in total enrollment at the primary level (class 1 to 5) increased from 28.1 percent in 1950-51 to 47.98 percent in 2024-25, while at the upper primary level (class 6 to 8) it increased from 16.1 percent in 1950-51 to 48.39 percent in 2024-25. Gender Parity Index in terms of enrollment increased to 1.0 both at primary and upper primary level in 2024-25. In 1951, 91.14 percent of the female population aged seven years and above was illiterate, which decreased to 45.84 percent in 2001 and 34.54 percent in 2011, of which about two-thirds live in rural areas. The transition rate from class V (primary level) to class VI (upper primary level) is 89.2 percent among girls and 88.4 percent among boys. However, inequalities still persist. There is a considerable difference between the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) of boys and girls. The GER ratio is different in every state. In 2024-25, the average dropout rate at the primary level was 0.0 percent for girls and 0.8 percent for boys, while the retention rate was 92.4 percent with minimal gender difference. Rural girls have to leave studies earlier than urban girls. ***(The author is a technocrat and educationist)***

Time to open the closed doors of girl child development

By: Lalit Gargg

National Girl Child Day is observed to raise awareness about the rights, education, health and empowerment of girls, and to promote gender equality. Initiated in 2008, this day reflects a changing reality in which girls are increasingly excelling in education, sports and leadership. Yet, challenges such as child marriage, female foeticide and malnutrition continue to persist. Through legal measures and initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, sustained efforts are being made to eliminate these social evils so that girls may emerge as symbols of pride and progress for society. The core objective of National Girl Child Day is to spread awareness about girls' rights, reduce gender discrimination, and emphasize the importance of education, health and nutrition. Today, girls are advancing in fields such as science, technology, defence and leadership, reflecting a gradual but meaningful shift in societal attitudes. Legal provisions including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, the POCSO Act, and government schemes such as Mission Vatsalya and PM CARES for Children are actively working toward the welfare of girls.

Despite these efforts, girls continue to face exploitation and discrimination. Although the child sex ratio has shown improvement, harmful practices like child marriage and female foeticide have not been completely eradicated. Nutritional challenges such as anaemia and underweight conditions among girls remain serious concerns. There is an urgent need to dismantle patriarchal mindsets and ensure equal opportunities for girls.In the Amrit Kaal of independence, India is reshaping itself with renewed confidence, aspirations and resolve. If there is one strongest foundation of this transforming nation, it is the girl child. National Girl Child Day offers an opportunity for introspection—to assess the condition of our girls, the direction they are moving in, and the kind of future society is creating for them. The fundamental question remains: are we truly building an India where a girl child is not seen as a burden at birth, but as a creator of the nation's future? Only when the combined strength of men and women works in harmony can a truly new India be realized.

Over the past few decades, there has been remarkable progress in the status of girls. Their participation in education has increased significantly, and girls and women have achieved extraordinary milestones in sports, science, administration, politics and entrepreneurship. Today, even daughters from rural India are making their mark in space science, startups, the armed forces and civil services. This transformation signals that in the Amrit Kaal, women and girls will not merely be participants, but leaders—becoming the driving force that will elevate the nation to its highest potential.However, alongside this hopeful picture lies a harsh reality that cannot be ignored. Crimes against girls and women—including sexual violence, domestic abuse, child marriage and cyber harassment—continue to challenge the conscience of society. Incidents of rape and violence are not merely failures of law and order; they reflect a deep collapse of our collective mindset. When a girl's safety cannot be ensured at home, in school, on the streets or in the digital world, claims of development remain incomplete and hollow.

The vision of a New India—developed, equitable and inclusive—places women's power, especially the empowerment of girls, at its very core under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His approach goes beyond welfare schemes to call for a transformation of social attitudes. Initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao have helped shift perceptions, encouraging society to view girls not as liabilities but as national assets. Programs focusing on education, health, nutrition, sanitation, digital empowerment and safety have opened new avenues of opportunity for girls.The Prime Minister's message is unequivocal: until girls are educated, secure and self-reliant, the dream of a developed India will remain unfulfilled. His broader vision recognizes girls not merely as individuals to be protected, but as active contributors to leadership, innovation and nation-building. This is why today's girls are confidently advancing in science, sports, governance and entrepreneurship—signaling the emergence of a balanced, equitable and empowered India led by Nari Shakti.

The root of the problem is not only the criminal, but the mindset that perceives girls as weak, dependent and submissive. This thinking originates within families and extends into society and institutions. Even today, discrimination between sons and daughters is evident in the distribution of resources, opportunities and freedom. Girls are taught silence in the name of "values," while boys are granted entitlement and autonomy. This unequal social conditioning eventually gives rise to violence and exploitation.What is needed today is a new social perspective—one that focuses not merely on reacting after crimes occur, but on preventing them before they happen. Society must recognize that atrocities against women are not women's issues alone; they represent a moral failure of the entire community. Strict laws are necessary, but far more essential is a transformation in social consciousness. As long as questions are directed at the victim—about her clothing, her timing, her freedom—the confidence of perpetrators will remain intact.

At the same time, girls and women must also reshape their own thinking. Self-reliance is not only economic, but mental and intellectual. Education must aim beyond degrees, fostering self-confidence, self-respect and decision-making ability. Girls must be empowered to recognize their rights, raise their voices against injustice and never consider themselves inferior in any form. The need of the hour is to raise girls who are not merely "tolerant," but alert, aware and empowered. Governance and administration play a decisive role in this transformation. Policies will be effective only when they reach the grassroots and are implemented with sensitivity. Gender sensitization must be mandatory across policing, judiciary, education and healthcare systems. Fast-track justice, survivor-centric procedures and psychological counseling must move beyond policy documents and become lived realities. In the digital age, specialized strategies are also required to address cyber safety and online harassment.

Equally important is the role of men and boys. Gender equality is not solely a women's responsibility. Boys must be taught respect, coexistence and equality from an early age. True balance will emerge only when men see themselves not as "protectors," but as partners. Patriarchy will weaken only when both fathers and mothers equally believe in the capabilities and potential of their daughters.The vision of a "developed nation" in the Amrit Kaal cannot be realized if half of its population continues to live in fear, discrimination and insecurity. The girl child is not merely a citizen of the future—she is a builder of the present. Investment in her education, safety and empowerment is the nation's greatest capital. When a girl is secure, educated and confident, she does not just transform her own life—she shapes the future of generations.

On National Girl Child Day 2026, it is imperative that we move beyond slogans and ceremonial observances. Real change must begin in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities. Our mindset must shift—girls do not need pity or protection alone; they deserve respect and equal opportunity. When society, governance and girls themselves collectively shoulder the responsibility of transformation, the girl child of Amrit Kaal will undoubtedly stand at the highest peak of the nation—not as a symbol, but as a decisive force of strength, wisdom and future-shaping leadership. ***(The author is a Journalist&Columnist who can be reached at lalitgarg11@gmail.com)***

Page 6 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 20:13 Page 1

More than 26,800 people have been detained in a widening arrest campaign

Death toll in Iran protest crackdown is reportedly at 5,002 as Trump says US 'armada' approaching

DUBAI, Jan 23: The death toll from Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests reached at least 5,002 people killed Friday, activists said, warning many more still were feared dead as the most-comprehensive internet blackout in the country's history crossed the two-week mark.

The challenge in getting information out of Iran persists due to authorities cutting off access to the world through the internet on Jan. 8, even as tensions rise between the United States and Iran as an American aircraft carrier group moves closer to the Middle East — a force US President Donald Trump likened to an "armada" in comments to journalists late Thursday.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency offered the death toll, saying 4,716 were demonstrators, 203 were government-affiliated, 43 were children and 40 were civilians not taking part in the protests. It added that more than 26,800 people had been detained in a widening arrest campaign by authorities.

The agency's figures have been accurate in previous rounds of unrest in Iran and rely on a network of activists in Iran to verify deaths. That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades, and recalls the chaos surrounding Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran's government offered its first death toll Wednesday, saying 3,117 people were killed. It added that 2,427 of the dead in the demonstrations that began Dec. 28 were civilians and security forces, with the rest being "terrorists." Iran's theocracy in the past has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll, in part due to authorities cutting access to the internet and blocking international calls into the country. Iran also reportedly has limited journalists' ability locally to report on the aftermath, instead repeatedly airing claims on state television that refer to demonstrators as "rioters" motivated by America and Israel, without offering evidence to support the allegation.

The new toll comes as tensions remain high over Trump laying down two red lines over the protests — the killing of peaceful demonstrators and Tehran conducting mass executions. Iran's attorney general and others have called some of those being held "mohareb" — or "enemies of God." That charge carries the death penalty. It had been used along with others to carry out mass executions in 1988 that reportedly killed at least 5,000 people

The US military meanwhile has moved more military assets toward the Mideast, including the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and associated warships traveling with it from the South China Sea.

A US Navy official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military movements, said Thursday that the Lincoln strike group is currently in the Indian Ocean.

Trump said Thursday aboard Air Force One that the US is moving the ships toward Iran "just in case" he wants to take action.

"We have a massive fleet heading in that direction and maybe we won't have to use it," Trump said.

Trump also mentioned the multiple rounds of talks American officials had with Iran over its nuclear program prior to Israel launching a 12-day war against the Islamic Republic in June, which saw US warplanes bomb Iranian nuclear sites. He threatened Iran with military action that would make earlier US strikes against its uranium enrichment sites "look like peanuts." "They should have made a deal before we hit them," Trump added. (AP)

Venezuela opens debate on an oil sector overhaul as Trump seeks role for US firms

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), Jan 23: Venezuela's legislature opened debate Thursday on a bill to loosen state control over the country's vast oil sector in the first major overhaul since the late socialist leader Hugo Chávez nationalised parts of the industry in 2007.

The legislation would create new opportunities for private companies to invest in the oil industry and establish international arbitration for investment disputes.

Following the US capture of former President Nicolás Maduro earlier this month, the Trump administration has ramped up pressure on acting President Delcy Rodríguez and other allies of the ousted leader to invite greater investment from US energy companies in Venezuela's flagging oil industry. A draft of the proposed legislation, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press, represents a sharp turn away from the resource nationalism of Chávez, who accused multinationals of colonial exploitation and considered the country's oil wealth to be state property.

In apparent response to demands from US oil executives, the proposed legislation would allow private companies to independently operate oil fields, market their own crude output and collect the cash revenues despite remaining, on paper, minority partners to the state oil company.

"The operating company shall assume the comprehensive management of the execution of the activities, at its sole cost, expense and risk," the draft says, adding that portions of production volumes "may be directly commercialised by the operating company, once governmental obligations have been fulfilled."

Crucially, the bill also would let companies settle legal disputes through arbitration in international courts rather than only local courts.

The legislation also would keep the current 30 per cent royalty rate, but let the government cut royalties and taxes to as low as 15 per cent for expensive or hard-to-develop oil projects, so that companies would be more willing to invest. The president of Venezuela's National Assembly and the acting president's brother, Jorge Rodríguez, told lawmakers at the start of Thursday's debate that the bill aims to "allow an accelerated increase in production" of oil in Venezuela.

"Oil under the ground is useless," he said, referring to the need to boost oil production and open up new exploration opportunities.

Pushed by Delcy Rodríguez, the bill is expected to advance swiftly through the ruling party-dominated legislature. Lawmakers concluded the initial discussion of the bill on Thursday after around two hours and advanced the legislation to a second round of debate, yet to be scheduled.

During the session, Orlando Camacho, a lawmaker and head of Venezuela's national Fedeindustria business association, told the assembly that the bill would ensure that Venezuela's oil industry "remains the engine of the country."

The proposed legal guarantees — ensuring that foreign companies can bring claims against Venezuela before international bodies — are necessary to attract private investment, he said. Even as US President Donald Trump looks to lure American companies to reboot Venezuela's oil sector, many remain concerned about the financial and legal risks of pouring billions of dollars into the country.

Plenty of investors have been burned before, their assets seized as Chávez nationalised parts of Venezuela's lucrative oil industry in 2007. Firms like Exxon have been trying to get the Venezuelan government to compensate them for their billions of dollars in losses ever since, to no avail. The current political uncertainty also worries investors. There is no timeline for holding democratic elections in Venezuela after Maduro's ouster as Rodríguez, long Maduro's loyal second in command, seeks to consolidate control. (AP)

Pak's human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab, her husband arrested in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: Pakistan's prominent human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her husband, lawyer Hadi Ali Chattha, were arrested on Friday while they were en route to a court in Islamabad.

The couple was en route to appear in the Additional District and Sessions Court in the controversial tweets case, in which Judge Mohammad Afzal Majoka had issued arrest warrants on January 16.

Mazari-Hazir's mother, Dr Shireen Mazari, who was human rights minister in the government of Imran Khan, confirmed the arrest, saying that her daughter and son-in-law "have been arrested, put in separate cars, and taken away to unknown locations." "Fascism at its peak. Emasculated men in power must be so pleased with this achievement!" Mazari added in a post on X. Mazari also shared videos showing police vehicles trailing the lawyers' car, with officers stopping the vehicle and opening its doors. In a separate post, Mazari claimed that the police "used violence on the bar leaders, [including] breaking the windows of the car, etc". "Seems they (police) used violence on Imaan and Hadi also," Mazari alleged in another post. The couple spent two consecutive nights in the office of Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) President Wajid Ali Gilani to evade arrest.

Gilani, who was with Mazari-Hazir at the time of the arrest, claimed that the authorities had made a commitment that the couple would not be arrested when going to appear before the court. He also claimed that the police subjected the lawyers to violence and broke the vehicles' windows, forcing Mazari-Hazir and Hadi out of the car, adding that police officials also "pushed down (IHCBA) Secretary Manzoor Jajja" and also subjected him to violence. "The authorities should stop this oppression. If they do not, then the 2007 lawyers' movement will be launched again," Gilani asserted, as he warned of protest. (PTI)

Iranian prosecutor denies Trump's claim 800 prisoners were spared execution

DUBAI, Jan 23: Iran's top prosecutor on Friday called US President Donald Trump's repeated claims that he halted the hangings of 800 detained protesters there "completely false." Meanwhile, the overall death toll from a bloody crackdown on nationwide demonstrations rose to at least 5,002, activists said.

Activists fear many more are dead. They struggle to confirm information as the most comprehensive internet blackout in Iran's history has crossed the two-week mark.

Tensions remain high between the United States and Iran as an American aircraft carrier group moves closer to the Middle East, something Trump likened to an "armada" in comments to journalists late Thursday.

Analysts say a military buildup could give Trump the option to carry out strikes, though so far he's avoided that despite repeated warnings to Tehran. The mass execution of prisoners had been one of his red lines for military force — the other being the killing of peaceful demonstrators.

"While President Trump now appears to have backtracked, likely under pressure from regional leaders and cognizant that airstrikes alone would be insufficient to implode the regime, military assets continue to be moved into the region, indicating kinetic action may still happen," New York-based think tank the Soufan Centre said in an analysis on Friday.

Prosecutor denies Trump's claim

Trump has repeatedly said Iran halted the execution of 800 people detained in the protests, without elaborating on the source of the claim. On Friday, Iran's top prosecutor, Mohammad Movahedi, strongly denied that in comments carried by the judiciary's Mizan news agency.

"This claim is completely false; no such number exists, nor has the judiciary made any such decision," Movahedi said.

His remarks suggested Iran's Foreign Ministry, led by Abbas Araghchi, may have offered that figure to Trump. Araghchi has had a direct line to US envoy Steve Witkoff and conducted multiple rounds of negotiations over Iran's nuclear program with him.

"We have a separation of powers, the responsibilities of each institution are clearly defined, and we do not, under any circumstances, take instructions from foreign powers," Movahedi said.

Judiciary officials have called some of those being held "mohareb" — or "enemies of God." That charge carries the death penalty. It had been used along with others to carry out mass executions in 1988 that reportedly killed at least 5,000 people.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Javad Haji Ali Akbari, the Friday prayer leader in Tehran, mocked Trump as a "yellow-faced, yellow-haired and disgraced man" who is "like a dog that only barks."

"That foolish man has resorted to threatening the nation, especially over what he said about Iran's leader," the cleric said in comments aired by Iranian state radio. "If any harm were to occur, all your interests and bases in the region would become clear and precise targets of Iranian forces."

Iran's foreign ministry lashed out at a European Parliament resolution adopted Thursday, which slammed "repression and mass murders being perpetrated by the Iranian regime against protesters in Iran." The resolution called for the release of those detained and urged the European Council to designate Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which was key in putting down the nationwide protests, as a terrorist organisation.

The foreign ministry expressed "its strong revulsion at the insulting assertions" of the resolution. In a statement issued Friday, it stressed that "any illegal or interventionist decision or position concerning the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the country's security defenders will be met with reciprocal action by Iran, and responsibility for the consequences will rest with those who initiate such actions."

Death toll rises

The latest death toll was given by the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which reported that 4,716 of the dead were demonstrators, 203 were government-affiliated, 43 were children, and 40 were civilians not participating in the protests. It added that more than 26,800 people had been detained in a widening arrest campaign. The group's figures have been accurate in previous unrest in Iran and rely on a network of activists in Iran to verify deaths. That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades, and recalls the chaos surrounding Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran's government offered its first death toll on Wednesday, saying 3,117 people were killed. It added that 2,427 of the dead in the demonstrations that began Dec. 28 were civilians and security forces, with the rest being "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest. (AP)

Stable policy environment, reforms driving India's growth: CG in Shanghai

BEIJING, Jan 23: A stable policy environment and a predictable, reform-oriented investment climate have ensured India's emergence as the world's fastest-growing major economy in recent times, Consul General in Shanghai Pratik Mathur said on Friday.

Speaking at the 11th Edition of the Shanghai International Business Cooperation Forum, Mathur highlighted initiatives like Make in India and Digital India as important drivers of New Delhi's rise through the global rankings, the Consulate said in a post on X.

He spoke at length about the increasing global interest in the upcoming AI Impact Summit 2026, which India will host on February 19-20, focusing on the principles of 'People, Planet, and Progress'.

Mathur also spoke about India's Global South-oriented, people-centric, and inclusive AI policies, such as Bhashini, which have boosted the nation's ability to foster the world's largest startup ecosystem, with over 100,000 startups.

The government's Bhashini AI platform allows translation of text, numbers, voice, images, and videos in a secure cloud environment.

The consul general added that in the process, India also ensured growth of unicorns in fintech, deep-tech, green technology and other new and emerging sectors.

In the interactive Q&A session which followed with a full-house audience of 400-500 investors and partners, Mathur spoke on the systemic reforms being undertaken in India in a variety of sectors such as manufacturing, connectivity, taxation, and corporate governance.

He also talked about the liberalised foreign direct investment (FDI) norms allowing 100 per cent FDI in multiple sectors.

These, he said, have helped ensure a transparent, rules-based ecosystem for foreign investors.

At the forum, partners and collaborators stressed on multiple collaboration avenues for international partners.

"Areas of core interest for us include building resilient supply chains which will help to build #AtmanirbharBharat and ensure progress in the realisation of our dream of #ViksitBharat..." the post said. (PTI)

Vietnam's ruling Communist Party re-elects To Lam as general secretary

HANOI, Jan 23: Vietnam's To Lam was re-elected Friday as the general secretary of its ruling Communist Party.

The decision came at the conclusion of the National Party Congress, the country's most important political conclave.

No announcement was made about whether he will also become president. If To Lam were to get both positions, he would be the country's most powerful leader in decades, in a manner similar to that of Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

The Congress was framed by Vietnam's defining national question: whether the country can transform itself into a high-income economy by 2045. During the meeting, Vietnam set a target of average annual GDP growth of 10% or more from 2026 to 2030. (AP)

Syrian forces take control of prison housing IS members after Kurdish fighters evacuate

RAQQA (SYRIA), Jan 23: Syrian government forces took control on Friday of a prison housing members of the Islamic State group in the north of the country, after hundreds of Kurdish fighters evacuated from the area as part of a recent deal.

Syria's Interior Ministry said in a statement that the government's prisons authority is now in charge of al-Aqtan prison north of the northern city of Raqqa, and the files of the detainees are being reviewed.

Al-Aqtan prison is the second jail to come under government control after troops entered Shaddadeh prison on Monday near the border with Iraq, from where 120 IS detainees managed to flee amid the chaos. Most of them have been recaptured, state media said.

The move into al-Aqtan prison comes two days after the US military said that it has started transferring some of the 9,000 IS detainees held in more than a dozen detention centers in northeast Syria controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, in northeast Syria.

The SDF was the main force fighting IS in Syria over the past decade, and in March 2019, captured the last sliver of land that the extremists held.

During the battles against IS, thousands of extremists and tens of thousands of women and children linked to them were taken and held in prisons and the al-Hol camp, which was taken by government forces on Wednesday.

The capture of al-Aqtan prison came after government forces surrounded it from all sides earlier this week during a two-week offensive against the SDF. Raqqa governor Abdul-Rahman Salama said there are up to 2,000 detainees at al-Aqtan, but it wasn't immediately clear how many of them are linked to IS.

Deputy Interior Minister Maj. Gen. Abdul-Qader Tahan visited the prison on Friday to see the conditions of the detention centre and the detainees, state television reported.

Negotiations had been ongoing for days, after which a deal was reached to open a corridor for the nearly 800 SDF fighters to head west toward the region of Kobani, which is still controlled by the US-backed group.

The SDF said in a statement that with the support of the US-led coalition, the force has completed the transfer of its fighters assigned to securing al-Aqtan Prison "to safe locations." The SDF said that al-Aqtan prison holds detainees from the IS "terrorist organisation." The government's push into northeast Syria in early January led thousands of mainly Kurds to flee into the northeastern province of Hassakeh, which has a large Kurdish community. A four-day ceasefire was declared Tuesday night, after several previous truces collapsed.

As part of a deal signed by interim Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa and SDF commander Mazloum Abdi, the US-backed force should merge into the ministries of defence and interior.

US envoy Tom Barrack said in a statement on Tuesday that the SDF's role as Syria's primary anti-IS force "has largely expired" since the new government is "both willing and positioned to take over security responsibilities." The US isn't interested in "prolonging a separate SDF role," he said.

On Wednesday, US and Iraqi officials said that Iraq had requested that IS detainees be transferred to Iraq, and Washington accepted the idea. The Syrian government welcomed the deal to transfer the prisoners after it was made public on Wednesday, saying it would help in the process. (AP)

FDI inflows to India surged by 73 per cent to USD 47 billion in 2025: UN

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 23: The FDI inflows to India in 2025 surged by 73 per cent to USD 47 billion, mainly due to large investments in services and manufacturing, supported by policies aimed at integrating the country into global supply chains, the UN said.

The Global Investment Trends Monitor, released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), stated on Thursday that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows to China declined for the third consecutive year, falling by 8 per cent to an estimated USD 107.5 billion.

"FDI inflows to India surged by 73 per cent to USD 47 billion, mainly due to large investments in services – including finance, IT, and R&D – as well as manufacturing, supported by policies aimed at integrating India into global supply chains," UNCTAD said.

It added that global foreign direct investment reached an estimated USD 1.6 trillion in 2025, a 14 per cent increase.

However, a significant part of the increase was due to higher flows through several major global financial centres and investment hubs (economies with significant conduit FDI flows), which added more than USD 140 billion to the total, with the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Ireland – in that order – accounting for the bulk.

FDI flows to North America remained broadly stable. The United States – the world's largest FDI recipient – recorded a 2 per cent increase in inflows. Cross-border M&A activity declined by 22 per cent to USD 132 billion. While M&A sales decreased across most industries, they rose sharply in semiconductors and telecommunications, it said.

The report added that the total value of international project finance increased by 7 per cent to USD 218 billion, while the number of projects declined by only 5 per cent. Project finance activity increased in Syria, the Philippines, Viet Nam, and Uzbekistan, but declined in Egypt and India.

Data centres drove much of the FDI trend in 2025, recording an increase of USD 125 billion in greenfield announcements and of USD 30 billion in international project finance.

The bulk of the growth was thus through greenfield investment, contrasting with the traditionally more important role of international project finance within the telecommunications sector.

Proprietary infrastructure is becoming increasingly important due to growing competition in AI technology.

India was among the top 10 major recipients of data centre investments in 2025, it said, adding that foreign investment in data centres is concentrated in a handful of countries. France, ranked number 1, the United States (2) and the Republic of Korea (3) led as host countries, while emerging markets such as Brazil (4), India (7), and Malaysia (9) also attracted major projects.

"Total greenfield investment in data centres surpassed USD 270 billion, representing more than one-fifth of all investment projects. The leading host countries for these investments were France, the United States, and the Republic of Korea. Notably, emerging markets such as Brazil, Thailand, India, and Malaysia also ranked among the top ten hosts of data centre projects," it said. (PTI)

Page 7 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 20:50 Page 1

Pema Khandu addresses 7th General Conference of service associations in Pasighat

CM assures CoSAAP on NPS, lateral entry issues

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Jan 23: Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday assured the Confederation of Service Associations of Arunachal Pradesh (CoSAAP) that the issues raised in its memorandum, particularly those related to the National Pension Scheme (NPS) and lateral entry, would be taken up seriously at the appropriate levels.

Addressing the 7th General Conference of CoSAAP here, the Chief Minister said the concerns regarding the pension system were genuine and required careful consideration. He informed that he had already discussed the matter with representatives from Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring states and assured that the issue would be raised before the Government of India at both political and administrative levels.

On the issue of lateral entry, Khandu said that although several committees had examined the matter after 2018–19, the outcomes had not been satisfactory. He added that the issue was now being re-examined by the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) to ensure that no injustice was done to any section of employees.

Highlighting the role of CoSAAP, the Chief Minister emphasised the need for better coordination among its federating and district units. He noted that the government receives numerous memorandums from different departmental associations and said that if issues were discussed and refined at the CoSAAP level before submission, it would save time and make the demands more practical and genuine.

Describing government employees as the "permanent system" of governance, Khandu said that while policymakers may change, the administration is run by officers and staff. He stressed that honesty, commitment and adherence to rules and conduct were essential, particularly in a geographically vast and strategically sensitive border state like Arunachal Pradesh.

Referring to administrative reforms, the Chief Minister said the state government had constituted the Administrative Reforms Commission to examine manpower distribution, workload imbalance among departments and overall system efficiency. He informed that the ARC's first meeting was scheduled shortly and that its interim report was already ready for discussion.

Stating that Arunachal Pradesh has over one lakh employees, including regular, contractual and contingency staff, Khandu said the ARC would examine all aspects and submit its final recommendations, following which decisions would be taken expeditiously. He credited government employees for the state's progress over the past decade, noting that employee morale had improved alongside growth in infrastructure and resources. He reiterated the government's commitment to employee welfare, including improvement of office infrastructure, residential facilities and infrastructure upgradation in the upcoming budget.

Khandu also noted that the state budget had increased significantly over the years, along with a substantial rise in state-owned resources, enabling greater developmental activity across sectors.

On governance and accountability, the Chief Minister cautioned that corruption leads to project delays, public loss and damage to the state's image. He said maintaining integrity, accountability and a healthy work culture was critical, adding that while democratic dissent was permissible, employees undermining government policies from within the system would not be tolerated and would invite strict action.

He further urged CoSAAP to ensure that its technical sessions focus not only on demands but also on performance levels, policy implementation challenges and solutions, stating that feedback from employees working at the grassroots level was invaluable.

Calling all stakeholders "Team Arunachal," the Chief Minister said government employees would play a crucial role in achieving the goal of a developed Arunachal by 2047.

Education Minister P D Sona, legislators Ninong Ering, Tapi Darang, Oken Tayeng, Oni Panyang, Tojir Kadu and Puniyo Apum, BJP state president Kaling Moyong and others were present on the occasion.

DGP calls on Guv to outline priorities for law and order

Focus on illegal migration, drug menace and people-friendly policing

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 23: The Director General of Police (DGP), Shiv Darshan Singh Jamwal, called on the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar on Thursday. Having assumed charge as the State Police Chief on January 22, the DGP briefed the Governor on his immediate priorities and strategic roadmap for strengthening peace, public safety and overall law and order across Arunachal Pradesh.

The Governor advised the DGP to take firm, decisive and time-bound action against illegal migration, citing its implications for social harmony and internal security. He also stressed the need for focused efforts to curb the growing drug menace to safeguard the youth from substance abuse.

Special attention was drawn to Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts, where the Governor emphasised instilling public confidence through visible policing, effective intelligence gathering and close coordination with local communities.

Highlighting the importance of the police as the first point of contact for citizens, the Governor urged strict discipline, proactive leadership and the highest standards of professionalism. He called for people-friendly policing that is responsive, compassionate and fair, while also prioritising the welfare, morale and working conditions of police personnel.

The Governor further recommended the extensive use of modern technology, including digital surveillance, data-driven policing and smart crime analysis tools to enhance efficiency and move towards a crime-free Arunachal Pradesh. He noted that combining technology with ethical policing and community trust can significantly strengthen preventive and responsive law enforcement.

The DGP assured the Governor that he would work with dedication to translate this vision into action, striving to build a crime-free State and a people-friendly, professional police force committed to serving and protecting every citizen with integrity and empathy.

PMFME Rural Mart, Mother's Kitchen inaugurated in Tawang

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Jan 23: Deputy Commissioner of Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS on Thursday inaugurated the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Rural Mart, funded by NABARD, along with Mother's Kitchen at the Walk-Through Market near the Parade Ground in Tawang.

The programme was organised by the Block Mission Management Unit (BMMU), Tawang and witnessed the participation of nine Mother's Kitchens out of the 18 registered units in the district. The newly inaugurated Rural Mart is being run through the collective efforts of women Self Help Groups (SHGs) of Tawang and showcased a wide range of locally produced herbs, traditional snacks, pickles and other indigenous products, reflecting the rich culinary and cultural heritage of the region.

The event was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Rinchin Leta, Assistant Commissioners Sangey Wangmu Mosobi and Tsering Choden, DAO Pema Dechen, DHO Koncho Gyatso and other heads of offices of Tawang district. During the programme, the participating Mother's Kitchens displayed a variety of traditional cuisines and local brewery, which drew appreciation from officials and visitors.

Welcoming the dignitaries and participants, Dr Tsewang Dorjee, Block Mission Manager, ArSLM BMMU Tawang, informed that Mother's Kitchen is a flagship initiative of the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSLM) aimed at promoting and institutionalising catering units managed by women SHGs. He stated that the initiative focuses on providing safe, hygienic and nutritious food while creating a sustainable income-generation model for rural women.

He further added that ArSLM provides capacity building, continuous handholding support and financial assistance of Rs 30,000 as seed capital to each Mother's Kitchen to help formalise their operations.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Commissioner Namgyal Angmo lauded ArSLM for the innovative initiative and commended the Mother's Kitchen participants for presenting local cuisines in an attractive and appealing manner. She encouraged the SHGs to maintain high standards of quality and service, stating that future orders would depend on consistency and food quality. She also urged them to experiment with new dishes to expand their offerings.

Stakeholders' meet held on technology-driven agriculture in Tawang

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Jan 23: A stakeholders' meeting on "Technology Intervention for Enhancing Agricultural Development in Vibrant Villages" was successfully organised by ICAR–Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI), Guwahati in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Tawang, for the benefit of farmers of Zemithang Block in Tawang district.

The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation of around 150 farmers, reflecting strong interest in strengthening agriculture and livelihood opportunities in India's vibrant border villages. The meeting began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, marking the formal inauguration of the event.

Delivering the welcome address, Dr G Kadirwal, Director, ICAR–ATARI, Guwahati, welcomed all dignitaries, officers, scientists and farmers. He outlined the objectives of the meeting and emphasised that technology should serve as a support system to strengthen agriculture in remote, border and mountainous regions, rather than replacing traditional knowledge and practices.

The Chief Guest, Dinesh Kulkarni, Sangathan Mantri and Organising Secretary of Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, appreciated farmers for practising organic and traditional farming systems. He stressed that technology must complement, not replace, indigenous agricultural practices.

Highlighting the strategic and cultural importance of Jemeithang, recognised as the first village of India, he assured continued support under the Vibrant Villages Programme and noted that the presence of Indian Army units in the area offers assured market linkage, provided production meets demand.

Special Guest Dr B S Dwivedi, former Member of the Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB), New Delhi, spoke on the challenges faced by farmers due to remoteness from mainland markets. He underlined the importance of collective farming and marketing through Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and encouraged a team-based approach for sustainable growth. He also appreciated the clean and pollution-free environment of the region.

Another Special Guest, Dr V N Narendra, Scientist, ICAR–National Research Centre on Mithun, highlighted livestock-based livelihood opportunities and elaborated on the economic potential of yak and cattle rearing. He encouraged farmers to adopt integrated farming systems to enhance income.

Zila Parishad Member Tsering Yangzom attended the programme and extended her support, while Captain Bashir Sheikh, Regimental Medical Officer, reaffirmed the Indian Army's commitment to the welfare of border villagers and assured full cooperation for village development initiatives.

Nawang Chonzom, Chairperson of Tawang Green Farmer Producer Company Limited, urged farmers to adopt technology while remaining aligned with traditional practices. She emphasised the importance of collective work through FPOs and expressed gratitude to ICAR–ATARI, KVK Tawang, the district administration and local representatives for organising the programme.

Circle Officer of Jemeithang, Deewan Mara, informed that the area is a no-slaughter zone where buying and selling of meat is prohibited and clarified that poultry inputs provided were strictly for egg production, respecting local customs. He also spoke about the spiritual significance of the Gorzam (Korzam) Chorten of the Monpa community and requested continued support for exposure visits and capacity-building programmes.

During the programme, dignitaries distributed agricultural inputs to farmers, including vermicompost, knapsack sprayers, vegetable seeds such as carrot, apple saplings and poultry birds meant solely for egg production.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by A N Tripathi of KVK Tawang, who expressed appreciation to all dignitaries, scientists, farmers, the Indian Army, district administration and supporting institutions. The successful event marked a significant step towards technology-enabled and sustainable agricultural development in vibrant border villages through coordinated efforts of ICAR–ATARI, KVK Tawang, the Indian Army and the local administration.

Meeting held on extending IMC limits to rural areas

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 23: A review meeting was held to discuss a proposal for extending the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) limits, focusing on jurisdiction, urban growth trends, administrative implications and statutory requirements.

The meeting was chaired by Minister for Urban Affairs and Land Management (UA/LM) Balo Raja and attended by Itanagar MLA and ULB Minister's Advisor Techi Kaso, ULB Commissioner Vivek Pandey, Itanagar Capital Deputy Commissioner Toko Babu, Papum Pare DC In-charge Tame Yajum Tarh, IMC Mayor Likha Nari Tadar, Deputy Mayor Tok Tabin Camdir, corporators and senior officials of the Urban Local Bodies (ULB) department.

Speaking to the media, Minister Balo Raja said the discussion focused on extending IMC jurisdiction within the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR). He noted that areas such as the Airport and railway zones would be included under the IMC to ensure a hygienic environment. "The entire capital region is for all and everyone should participate in maintaining cleanliness in their local areas," he said.

Raja added that proposals for extending IMC limits were discussed with suggestions and advice taken from stakeholders. "It is important to consult the general public, especially those in areas proposed for inclusion. The ZPMs from both areas were present to ensure public awareness before submission of the report for government action," he said. He also emphasised that every citizen, including elected leaders, officers, social workers and the general public, must support cleanliness and hygiene initiatives to make Itanagar a clean, green and livable city.

Other issues discussed at the meeting included revenue generation, garbage management, building byelaws and overall city development. Raja urged officials to work with commitment and lead by example to make Itanagar a model city.

MLA Techi Kaso advised authorities to consult grassroots leaders and educate local communities on the pros and cons of the proposed expansion before final decisions are taken.

DY CM attends Pangsau Pass International Festival 2026; inaugurates WWII memorials

Heritage, history and cross-border unity celebrated through Jeep rally, memorials and cultural festivities

HT Correspondent

NAMPONG, Jan 23: Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein attended the concluding day of the Pangsau Pass International Festival 2026, participating in the Vintage Willys Jeep Rally and inaugurating World War II memorials, celebrating heritage, history and cross-border cultural unity.

The rally, from Namsai to Pangsau Pass via the historic Old Ledo Road, saw participation from MP Tapir Gao, Speaker Tesam Pongte, Minister Dasanglu Pul, MLA Laisam Simai, ZPC Namsai Chau Sujana Namchoom and members of the Flatfenders Club of Nagaland. Mein recalled his family's historic Jeep journey after World War II, describing the rally as an emotional tribute to legacy and adventure.

The convoy passed landmarks such as Lalpul Bridge, Hamilton Bridge, Hell Gate and stretches of the Old Ledo Road, highlighting the Jeep's role in WWII. Mein thanked the 10th Assam Rifles for their hospitality and interacted with Myanmar officials. At Jairampur, he inaugurated the World War II Cemetery, unveiled the "Wall of the Forgotten Theater – World War II," visited the upgraded WWII Museum and paid tribute to Sepoy Lamtu Tikhak, a war hero from Arunachal Pradesh.

Highlighting the contributions of Arunachal communities, Mein noted the role of local groups in building the Stilwell (Ledo) Road and urged recognition of those who sacrificed their lives. He emphasised the festival's role in fostering India-Myanmar-Southeast Asia cultural ties and promoting heritage tourism, citing initiatives like the Jeep Rally, WWII museums, trekking routes and adventure tourism as avenues for local economic growth.

Mein also released the book "Tradition, Transformation and Identity – The Tikhak Tangsa of Arunachal Pradesh" by Dr Jeevantu Tikhak, calling it a tribute to the region's communities. He reiterated the importance of reopening the Old Ledo Road and operationalizing the Pangsau Pass Integrated Check Post to boost border trade. The event was attended by Minister Gabriel D Wangsu and MLAs Puinnyo Apum, Oni Panyang and Hamjong Thangam.

APWWS conducts mass cleanliness drive in Yingkiong

HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, Jan 23: The Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS), Upper Siang District, on Thursday organised a one-day mass social service in and around Yingkiong township in collaboration with the District Administration and the Department of Urban Development and Housing, Upper Siang, under the theme "All Hands for Clean and Green Yingkiong."

The cleanliness drive, aimed at making Yingkiong plastic-free and hygienic, witnessed active participation from APWWS units of Yingkiong, Simong, Mariyang, Geku and Jengging, along with administrative officers, heads of departments and other government officials. Through coordinated efforts, tonnes of plastic waste were collected and removed from the General Ground and various colonies across the township.

The programme was led by APWWS president, Yingkiong, Kasimang Jopir Pazing, along with vice president Neyang Lipir and general secretary Osen Taron. As part of the initiative, bamboo dustbins were installed at strategic locations to encourage proper waste disposal. The president appealed to the public to develop civic sense and make regular use of dustbins to maintain cleanliness and hygiene.

Addressing the participants, Kasimang Jopir Pazing gave a clarion call to the residents of Upper Siang to begin the new year with cleanliness, emphasising collective responsibility towards environmental conservation and the need to ensure a plastic-free future for coming generations.

APWWS president, Mariyang, Totok Siram Borang, highlighted the commendable role played by the youth association MAYA in maintaining cleanliness in Mariyang town, describing it as a positive example for others to emulate.

Team leaders from Simong, Jengging and Geku—Aget Sitek, Gegur Mize Medo and Paron—shared their experiences, appreciated the initiative taken by APWWS Yingkiong and assured continued support for similar programmes in the future. Hundreds of people took part in the cleanliness drive.

The programme concluded with a strong appeal to the residents of Upper Siang to refrain from littering and to actively participate in keeping Yingkiong clean, green and plastic-free.

Dr S D Singh Jamwal takes charge as DGP of Arunachal Pradesh

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 23: Dr Shiv Darshan Singh Jamwal on Thursday officially joined as the Director General of Police (DGP) of Arunachal Pradesh. A general meeting was convened following his assumption of charge, during which he interacted with senior police officers.

Addressing the media, Dr Jamwal said that after taking charge as DGP, he held an interaction meeting with senior officers of the Police Headquarters and Superintendents of Police from various districts through video conferencing. He added that he would also hold separate meetings with senior officers to discuss various departmental issues in detail.

He stated that the interaction meeting was aimed at understanding the issues and challenges faced by the police force in matters related to crime, law and order, security and other related concerns of the state. He assured that security would be strengthened at all times to ensure the safety of the general public.

Dr Jamwal mentioned that he had earlier visited Arunachal Pradesh as a tourist and expressed his commitment to maintaining peace, tranquillity and law and order in the state.

Page 8 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 19:49 Page 1

SC seeks reports from CBI, ED

Issues fresh notices to Anil Ambani, ADAG in PIL alleging fraud

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The Supreme Court on Friday asked the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file status reports in a sealed cover within ten days on their ongoing investigations into alleged massive banking and corporate fraud involving the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG) and its group companies.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also issued fresh notices to Anil Ambani and the ADAG on a PIL seeking a court-monitored probe into the alleged fraud.

It took note of the fact that Anil Ambani and the ADAG had already been served with the notices of the PIL filed by the petitioner and former Union secretary E A S Sarma.

On November 18, the bench issued notices to the Centre, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), ED, Anil Ambani and ADAG on the PIL.

The bench, however, said it was granting them one last opportunity to appear and file their responses in the case.

The bench asked the Bombay High Court's Registrar General to ensure service of notices on Anil Ambani and the ADAG and file a compliance report.

The top court asked the CBI and the ED, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, to file status reports in a sealed cover in ten days on their ongoing probes into the alleged fraud.

During the brief hearing, lawyer Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the PIL petitioner, alleged that more than Rs 1.50 lakh crore of debt of these companies has been written off, and the money was siphoned off through many shell companies.

He said this was the "largest bank loan fraud in the country".

Bhushan said the company and Ambani have not entered an appearance before this court despite being aware of the fact that "this was highly reported in the media, it's not that they do not know, they are watching".

The solicitor general said that he was not opposing Bhushan and an FIR was lodged pursuant to a forensic audit conducted by the State Bank of India (SBI).

Earlier, Bhushan alleged that the probe agencies are not investigating the alleged complicity of banks and their officials in the huge banking fraud. He sought a direction to the CBI and the ED to file respective status reports with regard to the probe against banks and their officials in the case.

Bhushan said the instant case is "probably the largest corporate fraud in India's history".

The FIR was registered in 2025 though the fraud was going on since 2007-08, the lawyer alleged.

The PIL alleged systematic diversion of public funds, fabrication of financial statements and institutional complicity across multiple entities of the Anil Ambani-led Reliance ADAG.

It said the FIR registered by the CBI on August 21, along with the connected ED proceedings, addresses merely a small segment of the alleged fraud.

The petition claimed that despite detailed forensic audits flagging serious irregularities, neither agency is probing the role of bank officials, auditors or regulators, which the petitioner called a critical failure.

Issue a Writ of Mandamus or direction for a court-monitored investigation by the CBI and the ED to conduct a thorough, impartial and time-bound investigation into the financial fraud perpetrated by Respondent No. 4 (Anil Ambani) and Respondent No. 5 (ADAG)," the plea said. It also sought a direction to the respondents for the constitution of a special investigation team (SIT) comprising officers from the CBI and the ED to conduct a thorough, impartial and time-bound investigation.

Issue appropriate writ or direction that the investigation into the affairs of ADAG, its promoters/ directors and connected entities be monitored by this honourable court so as to ensure that the probe is fair, independent, comprehensive and free from any external influence, and that no aspect of the financial or criminal misconduct revealed in the forensic and audit reports is left outside the scope of inquiry, it said.

The plea also sought a comprehensive, coordinated and judicially supervised probe, asserting that the ongoing investigations by the CBI and the ED were inadequate and deliberately restricted to a narrow FIR filed by the SBI in August 2025.

It said between 2013 and 2017, RCOM, Reliance Infratel (RITL) and Reliance Telecom (RTL) borrowed Rs 31,580 crore from a consortium of banks led by the SBI.

The SBI lodged the FIR on August 21, alleging criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust and misconduct involving an alleged loss of Rs 2,929.05 crore, it said.

The plea said the FIR was based on a forensic audit commissioned in 2019, covering suspicious fund flows, diversion of bank loans, fictitious transactions and the alleged use of shell companies.

The investigating agencies, in the present matter, have overlooked the five-year delay in filing the FIR by the bank, which clearly indicates involvement of bank officials and other public servants whose conduct enabled, concealed or facilitated the fraud, it said.

The CBI and the ED have entirely failed to investigate this institutional angle, and excluded from scrutiny the very public officials whose complicity or willful inaction forms an essential part of the criminal conspiracy, it said. (PTI)

Full dress rehearsal of 77th R-Day parade held amid rain, flypast curtailed

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: A full dress rehearsal of the 77th Republic Day Parade was held in the national capital on Friday as military personnel and artistes marched down the Kartavya Path amid morning rains, which briefly delayed the proceedings at the ceremonial boulevard.

However, in view of the inclement weather, the flypast and some sections of the cultural segments of the parade could not be held, officials said.

The full dress rehearsal of the parade began around 10:30 am and concluded around 11:45 am.

Every year, the stands in various enclosures see heavy crowds even on the day of the full dress rehearsal for which official passes are issued. However, the stands wore a sparse look on Friday due to bad weather.

Spells of rain, which also disrupted traffic in parts of the city, however, failed to dampen the spirit of the members of the marching contingents.

Military personnel marched from Vijay Chowk to Red Fort -- the route of the parade -- alongside various weapon systems mounted on different platforms, displaying high tempo and 'josh' even as they got drenched.

"It rained, and the cold was a challenge too. But I feel the passion inside of all of us, who have the honour to represent our Service or any ministry or organisation on the Kartavya Path, pumps you up," a commander of one of the Army contingents which will take part in the January 26 parade, told PTI.

Many spectators, who had come especially to watch the flypast -- one of the main attractions of the parade -- were disappointed. However, some said they were still content to see the majestic display of India's military might and cultural heritage.

BrahMos and Akash missile systems and several indigenous platforms will be showcased at the Republic Day parade.

In a departure from traditional practice, 'VVIP' and other labels, used earlier for enclosures at the parade venue, are not being used. Instead, all enclosures have been named after Indian rivers, senior officials of the defence ministry earlier said.

These include Beas, Brahmaputra, Chambal, Chenab, Gandak, Ganga, Ghagra, Godavari, Sindhu, Jhelum, Kaveri, Kosi, Krishna, Mahanadi, Narmada, Pennar, Periyar, Ravi, Sone, Sutlej, Teesta, Vaigai, and Yamuna.

Prabhat Gaurav (23), a Varanasi native and a civil services aspirant who is currently staying in Delhi, said he somehow managed to "get some polythene bags to protect his mobile phones and purse from getting wet". Drenched from tip to toe after the rehearsal, he showed the remnant of his parade entry pass fully soaked in rain.

"My enclosure was 'Kosi'. I attended it along with my four other friends. We arrived at the stands around 7:30 am and managed to buy some polythene bags from tea vendors near the venue. But many people did not have the means to protect themselves or their belongings from the rain. But, we still enjoyed watching the parade rehearsal," Gaurav told PTI.

Friday's rainfall ended a long spell of dry winter in the city. Delhi received its first rain of 2026 due to a strong western disturbance. The system brought gusty winds, thunderstorms and brief relief from rising pollution.

Patriotic songs and energetic narrations, which form part of the parade every year, engaged the audience with equal vigour as military contingents of the Army, Navy, the IAF, and those of paramilitary forces soldiered on along the Kartavya Path.

Thirty tableaux -- 17 from various states and Union Territories, and 13 from ministries and services -- will roll down the Kartavya Path during the ceremonial event whose dominant theme this year is 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'.

On Friday, various tableaus were showcased during the full dress rehearsal. The Department of Military Affairs' tableau will showcase India's victory in Operation Sindoor last year and the jointness the three wings of the armed forces displayed during the decisive action. (PTI)

Modi tears into DMK, calls it 'CMC' govt

MADURANTHAKAM (Tamil Nadu), Jan 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday kickstarted the NDA's 2026 election campaign in Tamil Nadu, mounting a spirited attack on the ruling DMK on issues, including corruption and coined an abbreviation--CMC-- to lash out at the Dravidian party.

According to the PM, CMC means "Corruption, Mafia, Crime." "The DMK is CMC -- a Corruption, Mafia, Crime promoting government. The people of Tamil Nadu have made up their mind to uproot DMK, CMC," he said at the massive gathering comprising of public and cadres from NDA constituents, including the AIADMK, AMMK and PMK (Anbumani faction).

In his maiden visit to Tamil Nadu in the poll year, the PM's rally turned out to be a show of strength with top leaders from the key alliance parties --- AIADMK chief and Leader of Opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) chief TTV Dhinakaran, PMK's Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, TMC-M leader G K Vasan and many others in attendance.

Continuing his attack against the DMK, Modi said the party-led government's "countdown has started." Tamil Nadu wants to be free of DMK's "misgovernance," and was looking forward to the BJP-NDA's good governance, he said. (PTI)

Three to four people dying by suicide in WB everyday due to SIR anxiety: Mamata

KOLKATA, Jan 23: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday claimed that three to four people are dying by suicide everyday in the state, due to anxiety over the ongoing SIR exercise.

Banerjee, addressing a programme at Red Road here on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose, asserted that the Election Commission and the central government must take responsibility for the deaths.

"More than 110 people have already died; everyday three to four people are dying by suicide out of SIR anxiety... 40 to 45 more people are fighting for their lives in hospitals. After all these years, we have to prove whether we are citizens of this country?" the CM said.

The special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is underway in the state ahead of the upcoming assembly polls.

Banerjee also accused the BJP of conspiring against Bengal, and claimed that icons of the country like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Bose, B R Ambedkar and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar were being insulted.

"We are noticing that attempts are being made to distort the history of India... Insult, intolerance, ingratitude towards them and an affront towards language; all these lie ahead of us," she alleged.

She accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of having abolished the Planning Commission, "which was envisaged by Subhas Chandra Bose", and replacing it with the Niti Aayog.

Banerjee also said it is unfortunate that Bose's birthday has not yet been declared a national holiday.

She said that dreams of the country's icons are being "broken to pieces", alleging that the saffron brigade's version of history was forced upon people.

"This has no relation to the history of the country," Banerjee, also the TMC supremo, said.

"People's rights are being taken away and democracy is being crushed," she said, asking on a sarcastic note whether Bose would have been summoned for an SIR hearing in the name of logical discrepancy had he been alive, and "questioned about his Indian citizenship".

Claiming that 1.38 crore people have been summoned by the EC for the SIR hearings over logical discrepancy, she said that already 58 lakh names have been deleted in the draft rolls. (PTI)

Upset with Rahul's 'Kochi snub', Tharoor skips key Congress meet on Kerala polls: Sources

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday skipped a key strategy meeting of the party for the upcoming Kerala polls as he is believed to be upset over Rahul Gandhi not properly acknowledging his presence at a recent event and repeated attempts by state leaders to "sideline" him.

Sources said that while a series of events had led to Tharoor's disappointment with the treatment meted out to him, the tipping point was Gandhi not acknowledging him at the 'Maha Panchayath' held in Kochi on January 19 to felicitate the local body poll winners.

Gandhi acknowledged other senior leaders present on the stage and took their names but did not mention Tharoor, a four-time MP and one of the three Congress Working Committee (CWC) members from the state, who was also on the dais, the sources said.

Tharoor's office said he had informed the party of his inability to attend the meeting due to his prior commitments at the Kerala Literature Festival in Kozhikode.

However, according to sources close to him, he is very upset at the treatment meted out to him by the party, especially after differences had been ironed out at the Wayanad meetings on the sidelines of the Lakshya 2026 leadership camp organised by the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee to chalk out strategies for the upcoming state assembly elections.

After that conclave, Tharoor had said that he had never deviated from the party line.

There was no official reaction from the Congress on the issue.

A united call was given by the Kerala Congress leaders to take on the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the upcoming assembly polls from Wayanad. An understanding was believed to have reached that Tharoor would not contest but campaign in the polls throughout the state.

However, days later, the differences within the state unit have again emerged, with Tharoor seemingly not happy with the way he has been treated in Kochi recently.

Tharoor has also sent messages to key party functionaries, including party general secretaries K C Venugopal and Deepa Das Munshi, who is the AICC in-charge of Kerala, pointing out the "mistreatment" meted out to him.

Tharoor's statements and articles had invited sharp criticism from Congress leaders at the national and state levels in the recent past.

A row had erupted last year over his comments on the India-Pakistan conflict and the diplomatic outreach after the Pahalgam attack. His comments were at variance with the Congress' stand and many party leaders took a swipe at him, questioning his intentions.

Tharoor has, however, maintained that there is no variance in stance on foreign policy and there must be bipartisanship.

Kharge on Friday chaired a key meeting of the party here with Kerala leaders to fine-tune the party strategy for the assembly polls.

Gandhi, Venugopal, Pradesh Congress Committee chief Sunny Joseph and Congress Legislature Party leader V D Satheesan, among others, attended the meeting at Kharge's residence. (PTI)

Journey of Viksit Bharat@2047 a 'maritime voyage': Navy Chief

RANCHI, Jan 23: Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi on Friday equated Viksit Bharat @2047 to maritime voyage, emphasising that world's economies, including India's, rely heavily on oceans for trade and growth.

He said that 90 per cent of the world's EXIM trade occurs through the seas, and 95 per cent of India's trade volume is carried by sea routes, making the oceans the primary medium for achieving Viksit Bharat @2047.

"Viksit Bharat @2047 is no longer just a policy, it has now become a reality, and clear milestones have been set to achieve the target. As we know, 95 per cent of our trade occurs via sea routes, and around 90 per cent of the world's trade volume depends on them. We are geographically blessed as our country is surrounded by oceans on three sides, and it is our responsibility to keep them free from any deterrence," Admiral Tripathi said while addressing students at the CCL's Darbhanga House conference hall.

The Indian Navy is the first responder in the Indian Ocean region and is being recognised as such by the world today, he said. "The blue economy currently contributes only 4 per cent to our economy, which is very small, and it should be augmented to double digits to align with the vision of Viksit Bharat," the Navy chief stressed. (PTI)

From postcard snow hills to rain-soaked plains, dry spell ends in North India, farmers, tourists rejoice

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Snow and rain. Dark skies over north India wrote in both on Friday, the snow painting the hills a picture postcard white while steady rain disrupted life across the plains, including in Delhi where the full dress Republic Day rehearsal went ahead despite the weather odds.

Temperatures plummeted as the prolonged dry spell finally ended in the region with the unseasonal snow and rainfall. It led to sighs of relief from farmers in many and whoops of delight from tourists in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir preparing for a long holiday weekend.

Fresh snowfall in most parts of Jammu and Kashmir led to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu national highway, suspension of Mata Vaishno Devi yatra and cancellation of over 20 flights in Kashmir. The famous skiing resort of Gulmarg received over two feet of fresh snow, while the Sonamarg tourist resort in Ganderbal district recorded over six inches, and the Pahalgam resort in south Kashmir's Anantnag district around three inches, they said.

Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded in many areas in Budgam, Baramulla, Kupwara Shopian, Pulwama, and Bandipora districts, while Anantnag and Kulgam districts received light to moderate snow, they added.

The air traffic to and fro Kashmir was suspended on Friday after flight operations were cancelled at the Srinagar airport due to heavy snowfall in the valley, which has rendered the runway unsafe for aircraft operation, officials said.

"Due to adverse weather conditions and snowfall in Srinagar, the runway is currently not available for safe aircraft operations. In the interest of passenger safety, all flight operations to and from Srinagar have been cancelled for the day," an official of Airport Authority of India (AAI) said here.

The Mughal Road, the alternate road connecting the valley with Jammu region, was also shut, while the Srinagar-Leh national highway was also closed for traffic due to snowfall in Sonamarg and Zojila Axis.

The Meteorological Department has forecast the current weather system to continue till Friday evening. There is a possibility of heavy rain or snow with gusty winds or hailstorm over a few districts of Pir-Panjal range, Chenab valley and south Kashmir.

High-speed winds swept many places in the valley, including Srinagar, last night, uprooting trees, electricity poles, and rooftops in few areas, while also snapping power lines, the officials said.

Electricity was snapped in several areas of the valley, but restoration works are underway.

In Jammu, schools in Rajouri, Poonch and Kathua districts were closed after snowfall was experienced in the high altitude areas. Moderate rains lashed the plains, including Jammu city, bringing an end to a dry spell that had lasted for over two months.

The Mata Vaishno Devi shrine also witnessed the first snowfall of the season, forcing the authorities to suspend the yatra. Snowfall was still continuing in the upper reaches of Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Poonch, Rajouri, Reasi, Udhampur and Kathua districts, officials said, adding that five inches to over one foot of snow had accumulated in the snowbound areas. In Delhi, a long spell of dry winter weather finally ended when the city recorded its first rain of the year, bringing a brief relief from high pollution levels in the city.

According to IMD's forecast for the day, Delhi would see one or two spells of rain during the early to forenoon hours and another spell of very light to light rain in the afternoon and evening.

The showers led to a significant shift in air quality as Delhi's AQIstood at 293 in the "poor" category, according to the CPCB's Sameer app, an improvement from 313 recorded at 4 pm on Thursday.

While soldiers marched along the Kartavya Path in soaked uniforms and boots for full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade, office goers battled cold and congestion when peak-hour rain brought

Following a steady rainfall, traffic crawled in parts of the city. While some commuters shared pictures of long jams on X, with captions, "Light rain, heavy drama - peak Delhi behaviour", "Delhi traffic sucks!"

Some office-goers also uploaded videos of waterlogged roads. One of the users uploaded a video of her autorickshaw wading its way through a waterlogged road.

At Kartavya Path, marching columns of soldiers in soaked uniforms and wet boots held the full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade even though steady rain and thunder delayed proceedings at the ceremonial boulevard.

People who came to watch the rehearsal remained seated even as the rain continued. Many used umbrellas, caps and plastic sheets to protect themselves, while others adjusted their seating and belongings as the rain passed.

Himachal Pradesh on Friday received its first snowfall of this winter, ending a nearly three-month-long dry spell and bringing cheers to the tourists and turning the hill state into a winter wonderland.

Tourists seen enjoying the snow at famous tourist spots. Some users on X, posting videos of the fresh snowfall, suggested tourists to drive slowly on the road. "I've seen snowfall for the first time in Manali. It is an amazing experience," a tourist from Una said.

Another tourist said, "We have been coming here so several years, visited many places hoping to witness snowfall. And this time we are witnessing it. Its like a dream come true."

A Gujarat resident, who came to Manali to witness snowfall, said, "We are enjoying a lot. There is snow everwhere. Everyone should come to Himachal and witness this. Its worth every penny we spent on this trip."

According to Shimla Meteorological Centre, Kothi village near Manali received 15 cm, the highest in the state. Similarly, Gondla, Kukumseri and Hansa villages in the tribal district, Lahaul and Spiti received 12 cm, 6.8 cm and 5 cm snowfall, respectively.

Jubbal in Shimla district recorded 6 cm, Manali 4.8 cm, Keylong and Kufri received 4 cm each, and Shimla received 0.6 cm of snow. The MeT has predicted that the higher reaches of the state will continue to receive snowfall till January 24, while other areas are expected to remain dry. (PTI)

Page 9 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 21:32 Page 1

300 households in Aizawl to soon get 24x7 drinking water supply

AIZAWL, Jan 23: The Mizoram government will soon start providing 24x7 drinking water supply to around 300 households in two areas of the capital Aizawl as a pilot, officials said on Friday.

The ₹ 5.24 crore project, funded by the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2 scheme, was unveiled by Public Health Engineering Minister Lalnilawma on Thursday night.

The Vaivakawn and Chawnpui areas in the western part of the town will have round-the-clock access to drinking water in four to six months when the project is complete, Lalnilawma said, noting that it was a milestone for Mizoram.

Steps will be taken to eventually extend the facility to other households as well, he said.

Lalnilawma said smart water meters will be installed, and a new pipeline network will be used in the implementation of the project. He said proposals have also been submitted to the Centre for funds to augment the water supply to other towns in the state.

The minister said several water projects could not be expedited due to the unavailability of environmental clearance and land.

Urging people to conserve water, he said the government has launched an Android app, 'Tui leak', through which people can report leakage of water pipelines. Internet of Things (IoT) and SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) will be used in the 24x7 water supply system to enhance operational efficiency, scalability and real-time data monitoring, officials said.

Ultrasonic level indicator, automated valve and flow meters will be installed to monitor water level, water flow, pressure and equitable supply, they said.

Smart water meters will be provided to consumers free of cost, they added. (PTI)

Scholars estimate that total number of Mizo speakers worldwide, has now exceeded 2.2 million

Efforts on to include Mizo language in 8th Schedule: Officials

AIZAWL, Jan 23: Steps are being taken to explore possibilities for inclusion of Mizo language in the 8th schedule of the Constitution, officials said.

The initiative is undertaken by Mizo Language Development Board (MLDB) established by the government, they said on Thursday.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday chaired a meeting with members of the Eighth Schedule Study Group of MLDB to review and assess the progress of the initiatives taken by the study group, according to an official statement issued by the state's Information and Public Relations department.

The study group informed Lalduhoma that its report is nearing completion for submission to the government, the statement said.

The members also told the chief minister that they have been meeting representatives of various organisations and ethnic communities across the state to gather opinion on the inclusion of the Mizo language in the Eighth Schedule, it said.

The members said that there is overwhelming consensus and support for inclusion of Mizo language in the 8th schedule, it said.

They informed Lalduhoma that Mizoram had submitted a proposal for inclusion of Mizo language in the 8th schedule to the Centre in the past, but no concrete follow-up action was taken, the statement said.

The study group suggested that a task group be constituted to resubmit the proposal in a comprehensive manner and to pursue the matter vigorously.

It said that Mizo was declared the official language of Mizoram in 1974 and serves as a common medium of communication or lingua franca among Zo ethnic communities living in different parts of the world.

The Sahitya Akademi has already recognised Mizo as a regional language, which can be studied up to PhD level, according to the study group.

Lalduhoma appreciated the significant progress achieved by the MLDB and the study group within a short period and commended their dedicated efforts, the statement said. He said that the recommendations and proposals put forward by the study group were well-considered and assured that these would be followed up appropriately, it said.

According to the 2011 Census, Mizo-speaking people are spread across 26 states and 7 Union Territories, officials said.

It is believed that ethnic Mizos, who speak the Mizo language, are now present in all states, they said.

According to the 2011 census, the number of Mizo speakers in Mizoram was more than 8.3 lakh and the number is expected to increase substantially by now, officials said.

Some scholars estimated that the total number of Mizo speakers worldwide has now exceeded 2.2 million, they said.

Google has included Mizo in google translator in May 2022.

The People's Linguistic Survey of India has classified Mizo as a growing language, while UNESCO has placed it under the "vulnerable" category among the world's languages. (PTI)

Modi gave due recognition to Netaji: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, Jan 23: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who gave due recognition to great freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

Addressing a rally to mark the birth anniversary of Netaji here, he lauded the role of Bose, who had immensely contributed to the country's freedom struggle.

"Despite Netaji's immense contribution to the freedom struggle, he was not accorded due recognition by the previous governments. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who built a statue of Netaji in Delhi's India Gate for the first time and declared 'Parakram Diwas' to be observed on the birth anniversary of Netaji," he said.

Urging the youth to follow the path shown by Netaji, the chief minister said the nationalistic ideology of Bose is still relevant for the people. "We all know the ideological difference between Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose that had prompted him to leave Congress and float a new political party- Forward Bloc. He always wanted full freedom from the British," he said.

Saha said that what Netaji had been advocating for, 'Purna Swaraj' (full freedom) from the beginning, the Indian National Congress (INC) had finally endorsed at its Lahore Congress session.

"The ideology and idealism demonstrated by Netaji during the freedom struggle will continue to inspire the youth of the country. These are still relevant in our country," he said.

The rally was organised by Netaji Subhash Vidyaniketan, a government-aided school to commemorate the 129th birth anniversary of the great freedom fighter. (PTI)

Manipur govt announces ₹ 10L ex gratia

IMPHAL, Jan 23: The Manipur government on Friday announced an ex gratia of ₹ 10 lakhs for the next of kin of the 29-year-old Meitei man, who was shot dead by suspected Kuki militants in Churachandpur district. Singh, along with his wife, was abducted from their home in the Tuibong area of the district by the militants on January 21 and was shot dead. His body was recovered from near Natjang later that night, officials said. His wife, who belongs to the Kuki community, was let off unharmed. In a statement issued by Commissioner (Home) N Ashok Kumar, the state government expressed grief over the incident and announced the ex gratia payment. (NNN)

Mizoram govt to begin procurement of four key crops from February under flagship programme

AIZAWL, Jan 23: The Mizoram government will begin procurement of locally produced four key crops - ginger, turmeric, dry broomsticks and chilli - from February to assist farmers, an official said.

Mizoram Agriculture Marketing Board Co-Chairman K C Lalmalsawmzauva on Thursday said procurement of ginger from farmers would be undertaken from February to May, dry broomstick from February to March, and turmeric and chilli will be procured from February to April.

The government has already begun procurement of paddy or unhusked rice in November, and it will continue till March, he said.

Lalmalsawmzauva, who is also an adviser to the CM for the handholding scheme, said the government will extend the maximum support prices for each crop purchased under the state's flagship programme 'Bana Kaih' or handholding scheme.

The maximum support price for ginger is fixed at ₹ 50 per kg, ₹ 80 per kg for broomstick, ₹ 350 per kg for chilli and the support prices for turmeric and paddy are fixed at ₹ 20 and ₹ 30 per kilogramme respectively, he said.

He said that procurement will be carried out in all secondary collection centres (SCCs) across the state.

"Buffer stocking will not be arranged this time, and all the key crops will be procured at secondary collection centres set up in different parts of the state. Only locally produced crops of farmers, who registered under farmers societies in their respective areas, will be procured, and those that come from outside will not be entertained," Lalmalsawmzauva told a news conference here.

He said that there are 64 SCCs for ginger and 13 for dry broomsticks across the state, where supervisors and assistant supervisors will be deputed from the government side to monitor the procurement and they will be assisted by leaders of farmers societies.

The maximum support prices will be transferred to the farmers' bank account through Direct Beneficiary Transfer (DBT), he said.

Lalmalsawmzauva urged the farmers to register under farmer societies in their respective areas as they will not be allowed to sell their crops at an SCC outside their area.

He said that farmers will be allowed to sell their crops to other private agencies at reasonable prices higher than the support prices or minimum rates fixed by the government.

State Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare special secretary Ramdinliani, who accompanied Lalmalsawmzauva at the press conference, claimed that there is growing demand for Mizoram-grown ginger due to its organic quality.

Though many buyers have expressed their interest, the government is yet to ink agreements with them due to the fluctuating ginger price, she said.

Buying the five key crops was one of the poll promises of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government headed by Chief Minister Lalduhoma.

Officials said that the government has spent or released about ₹ 137.72 crore as support price for the purchase of ginger last year.

The government also purchased 48,602.29 quintals of dried broomsticks worth nearly ₹ 2 crore and more than 1,400 quintals of paddy worth about ₹ 50 lakh from the farmers during the same year, they said. (PTI)

Modi govt invested ₹ 6.50L cr for development of NE in last 10 yrs: Scindia

AGARTALA, Jan 23: Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday said the Narendra Modi government has invested ₹ 6.50 lakh crore for the development of the Northeast in the last 10 years.

Scindia was addressing a programme in Agartala, where he unveiled projects worth Rs 220 crore of the Ministry of the Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

"The Modi government has brought a revolution in the region. It has spent Rs 6.50 lakh crore in the Northeast during the last 10 years, with the decision of allocating 10 per cent of the budgetary outlay of every ministry to the region," he said. Scindia said the Centre wants to transform Tripura into the gateway to Southeast Asian nations. "The PM has been trying to make the region a 'centre point' of the country's growth," he said.

The DoNER minister also lauded Tripura's growth trajectory in the last 10 years, with the state recording a phenomenal growth, surpassing the national rate.

"Earlier, Tripura used to register 3-4 per cent annual growth but now records 10.50 to 11 per cent, which is more than the national average," he said.

He also noted the improvement in connectivity in the state over the last few years. "The state had only 850 km of national highway 12 years back, but it now has 1,550 km of national highway. Railway connectivity has also witnessed a major boost as the line up to Sabroom in South Tripura has been made broad gauge. Flight service to the state has almost doubled," he said.

Chief Minister Manik Saha and Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath were present at the programme. (PTI)

Mizoram ropes in NDDB to augment milk production

AIZAWL, Jan 23: The Mizoram Milk Producers Cooperative Union Ltd (MULCO) signed an agreement with the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to strengthen the sector in the state, officials said on Friday.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aimed at providing a structured and technology-driven push to the dairy sector of Mizoram, was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Lalduhoma and state Cooperation Minister PC Vanlalruata on Thursday, they said.

The MoU was signed by state Cooperation Secretary Udit Rai Prakash, NDDB Executive Director S Rajeev and MULCO MD Lalhmunliani.

The agreement marks a significant step towards aligning Mizoram's dairy development efforts with the Ministry of Cooperation's flagship programme, 'White Revolution 2.0', officials said. As per the agreement, the NDDB will prepare a comprehensive dairy development plan for Mizoram in line with the target under the Ministry of Cooperation's flagship scheme, White Revolution 2.0, they said. It will provide technical support and assistance in all required areas, while MULCO will be responsible for implementing the plan in the state, they added.

The CM said the agreement would enhance milk production in Mizoram and also improve the livelihoods and income of livestock farmers. He said the Mizo people have traditionally been engaged in animal husbandry and that the state possesses good land resources suitable for livestock rearing.

"By integrating modern technology and improved practices, the state's potential can be harnessed more productively," he said. (PTI)

Drone-based healthcare services in Nagaland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 23: The Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing Centre (NGISRSC) and the health & family welfare department signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) at the directorate of health & family welfare in Kohima to integrate drone technology into the state's healthcare service framework.

An official statement on Friday said the MoA, signed on Thursday, seeks to address critical challenges arising from Nagaland's difficult terrain and limited accessibility by deploying drone technology for emergency medical supply delivery, response during disease outbreaks and natural calamities, aerial support for vector control, and geospatial mapping for informed planning and decision-making.

Under the agreement, the NGISRSC will undertake drone operations, capacity building, data analysis, and ensure compliance with applicable regulatory frameworks, while the health & family welfare department will extend necessary logistical support, coordination, and deployment planning.

During the signing of the agreement, senior project director, NGISRSC, Mhathung Kithan emphasised the importance of integrating emerging technologies into public health systems, stating that the adoption of drone technology would significantly enhance the efficiency of healthcare service delivery across the state.

Principal director, health & family welfare department, Dr Mereninla Senlem, highlighted that the collaboration would strengthen the state's preparedness and response mechanisms during emergencies and disasters. She noted that the initiative would play a crucial role in ensuring timely delivery of essential medical supplies during emergency health operations and disaster situations.

This MoA marks an important milestone in Nagaland's journey toward resilient, technology-enabled healthcare and sets a model for inter-departmental collaboration in leveraging emerging technologies for public welfare, the statement added.

NHIDCL donates 2 ambulances to Mon dist

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 23: The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), donated two ambulances under their CSR activity to Tizit PHC and Wakching PHC under Mon district on Friday.

Mon DC Wennyei Konyak handed over the keys of the new ambulances to the Mon chief medical officer.

The ambulances were flagged off by Konyak to their respective locations, marking a significant step toward improving emergency medical response and healthcare delivery in the district.

He appealed to the PHCs to have ownership of the vehicles and use them judiciously to cater to the needs of the people.

Meghalaya CM writes to Odisha counterpart over pastor assault

SHILLONG, Jan 23: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma has written to his Odisha counterpart expressing concern over reports of an incident in which a pastor was allegedly assaulted and publicly humiliated by a mob earlier this month.

In his letter to Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Majhi, Sangma said India's strength lies in its constitutional values where faith is a matter of individual conscience and disputes must be addressed strictly through lawful means.

He said incidents of mob violence in a peaceful state like Odisha are deeply distressing for citizens across the country, and more so for people of the Christian faith who believe in living with dignity and self-respect.

"Mob violence cannot be allowed to replace the rule of law. Targeting persons for their faith corrodes the plural social fabric that is essential to our constitutional order," the chief minister said.

He further said acts of extremism cannot be allowed to substitute due process as they risk creating fear and mistrust among communities.

"I trust your leadership will ensure that Odisha continues to uphold justice and the rule of law," Sangma said in the letter. A pastor was assaulted, paraded with a garland of shoes and forced to eat cow dung on suspicion of religious conversion in Odisha's Dhenkanal district on January 4. (PTI)

NFR pushes ahead with Dimapur–Kohima rail link, work progressing on strategic project

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is continuing construction work on the strategically significant Dimapur (Dhansiri)–Kohima (Zubza) new railway line project, which will, for the first time, connect Nagaland's capital city with the national railway network.

Spanning a total length of 78.42 km, the project passes through Karbi Anglong district in Assam and Chumukedima and Kohima districts in Nagaland.

The alignment includes eight stations—Dhansiri, Dhansiripar, Shokhuvi, Molvom, Pherima, Piphema, Menguzuma and Zubza. Of these, Dhansiri, Shokhuvi and Molvom stations have already been completed.

The project involves challenging engineering works, including the construction of 20 tunnels with a combined length of

31,169 metres, 27 major bridges and 149 minor bridges, with substantial portions of these structures already in place.

The line has been commissioned in phases so far.

The Dhansiri–Shokhuvi section, measuring 16.5 km, was commissioned in October 2021, followed by the Shokhuvi–Molvom section of 14.64 km in March 2025.

Regular train services are currently operating from Shokhuvi, connecting it with Guwahati in Assam and Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh, providing passengers with safer, smoother and more reliable travel options. With the commissioning of Molvom station, it has become the third major railway station in Nagaland and began handling freight operations in September 2025.

Once fully completed, the Dimapur–Kohima rail link is expected to significantly enhance access to education, healthcare, employment and markets, while reducing reliance on road transport by offering a comfortable, affordable and time-efficient travel alternative.

NFR has set a target to complete the remaining sections of the project by 2029, a milestone that is expected to play a key role in boosting connectivity and overall development in the region.

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

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

No. KDVD/Ad & Interview Etc. /2/2023/543 /Dated Diphu the 23/01 /2026.

NOTICE

With reference to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Authority letter No. KAAC/T&D-300/Pt.1/PC/CSB/Clause 3.6/2025-26/01 Dated 21/02/2026, the Viva-Voce examination scheduled on 29/01/2026 for the Posts of Grade-IV under A. H. & Vety. Department is hereby Postponed until further notification. Inconvenience caused to the candidates is hereby regretted.

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

Page 10 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 21:53 Page 1

IT WAS A LITTLE UPSETTING FOR ME: RANI MUKERJI ON HER VOICE BEING DUBBED IN 'GHULAM'

Actor Rani Mukerji on Thursday said it was upsetting when the makers of her 1998 film "Ghulam" decided to get her character's voice dubbed by another actor and thanked filmmaker Karan Johar for letting her retain it in "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai".

The National Award-winning actor sat down for a fireside chat with Johar here to discuss her three decades in cinema. She is also gearing up for her new movie "Mardaani 3", which is set to be released in theatres on January 30.

Rani recalled that during the shoot of "Ghulam", it was co-star Aamir Khan who told her that her voice would be dubbed by another artist.

"I think as a newcomer you don't have much of a choice because it was a really big thing for me to be able to do a film opposite Aamir because he was one of the superstars then.

"I learned later from Vikram (Bhatt) who's my director that actually it was a decision taken by probably Vikram, Mukesh ji and Aamir. But they made Aamir become the bad cop to speak to me. And Aamir kind of explained to me that we have to sacrifice certain things for the best of the film. And probably your voice is not apt for the character or the role," Rani said.

She said Aamir asked about her favourite actress and she instantly replied that it was Sridevi.

"He (Aamir) gave an example of how Sridevi's voice was dubbed in a lot of her films. But it didn't stop her from being the star that she became. So with that logic, he said, 'Rani, you must surrender to whatever is best for the film and we think that your voice should be dubbed.'

"And it was a little upsetting for me. But obviously I couldn't show the fact that I was upset because you need to be a team player whenever you're part of a film.

And I think as actors and technicians, we need to be part of a team. Even if there are personal disappointments, it doesn't matter as long as the intent is true for the film. And they went ahead and they dubbed my voice."

The actor then became emotional as she recounted the story of how Johar made the decision to retain her voice in "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", which came out the same year. In Johar's directorial, Rani appeared alongside Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol while Salman Khan made a special appearance.

"I really owe this to Karan, we were shooting for the trailer of 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai'. You came up to me and you said, 'Rani, are people dubbing your voice in 'Ghulam'? And I said, 'yeah'. So he said, 'Do you have a problem with dubbing?' And I said, 'No, I don't have a problem with dubbing.' He said, 'did you dub your first film?' I said, 'Of course, I dubbed my first film'.

"So he said, 'I love your voice', and I still remember it clearly. You said, 'I love your voice and you will dub for my film.' And thanks to you, Karan, that I was able to retain my voice," Rani said.

Daughter of late filmmaker Ram Mukherjee and playback singer Krishna Mukherjee, Rani made her acting debut with the 1996 movie "Raja Ki Aayegi Baaraat".

She went on to star in a wide range of films across genres, earning acclaim for performances in "Saathiya", "Black", "Bunty Aur Babli", "Hum Tum", "No One Killed Jessica", "Mardaani" and "Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway", establishing herself as an actor known for both mainstream hits and female-led roles.

Rani said even though she came from a film family, her parents never thought she'd become a huge actor.

"I don't even think they had dreams because at the time that we were growing up, I think it was never really something that occurred to my dad that I'm going to go ahead in life and work and do stuff like that.

"I think it was more always a boy's responsibility. I think that responsibility, they saw through my brother."

She revealed that her parents wanted her to get "married at a very young age".

"But I think destiny had other plans for me with the offer that came for 'Raja Ki Aayegi Bharat.' I think my mom just told me that, 'You know Salim (Akhtar, director) uncle who is a family friend, he has offered you the film. Why don't you take it up and see how it goes?'

"I never realised that my mom was probably finding a way to make the financial situation in the house better because they knew that if I do well in this field maybe things would get better. But probably at that point of time I didn't see it from that angle."

Johar said it was Rani's now husband, producer Aditya Chopra, who recommended her name to him for the role in "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", which was rejected by eight leading ladies at the time.

"I had become like the most rejected first time filmmaker because nobody wanted to do that part of Tina. I was trying very hard to convince them that it's pivotal to the film. All those eight girls and I remember each one of their names and I thanked them that they said no to me. "One evening it was none other than Aditya Chopra who called me. He said, 'Have you seen this new girl in this trailer of this film called 'Raja Ki ayegi Baarat'? It's this song. She comes out and she does a gesture. This girl is a big star.'

"I went and had a look and I said, 'She's a very pretty girl. And I went and met her. And, of course, the rest is history," Johar said. Rani said she did not know about the kindness shown to her by Aditya Chopra, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir and Johar at the time.

"You all probably saw this at the same time and you all thought that I was okay enough to be part of your films," she said. (PTI)

FEAR OF MEDIOCRITY PUSHED ME TO TAKE A BREAK: BHUMI PEDNEKAR

Actor Bhumi Pednekar says after working continuously for a decade, she saw a slight corruption creeping into her performances, prompting her to go on a sabbatical of ten months.

The 36-year-old actor is now back, feeling fresh and promoting her new show "Daldal", a crime thriller which is polar opposite to her OTT debut series "The Royals" in 2025. "I made the best decision of my life... I felt like if I needed longevity for the next two decades, I had to take those months off...

"One of my biggest fears in life is that I don't want to be mediocre with my performances. And I felt like I was going on that path. I just felt depleted, like when you feel a sense of emptiness. I felt like there was a slight corruption in me. And so it was important for me to take that break for that corruption to go," she told PTI in an interview.

Pednekar started out as an assistant casting director at Yash Raj Films but life had other plans for her. She took a plunge in acting with the studio's 2015 movie "Dum Laga Ke Haisha", which broke Bollywood's conventional romantic tropes to tell the story of an overweight girl and her reluctant husband.

Since then, the actor has consistently delivered praiseworthy performances in movies such as "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan", "Bala", "Saand Ki Aankh", "Badhaai Do", "Bhakshak", and "Bheed".

"It was ten years of work... I didn't have a pause. I'm an artist, not a factory and I think we forget that. My job is to give my best," the actor, who completed 10 years in the industry in 2025, said.

According to Pednekar, women artists in the industry don't have the luxury of doing one film in two years.

"We are not paid that well and I've to run my own house. So, we think we do three or four films and the effort is that we still choose great work. Therefore, I was like, I need to go back to doing films for the reason I started doing them, which is I love it," she said.

Asked if the lukewarm response to her recent films — "Mere Husband Ki Biwi", "The Lady Killer", and "Raksha Bandhan" — also led to her decision to take a step back, Pednekar said the two had no connection.

"I feel like it is not about how a piece performs, it is about what I have left in me to give," she said.

"Daldal", created by Suresh Triveni, is a psychological crime thriller series and features Pednekar as Rita Ferreira, a cop on the lookout for a cold-blooded serial killer in Mumbai.

Directed by Amrit Raj Gupta, the show is based on author Vish Dhamija's best-selling book "Bhendi Bazaar".

"My hope for 'Daldal' is that it truly becomes the 'Mindhunters' of India," said Pednekar, referring to Hollywood director David Fincher's acclaimed Netflix series.

"After a long time, I saw intelligent writing. There's been a lot of work that's done in this genre, it's thoroughly enjoyed, and with wonderful women actors leading it. I was very curious to see, have they disrupted it? And to me, they have done it. It's not a who-dunnit, it's a why-dunnit. And yet it will keep viewers hooked on because you are invested in the characters."

"Daldal" follows Ferreira as she investigates a string of brutally planned murders that point to a cold-blooded and deeply disturbed killer. As the killings escalate, Rita is drawn into an increasingly dark and dangerous case that begins to take a psychological toll on her.

It is the darkest character of her career, one that also forced Pednekar to confront her own unresolved issues.

"I feel the show forced me to deal with a lot of my childhood trauma. Sometimes we don't even realise that we have gone through certain experiences," she said.

"When you're growing up in school, there's bullying, the kids are mean, and I felt like I've dealt with it in the best way because I have a great family. But I don't think I did. I never kept it to myself," Pednekar said.

It also brought back memories of the things that happened after she started working.

"I was 17 when I started working and there's so much (you go through). It can also be a way a man touches you on a busy street. That feeling, that touch, you'll never forget. That is trauma that my body has stored, and I remember those instances so clearly."

While preparing for the role, Pednekar said she had to decide how much of her own lived experience she wanted to bring into the character.

"She is broken, she is dark and punishing herself. I'm the opposite of that. But yet, I had to go into experiences that I had gotten over and healed from because that's what actors do. We enjoy torturing ourselves, because that's my bank of experiences," she added.

"Daldal" is produced by Abundantia Entertainment's Vikram Malhotra along with Triveni. It is written by Sreekanth Agneeaswaran, Rohan D'Souza, and Priya Saggi. The show, which also features Samara Tijori and Aditya Rawal, will make its debut on Prime Video on January 30. (PTI)

Mohanlal starts shooting for 'L366'

Mohanlal has once again set social media abuzz as he unveiled a striking new moustache look as he began the shoot for his upcoming film with director Tharun Moorthy. Tentatively titled L366, the project has already generated excitement among fans.

Taking to his Instagram handle, Mohanlal shared a black and white photo and wrote, "L366". In the photo, he is seen sporting a moustache look. In 2025, director Tharun Moorthy disclosed that Mohanlal and he have reunited for another film. Fans immediately reacted. One of the fans wrote, "Look Laletta Age in Reverse gear." Another wrote, "Oh my god, how are you?"

Mohanlal, Thudarum Director Tharun Moorthy Reunite

Taking to his X timeline, Tharun Moorthy wrote, "When a storyteller and a legend meet again, a universe stirs. After 'Thudarum', I and @Mohanlal embark on another voyage, carried by the vision of Ashiq Usman Productions. Rolling Soon…" The director's announcement has triggered huge excitement among fans, some of whom have now begun to wonder if the upcoming film will be a sequel to one of Tharun Moorthy's earlier films. This is because Tharun Moorthy, on the occasion of Onam, earlier this year, had announced that he was in the process of writing a sequel to one of his earlier films. Tharun Moorthy announcing he has joined hands with Mohanlal, fans have begun wondering if this film is a sequel to the blockbuster 'Thudarum'. For the unaware, 'Thudarum' was a crime action drama that featured Mohanlal and Shobana in the lead. Directed by Tharun Moorthy, the film had triggered huge excitement among fans for a number of reasons.

The first and foremost reason was that this film featured actress Shobana opposite Mohanlal after almost 19 years. Their onscreen pairing is among the most loved in Malayalam cinema. Some of the landmark films in which the two actors have been featured together include 'Manichithrathazhu', 'Thenmavi Kombathu' and 'Mambazhakkalam'.

Mammootty And Mohanlal Starrer Patriot To Release On April 23? Find Out

If sources in the industry are to be believed, director Mahesh Narayanan's eagerly-awaited thriller 'Patriot', featuring both superstars of Malayalam cinema Mammootty and Mohanlal, is likely to be released on April 23 this year. Although there has been no official announcement on the release date of the film, sources in the industry say that the film is likely to hit screens on April 23 this year.

It may be recalled that on January 4 this year, the makers of the film had announced that the unit had wrapped up the film's shooting. They wrote,"That's a wrap. Blood, sweat, belief. #PATRIOT marches on. See you on the Big screen." (PTI)

RED LORRY FILM FESTIVAL 3 TO TAKE PLACE IN MUMBAI IN MARCH

The third edition of Red Lorry Film Festival is set to take place in Mumbai between March 13 and 15.The film festival will present a slate of over 120 titles, including Bradley Cooper's latest directorial, "Is This Thing On?", "Safe House" and the French drama "Nino", among others, according to a press release.There will also be a special "Legacy Rewind" section, celebrating tributes, classics and restored films that have shaped Indian cinema over the decades. The 3rd edition of RLFF will also feature a special celebration of Marathi cinema, with screenings of acclaimed upcoming and well-received Marathi films.Additionally, the festival will host the Rendezvous with French Cinema section in partnership with Alliance Francaise de Bombay (AF Bombay).Ashish Saksena, festival director of Red Lorry Film Festival and COO - Cinemas, said the focus remains on "thoughtful curation and delivering a festival experience that reflects the evolving tastes of Indian cinephiles while championing cinematic voices"."Red Lorry Film Festival was created with the intent of offering Indian audiences access to carefully curated global cinema in a theatrical environment. Over the last two editions, we have seen a growing appetite for international storytelling across cultures and genres. As we enter the third edition," he added.In addition to film screenings, RLFF will feature masterclasses and panel discussions with filmmakers and industry professionals, along with red carpet gala events. The festival will be hosted at INOX Maison, Jio World Drive Plaza, BKC, with satellite screenings at PVR ICON, PVR City Mall, PVR Dynamix, and Cinepolis Fun Republic Mall. (PTI)

Anubhav Sinha, Taapsee Pannu reunite for courtroom drama 'Assi'

Filmmaker Anubhav Sinha on Friday dropped the first look of his next directorial "Assi", a courtroom drama headlined by actor Taapsee Pannu.

The filmmaker and studio T-Series shared a motion poster of the movie, which will be released in theatres on February 20.

"We forget. We forgive. But not this time. 80. Per day. Every day. #Assi - An urgent watch, only in cinemas from 20th Feb," read a joint post by Sinha and T-Series.

Pannu, who will be seen in the role of a lawyer in the movie, also shared the motion poster on her Instagram page.

"It's been long... Long since we normalised this... See you in court... I mean the theatres... #Assi - an urgent watch, only in cinemas from 20th Feb," she wrote.

The movie marks a reunion between Pannu and Sinha after they collaborated on critically-acclaimed movies "Mulk" (2018) and 2020's "Thappad".

"Assi" will also feature Kani Kusruti, Revathy, Manoj Pahwa, Kumud Mishra, Zeeshan Ayyub, with special appearances by Naseeruddin Shah, Supriya Pathak, and Seema Bhargava.

In a press note, the makers said "Assi" is a relentless investigative thriller that unfolds through an intense, power-packed courtroom drama.

"As the film concludes, it leaves you questioning Why didn't I know this? Or did I? Justice must be served, but first, justice must be defined. Are those proven guilty the only culprits?" they said.

Sinha, also known for hard-hitting dramas such as "Article 15", "Anek", "Bheed" and series "IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack", has produced the movie through his banner Benaras Mediaworks Production alongside Bhushan Kumar and Krishan Kumar of T-Series. (PTI)

Page 11 Jan 24_Normal Pages 1/23/2026 7:09 PM Page 1

Delhi Capitals eye strong all-round show against RCB to stay alive in WPL playoff race

VADODARA, Jan 23: Delhi Capitals will require a strong all-round effort to stop an in-form Royal Challengers Bengaluru on their tracks to stay alive in the race to Women's Premier League playoffs, here on Saturday.

Capitals showed signs of resurgence with a seven-wicket win over Mumbai Indians in their previous match, moving to fourth place in the table with four points.

But DC will have to raise their game by another notch to beat Royal Challengers, still unbeaten in this edition of the WPL.

So far, Delhi's batting was led by veteran Lizelle Lee (213 runs) with Laura Wolvaardt (123) and Shafali Verma (149) giving her occasional support.

But the form of Jemimah Rodrigues was a matter of concern.

Rodrigues made an unbeaten fifty in the win over Mumbai to ease the worries to an extent, and she will have to chip in against RCB with another substantial innings.

DC also has some gaps to plug in the bowling department. Despite having some fancied names, their bowling so far has been led by uncapped pacer Nandani Sharma.

The Chandigarh girl has taken 10 wickets from five matches at an acceptable economy of 8.7. But India spinner Shree Charani (7 wickets, economy: 9.2) and Sneh Rana (1 wicket, economy: 12.4) are yet to hit their straps.

Even veteran South African pacer Marizanne Kapp (4 wickets) have not yet produced the yields, though her economy 5.25 has been top-notch.

The DC bowlers will have to be at their very best against a RCB line-up, bristling with experience and firepower.

Skipper Smriti Mandhana and Grace Harris have been a power-packed presence at the top, while Nadine de Klerk and Richa Ghosh have, as usual, propped up the middle and lower-order.

The rise of Gautami Naik, who made a fine 73 against Gujarat Giants, too has added to RCB's batting muscle.

The former champions' bowling too has been in top-shape with Sayali Satghare, De Klerk, Laurene Bell and Shreyanka Patil affecting regular strikes.

Their economy too has been astounding — 8, 6.9, 5.4 and 8.9 in that order across five matches.

Having already qualified for playoffs with 10 points, RCB will be eager to register another win to remain atop the table and move closer to a direct final entry.

Teams (from):

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (c), Richa Ghosh, Shreyanka Patil, Georgia Voll, Nadine de Klerk, Radha Yadav, Lauren Bell, Linsey Smith, Prema Rawat, Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, Grace Harris, Gautami Naik, Prathyoosha Kumar, D. Hemalatha, Sayali Satghare.

Delhi Capitals: Jemimah Rodrigues (c), Shafali Verma, Marzianne Kapp, Niki Prasad, Laura Wolvaardt, Chinelle Henry, Shree Charani, Sneh Rana, Lizelle Lee, Deeya Yadav, Taniyaa Bhatia, Mamatha Madiwala, Nandni Sharma, Lucy Hamilton, Minnu Mani, Alana King.

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

Bangladesh appeal can't be heard by ICC's DRC

Scotland to be named as replacement by Saturday

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: A desperate Bangladesh Cricket Board has written to the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) of ICC requesting it to overturn the governing body's decision to hold the national men's team's T20 World Cup games in India but its appeal won't be heard as it is outside the remit of the sub-committee.

Even as the ICC has kept Scotland on stand-by, the BCB under Aminul Islam Bulbul, after being completely cornered, decided to use its last resort --- approach the DRC headed by Englishman Michael Beloff (Kings Counsel).

"Yes, BCB has approached the DRC of ICC as it wants to exhaust all its options. If DRC rules against BCB, then the only body that can be approached is Court of Arbitration of Sports (CAS) in Switzerland," a BCB source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

Bangladesh's interim government and its sports ministry advisor and anti-India hardliner Asif Nazrul had announced that the team wouldn't travel to India due to "security reasons" after senior pacer Mustafizur Rahaman was removed from the Kolkata Knight Riders squad on BCCI's diktat.

If one checks the ICC's Constitution and 'Terms of Reference' for the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC), then it will become clear that it doesn't have any right to hear an appeal against a decision passed by the Board of Directors of the global body.

While the ICC Board of Directors emphatically voted 14-2 in favour of keeping Bangladesh's matches in India after an independent security assessment which cited security threat being "low to moderate", Nazrul maintained that it wasn't the BCB but the government which is mandated to take the decision.

As per clause 1.3 of Terms of Reference of DRC: "The Committee shall not operate as an appeal body against decisions of the ICC or any decision making body established under the ICC's Memorandum and Articles of Association or under any rules or regulations of the ICC..."

An ICC board source said: "Bangladesh can approach the DRC but if one looks at the rules, the case can't even heard as the committee doesn't have the remit to hear an appeal which is against the decision made by the Board of Directors."

It is understood that ICC chairman Jay Shah, who was in Namibia for the U19 World Cup, is in Dubai now and a formal decision on Bangladesh's replacement would be announced by Saturday.

"The ICC Board Members are extremely angry with Aminul Islam Bulbul as to why before informing the global body, a press conference was held. Asif Nazrul is a persona-non-grata for the ICC but Bulbul shouldn't have allowed a press conference before informing their decision to the ICC," the source told PTI.

The ICC's DRC acts according to the British law and one of its most recent verdicts under Beloff came in 2018 when it had summarily rejected Pakistan Cricket Board's USD 70 million compensation claim against the BCCI for allegedly not honouring an agreement to play bilateral series in Pakistan.

The DRC in its verdict had termed that what PCB back then had called a "Memorandum of Understanding" between two nations was merely a "letter of intent" which wasn't binding on the BCCI.

The DRC normally checks if the ICC Board have followed all rules as per its law and accordingly gives its verdict. It is not an appeals body.

Apart from Beloff, others include Mike Heron (Kings Counsel), Justice Winston Anderson, both of whom are Independent Code of Conduct Commission representative. The independent lawyers are Deon van Zyl (South Africa), Gary Roberts (Americas), Guo Cai (Asia), EAP Anabelle Bennett, Jean Paulsson (Europe), Peter Nicholson (Ethics Officer). Vijay Malhotra (Chair of Audit Committee) and Sally Clark (Management Support) are also part of the 11-member committee. (PTI)

Pakistan selectors include Shaheen Afridi for series against Australia

KARACHI, Jan 23: Pakistani selectors on Friday included fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi in the national T20 squad for the home series against Australia.

The squad announced has no changes from the one that played earlier this month against Sri Lanka with the exception of Afridi's return from a knee injury and Babar Azam coming back after his largely unsuccessful stint in the Big Bash League.

Afridi had injured his knee while fielding during the Big Bash League in Australia and returned home for treatment at the high performance centre in Lahore.

Australia are set to arrive in the country on January 28 and will play only their second series in the format on Pakistan soil after a solitary T20I in April 2022.

The Pakistani selectors are yet to announce their final World Cup squad amid growing rumours of a possible pullout by the Pakistan board in support of the Bangladesh cricket board's stance of not sending their team to India due to "security concerns".

Pakistan squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq. (PTI)

Sancho scores as Aston Villa seals Europa League last-16 spot with 1-0 win over Fenerbahce

LONDON, Jan 23: Jadon Sancho scored his first goal for Aston Villa to lift his new club past Fenerbahce 1-0 and into the Europa League round of 16 with a game to spare.

Lyon also clinched a last-16 spot with a 1-0 victory over Young Boys in Bern, and Freiburg joined them by beating Maccabi Tel Aviv by the same score.

Lyon and Villa are level on points (18) with six wins and a loss atop the standings with one game to go the in the league phase. Freiburg is one point behind in third.

Like in the Champions League, the top eight finishers advance automatically after eight rounds to the round of 16 while the teams placed from nine to 24 enter a two-leg playoff to progress.

Sancho, who joined Villa on a season-long loan from Manchester United in September, met a deflected cross from Matty Cash to hand Villa the victory.

Villa manager Unai Emery had a string of injured players unavailable, including captain John McGinn and defensive midfielder Boubacar Kamara.

Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during stints in charge of Sevilla and Villarreal.

Top teams

Ainsley Maitland-Niles delivered for Lyon in first-half stoppage time for the French team's 1-0 win over Young Boys. Freiburg got a late goal from Igor Matanovic for the Bundesliga club to beat Maccabi Tel Aviv 1-0.

Joachim Soltvedt converted from the spot in the 10th minute of stoppage time to salvage a 3-3 home draw for Norwegian side Brann against Midtjylland that dropped the Danish club to fourth place on 16 points.

Morgan Gibbs-White missed an opportunity to put Nottingham Forest ahead when Braga goalkeeper Lukáš Hornícek saved his spot kick early in the second half. Less than a minute later, the Portuguese hosts took a 1-0 lead on Ryan Yates' own goal. The Premier League club couldn't equalize and saw substitute Elliot Anderson dismissed in stoppage time. Braga is fifth, level on points with Midtjylland. At Stadio Olimpico, Niccolò Pisilli scored twice for Roma to beat Stuttgart 2-0 and move to sixth on 15 points.

Ferencvaros dropped to seventh after it was held 1-1 by Panathinaikos.

Real Betis lost 2-0 at PAOK with captain Andrija Živkovic and Giorgos Giakoumakis scoring second-half goals and has 14 points in eighth, the same as Porto in ninth. (AP)

India begin campaign against Uruguay on March 8

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Placed in four-team Pool B, India face Uruguay on March 8 in their opening match of the 2026 FIH Women's Hockey World Cup qualifiers in Hyderabad. The hosts then play Scotland on March 9 and Wales on March 11 in their remaining pool matches. England, Korea, Italy and Austria form Pool B..

The semifinals will be played on March 13 while the third-place playoff and the final will be held on March 14.

The other qualifying tournament will be held in Santiago, Chile, from February 28 to March 8, with Australia, Japan, Ireland, Chile, France, Canada, Malaysia and Switzerland competing in it.

The top three teams each from the qualifiers in Hyderabad and Santiago will book the tickets for the 2026 FIH Women's Hockey World Cup to be held in Belgium and the Netherlands in August. (PTI)

Scheffler starts the new year with a 63

LA QUINTA (USA), Jan 23: The idea for Scottie Scheffler was to get a gauge on his game at The American Express, and all appeared to be in good working order. He made birdies on half of his holes for a 9-under 63 to join a parade of low scores that left him one shot out of the lead. Min Woo Lee and Pierceson Coody led the way at 10-under 62 on the Nicklaus Tournament course at PGA West, the easiest of the three on the rotation. Scheffler played at La Quinta, where he didn't miss a green until the 17th hole. He chipped that in for birdie.

"I think the hardest part about these tests where you have to shoot so low is you can only shoot so many under par in a round of golf," Scheffler said. "The easier tests, where the scores are crazy low, if you start falling behind it's a lot harder to keep up, so you have to keep pace out here."

Jason Day had the most impressive round of the day with his 63 on the Stadium Course at PGA West, which averaged nearly four shots harder than the Nicklaus course and just over three shots harder than La Quinta. But it was a solid start for so many of the 156 players — the largest domestic field of the year among regular PGA Tour events because of the three courses. They were treated to ideal conditions they expect in the California desert, with pleasant weather and barely a breath of wind. Even with the new tech-infused TGL, weather like this has always made Palm Springs feel like playing indoors.

"You're coming to a dome almost," Vince Whaley said after a 63 at Nicklaus. "You got hardly any wind, perfect turf, perfect golf courses, and it's just a good check to see where your game's at in very benign conditions. Because if you can't hit a 6-iron out here, you're not going to hit a 6-iron good anywhere." Scheffler leads the strongest field in decades at The American Express, approaching the three-year anniversary at No. 1 in the world, a combined 13 tour titles and three majors the last two years.

This was his first competition against a full field — the first time playing when there was a 36-hole cut — since September in Napa, California (which he won).

Six holes into the new year, he already was 5-under par.

Scheffler hit only five of 14 fairways but was rarely out of position until the end of his round, twice being blocked by trees that required a hard fade on one how and a low slider around the trees on another at the 17th. That one ran through the green, leading to a chip that rolled in like a putt. It was a fast start and routine pars in the middle with a few birdies sprinkled in. About the only thing that caused even a little stress was when sprinkler came on right below his feet when he was doing interviews after his round.

"Felt I could have hit a few more fairways on the back nine, give myself some more opportunities," Scheffler said. "Even the fairways I was missing, I was missing on the correct side. And it was nice, even though I wasn't hitting it my best on the back, but to keep it in play and

That was the case for just about everybody.

Lee had three straight birdies around the turn and four in a row toward the end of his round. Coody made seven straight birdies on the back nine before closing with a par.

Nine players were at 63, a group that included Ben Griffin and Patrick Cantlay, and eight more players were at 64.

The final round will be played on the Stadium Course, and its difficulty was primarily the firmness of the greens that made it hard to get it close. Day didn't have too many problems as he put in a new set of Avoda irons this year.

"Irons felt great, the short game felt good, and I putted really nice today," Day said. "Just got to work on the driver a little bit. Some of the drives were a little off. But overall I feel pretty solid." Rickie Fowler was slowed by three bogeys in a four-hole stretch on the back nine at La Quinta, but his left shoulder felt great and there wasn't too much tournament rust. Fowler hasn't competed since the BMW Championship five months ago. (AP)

Forward Trinity Rodman agrees to new 3-year deal with the Washington Spirit of the NWSL

NEW YORK, Jan 23: Forward Trinity Rodman has agreed to a three-year contract to remain with the Washington Spirit, ending months of speculation about the Olympic gold medalist's future in the National Women's Soccer League.

"I think I've always had a vision and an idea of what I wanted my legacy to be," Rodman said at an event announcing her new deal on Thursday in Los Angeles. "We're doing that and I'm so grateful for that."

The speculation over Rodman's future with the Spirit spurred criticism of the NWSL salary cap and whether it hampered the league from attracting and maintaining top players.

Rodman, 23, became a free agent at the end of last season after five years with the Spirit. One of the biggest stars in the NWSL, keeping her in the league was considered vitally important as other U.S. national team stars, including Naomi Girma and Alyssa Thompson, opted to play in Europe.

Rodman, who won a gold medal with the United States at the Paris Olympics, has been drawn interest from European teams that don't have a salary cap.

The Spirit and Rodman struck a multi-year deal that both parties maintained was in compliance with the salary cap, but it was rejected by the league because it went against the spirit of the rules.

The National Women's Soccer League Players Association filed a grievance claiming that the NWSL's rejection of the contract violated Rodman's free agency rights and violated the collective bargaining agreement.

To address the salary cap issue, the NWSL in late December adopted a "High Impact Player" mechanism that allowed teams to spend up to $1 million over the cap to sign players that meet certain criteria. Those included metrics like national team minutes, inclusion among the 30 candidates for the Ballon d'Or or player rankings by outlets like the Guardian or ESPN.

The NWSLPA filed a grievance over the rule, claiming it violated the collective bargaining agreement and federal labor law because player compensation must be negotiated. The NWSLPA maintains the league had no authority to "unilaterally create a new pay structure."

The NWSL's salary cap is $3.5 million for each team for the 2026 season, although it will increase each year until it hits $5.1 million in 2030.

Rodman is currently with the national team in their annual January training camp in Carson, California. The team plays a match there against Paraguay on Saturday and then plays Chile on Tuesday in Santa Barbara.

Rodman has 47 appearances and 11 goals with the national team, more than any other player on the latest roster. She played in one U.S. match last year, a 2-0 victory over Brazil in April, because of injuries. (AP)

Mane, Sakshi better national record scores in air rifle trials

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Maharashtra's Sakshi Sunil Padekar and Railways' Shahu Tushar Mane bettered national record scores in the finals and qualification rounds of the 10m air rifle women and men events respectively at the national selection trials 1 and 2 (Group A) here on Friday.

Sakshi shot 254.3 in the T2 final while Shahu Tushar Mane scored 637.1 in the qualification. Both these scores are better than the national record but they will not enter the official record books.

Olympian Arjun Babuta won the men's T2 final in 10m air rifle, while Sakshi claimed the women's 10m air rifle T2 final. Olympian Rahi Sarnobat claimed the T2 final of women's 25m pistol.

Sakshi dominates

Maharashtra's Sakshi produced a commanding performance in the women's 10m air rifle Trial 2, staying firmly in control from qualification through to the final.

Padekar topped the qualification round with an impressive 634.4 before backing it up with a superb 254.3 in the final, better than the existing national record score, set by Elavenil Valarivan in the Asian Shooting Championship last year, to seal first place in emphatic fashion. Kerala's Vidarsa K Vinod shot 252.0 in the final to finish second, while world championship bronze medallist Elavenil Valarivan, who was second in qualification with 633.4, claimed third place with a final score of 231.4.

Uttar Pradesh's Khyati Chaudhary narrowly missed out on the podium, finishing fourth with 209.7, while Delhi's Rajshree Anilkumar Sancheti ended the final in fifth place with 188.6.

Maharashtra's Arya Rajesh Borse finished sixth with 167.5, while Trial 1 winner Tilottama Sen was placed seventh with 145.3. West Bengal's Ismita Bhowal did not start the final despite qualifying sixth with a score of 631.6.

Arjun Babuta wins thriller

Olympian Arjun Babuta claimed top honours in a closely contested men's 10m air rifle Trial 2 final, finishing with 253.4.

Babuta, who had qualified second with 632.4, elevated his performance in the final to edge out Maharashtra's Parth Rakesh Mane by the narrowest of margins.

Parth finished just 0.1 points behind on 253.3 to take second place with both athletes shooting 10.8 in their final shot. Navy's Kiran Ankush Jadhav secured third with 231.2.

Delhi's Paarth Makhiya finished fourth with 210.1, followed by Telangana's Dhanush Srikanth in fifth on 187.9. (PTI)

A meeting of experience and youth

Sabalenka set to play Mboko at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Jan 23: Luxury brands have been getting airtime at the Australian Open as Aryna Sabalenka and Victoria Mboko advanced to the fourth round.

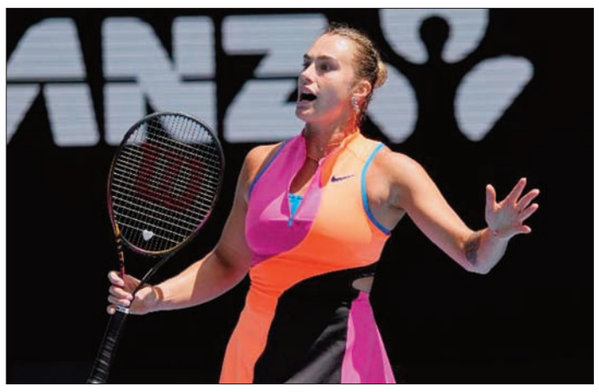
When the top-ranked player in women's tennis meets one of the sport's rising teenage stars, though, it'll be all about the business of tennis.

No. 1 Sabalenka edged Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (4), 7-6 (7) and 19-year-old Mboko ousted 14th-seeded Clara Tauson 7-6 (5), 5-7, 6-3 to advance to the Round of 16.

Sabalenka has won the Australian Open twice and reached the final here last year. She has also won two U.S. Open titles. Mboko is making her Australian Open debut at Melbourne Park.

There's been a bigger focus on fashion than usual at the tournament after Naomi Osaka's dramatic walk-on for her first-round match.

So both had to field questions about endorsement deals timed to coincide with the year's first major



— Sabalenka with Gucci; Mboko with Rolex — but the main focus Friday was, more pertinently, on a match-up between two players of vastly different experience.

"First of all, I never actually talked to her, never had chance to hit, to practice with her. I've only seen her outside," Sabalenka said. "I was watching some matches. Yeah, she's a great player. She's a fighter. She's playing really good, aggressive tennis."

Sabalenka is playing at the Australian Open for the eighth time, has won 22 titles on tour and earned more than $45 million in prize money in her career. She was long considered among the brightest prospects in the sport but had to overcome nerves and problems with her serve. It wasn't until her fourth trip to the Australian Open that she advanced to the second week.

"I feel like maybe for me, it would be really tough to handle the success at young age," Sabalenka said. "But I feel like now seeing these girls, so like young age achieving so much, playing such a great tennis, being really mature, it's incredible. I feel like they mature much faster than I did." Mboko acknowledged it'll be a huge step up, on and off the court. It's her fourth major and her first time into the Round of 16. She has won two WTA titles, her first last year as an 18-year-old wild card in Montreal.

"I think it's super cool. I've never played a current No. 1 in the world. That's going to be a very different experience," she said. "I assume we'd be playing on Rod Laver, as well. I've never played on a Grand Slam center court either. A lot of firsts.

"To be doing that on Sunday is, I think, really cool. Just to show what I got."

Sabalenka has developed a large following by being very active on social media, bringing new fans to tennis and giving existing fans a look behind the scenes.

She takes the role of being an ambassador for the public, and a positive influence for younger players, seriously. Mboko is about to get her first close-up experience.

"That's the only focus I have, is to be good example, to show that you can balance things, that you have to have fun and also be really focused on your career," she said. "Just so the young kids are not making the same mistake that I made, being too much on tennis and it's actually created a lot of pressure and it's kind of like destroying yourself from inside.

"I'm just trying to be an example for the next generation to be fun, to be willing to do things that you like that brings you joy, but also the same time being focused on tennis." (AP)

Page 12 January 24_Normal Pages 23-01-2026 18:38 Page 1

Bangladesh matches to be played in India as scheduled

Sarfaraz Khan's 227 puts Mumbai in command against Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, Jan 23: Sarfaraz Khan's strokeful 227 gave Mumbai the bragging rights even as Hyderabad reached 138/2 at stumps on day two, trailing by a massive 422 runs in the first innings of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group D clash here on Friday.

Sarfaraz, resuming on 142, converted his first ton of the season into a huge score against a bowling attack led by star India pacer Mohammed Siraj (1/106), clobbering 19 fours and nine sixes to continue his rich vein of form.

Suved Parkar, picked in place of Ajinkya Rahane, gave a good account of himself by scoring 75 as Mumbai piled up a massive 560 in their first innings.

Hyderabad stumbled early on by losing two wickets, but Rahul Gahlaut (82 not out) and Kodimela Himateja (40 not out) saw them through till the close of play by putting on an unbeaten 100-run stand for the third wicket.

Meanwhile, bad light stopped Puducherry's advance against a struggling Jammu and Kashmir, who had slipped to 150 for six in reply to the hosts' 233. Abdul Samad was batting on 40 not out with Abid Mushtaq (1 not out) at the other end as J & K trailed by another 83 runs in the first innings.

Delhi, who were shot out for 216 on day one, were under tremendous pressure against Chhattisgarh who reached 351 for two, having conceded a first-innings lead of 135 runs. Ayush Pandey led Chhattisgarh's charge with a splendid 161 not out (313 balls; 17 fours, 1 six) while Anuj Tiwary scored 108 (197 balls, 14 fours).

Rajasthan were also in dire straits, trailing by 293 runs in the first essay after slipping to a poor 113 for six against Himachal Pradesh's 406. Resuming at 314/4, HP looked to record a big total but Rajasthan did well to pull things back, taking six wickets for 86 runs on the second day morning.

However, Mukul Negi (3/16) and Aryaman Dhaliwal (2/35) gave HP control of the game with regular strikes in the post-tea session wherein Rajasthan slipped from 58 for two to 115/6.

Brief scores:

At Hyderabad: Mumbai 560 in 123.2 overs (Siddhesh Lad 104, Sarfaraz Khan 227, Suved Parkar 75; Rakshann Readdi 4/107) lead Hyderabad 138/2 in 41 overs (Rahul Gahlaut 82 not out, Kodimela Himateja 40 not out; Himanshu Singh 1/18) by 422 runs.

At Puducherry: Puducherry 233 lead Jammu & Kashmir 150/6 in 60 overs (Shubham Khajuria 46, Abdul Samad 40 not out; Safar Udeshi 2/41) by 83 runs.

At COE (Bengaluru): Delhi 216 trail Chhattisgarh 351/2 in 102 overs (Ayush Pandey 161 not out, Anuj Tiwary 108; Divij Mehra 1/41) by 135 runs.

At Jaipur: Himachal Pradesh 406 in 122.1 overs (Ankush Bains 72, Pukhraj Mann 118, Nikhil Gangta 84; Khaleel Ahmed 3/68) lead Rajasthan 115/6 in 39 overs (Salman Khan 32; Mukul Negi 3/16, Aryaman Dhaliwal 2/35) by 293 runs. (PTI)

Alcaraz wins third-round match but loses 'drop-shot battle' at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Jan 23: Carlos Alcaraz acknowledged that while he won the third-round match, he lost the battle of the drop shots against Corentin Moutet.

That could be a first for the 22-year-old Spaniard, who grew up relentlessly practicing his drop shots and is now at the Australian Open chasing a career Grand Slam.

The left-handed Moutet mixed things up for Alcaraz in an almost festival Friday vibe on Rod Laver Arena, his blend of drop shots, slice, tweeners, half-volleys, angled volleys and even an underarm serve keeping the world's No. 1-ranked player on his toes.

The 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 win over the No. 32 seed appeared like a fairly convincing scoreline, but the match was anything but routine.

"When you play someone like Corentin you don't know what's going to be next," Alcaraz said in his on-court TV interview. "I had so much fun on the court. As you could see, we both pulled off great shots. Great points."

Alcaraz laughed when he reflected on his surprise near the end of the first set, when he was fed up with tracking down drop shots and told his support team "I'm not going to run to get those."

"I was tired to go forward to the net," he said, adding that he'd looked at the stats and — with a mild exaggeration — thought "I've been to the net 55 times?"

"I thought we were in a drop-shot competition, but he won!"

There were moments of tension, like in the second set when Alcaraz surrendered a 3-0 lead when the 26-year-old Frenchman went on a four-game roll.

Ever the showman himself, Alcaraz chimed in with some of his own tricks and tweeners. It helped him stay composed.

In the first round, Moutet was booed by the crowd for his underarm serve on match point. There was much more love from the Aussie crowd this time.

After winning a point near the end of the match with a perfect, deep lob into the corner, he made an iconic fist pump celebration.

When he held in that game with a winning volley, he marked it by doffing his cap.

Alcaraz will next play Sunday against No. 19 Tommy Paul, who advanced when Alejandro Davidovich Fokina retired with an injury after dropping the first two sets 6-1, 6-1.

"We have a great battles against each other," Alcaraz said. "The matches against each other are always a great level."

Sabalenka's tough win

Aryna Sabalenka said there were times she felt like her head, her hands and her racket were not connected but she still had just enough to squeeze past Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (4), 7-6 (7).

The top-ranked Sabalenka, chasing her third Australian Open title in four years, led 6-5 and 40-0 in the opening set but Potapova saved all three set points to send it to a tiebreaker. Sabalenka led 3-0 in the tiebreaker before Potapova leveled at 3-3. Sabalenka held two more set points and clinched the set when she laced a backhand down the line.

After trailing 4-0 in the second, Potapova rallied to level it at 4-4 and then again force a tiebreaker. Potapova had three set points in the tiebreaker but Sabalenka rallied when the pressure was on.

"She played incredible tennis," Sabalenka said. "I was always on the back foot. There are days where you just have to fight — it was such a fight."

Sabalenka won the Australian Open title in 2023 and 2024 and was the runner-up a year ago to Madison Keys. Sabalenka has also won the U.S. Open twice.

Her fourth-round match will be against the rising star Victoria Mboko, who beat 14th-seeded Clara Tauson 7-6 (5), 5-7, 6-3.

"I never actually talked to her, never had chance to hit, to practice with her. I only seen her outside. I was watching some matches," Sabalenka said of the teenage Canadian. "Yeah, she's a great player. She's a fighter. She's playing really good, aggressive tennis."

Tien-Medvedev revisited

Daniil Medvedev rallied from two sets down for a 6-7 (5), 4-6, 7-5, 6-0, 6-3 comeback win over Fabian Marozsan, the fifth time he's rallied from 0-2 to win a Grand Slam match.

"I was not calm after the first set because I was mad at myself for not doing better. It cost me in the second," Medvedev, the 2021 U.S. Open champion and three-time Australian Open runner-up, said. In the third, "I had to really let it go. Just think about what I need to do."

He did that, and now he into a rematch with Learner Tien, the American who upset him in a second-round five-setter here last year.

The 25th-seeded Tien advanced to the fourth round again with a 7-6 (9), 6-4, 6-2 win over Nuno Borges. (AP)

Tata Steel Masters: Gukesh to meet Abdusattorov in round 6

WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS), Jan 23: A win in the previous match boosting his confidence, India's world champion D Gukesh will meet joint leader Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in the sixth round of the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here.

Gukesh, who defeated Thai Dai Van Nguyen of Czech Republic with black pieces in the fifth round, will have another black game to negotiate. But, if the form of the youngest ever world champion is any indication, the colour of the pieces should not matter.

Missing out on a superior position in the opening round against Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan and then being slightly shaky against Dutch Grandmaster Jorden van Foreest, Gukesh conceded that the start might have been indifferent but everything was well now.

With four draws and a lone victory, the Indian is sharing the fourth spot with three points in his bag, a half point behind Abdusattorov, Sindarov and Hans Niemann of United States.

Arjun Erigaisi started off with a win against R Praggnanandhaa and then had three draws thereafter. He lost to Vladimir Fedoseev, the Russian who is representing Slovenia.

Erigaisi's loss was disappointing as he went down amidst wild complexities which is considered to be his forte. With 2.5 points, Arjun slipped to joint seventh spot from being a co-leader and will hope to make a strong comeback against Matthias Bluebaum of Germany in the sixth round.

Defending champion Praggnanandhaa is one player who has not performed up to expectations of his huge fanbase. With just 1.5 points to back himself, it is important for the lone Indian in the Candidates' tournament to find his groove soon. Otherwise, it could be very late for a recovery. Praggnanandhaa meets Fedoseev in the next game.

The other Indian in the fray, Aravindh Chithambaram has matched Praggnanandhaa on points and will look forward for an improved performance as the tournament progresses further.

In to its 88th edition, the Tata Steel Masters is being played on a round-robin basis with 13 rounds among 14 players. The prestigious tournament has been won by Viswanathan Anand five times in the past.

Pairing round 6: Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 3.5) vs D Gukesh (Ind, 3); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 1.5) vs Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 3); Matthias Bluebaum (Ger, 2.5) vs Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 2.5); Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 1.5) vs Javokhir SIndarov (Uzb, 3.5); Hans Moke Niemann (Usa, 3.5) vs Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2.5); Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur, 2) vs Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 3); Thai Dai Van Nugyen (Cze, 1.5) vs Anish Giri (Ned, 1.5). (PTI)

Kyle Jamieson replaces injured Adam Milne in New Zealand squad for T20 World Cup

CHRISTCHURCH, Jan 23: New Zealand has drafted pacer Kyle Jamieson into their T20 World Cup squad after Adam Milne was ruled out of the marquee event with a torn left hamstring.

Milne suffered the injury in the first over of the SA20 clash between Sunrisers Eastern Cape and MI Cape Town last Sunday, and scans have revealed the extent of the damage, according to New Zealand Cricket.

"Jamieson, who is currently part of the Blackcaps white-ball tour of India, has been added to the T20 World Cup squad after originally being named as the traveling reserve for the February-March tournament in India and Sri Lanka," NZC said on their website.

New Zealand head coach Rob Walter said Milne, who wasn't a part of the squad touring India, was getting himself ready for the T20 World Cup.

"We're all gutted for Adam. He'd worked so hard to get himself ready for the tournament and was looking back to his best in his eight games for the Eastern Cape Sunrisers," Walter said.

Walter expressed confidence in Jamieson, who has led an inexperienced Kiwi pace attack on the white

ball tour of India, to come good in the T20 World Cup.

"It's great that Kyle is already with us here in India. He's an integral member of our pace-bowling group and has hit the ground running on this tour," the head coach said.

"He's a hard worker with a good set of skills and experiences that will hold him in good stead for the tournament," Walter added.

A replacement for Jamieson in the pool of travelling reserves will be announced later. (PTI)

Players' injuries ahead of T20 World Cup 'unfortunate': Morris

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 23: Former all-rounder Chris Morris was delighted to see T20 World Cup-bound South African cricketers performing strongly in the ongoing SA20, but was equally concerned about a few of them succumbing to injuries ahead of the marquee event.

South Africa made two changes to their T20 World Cup squad on Thursday with Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs coming in for Tony De Zorzi and Donovan Ferreira after the pair were injured during the SA20.

Besides them, David Miller missed the Eliminator for Paarl Royals against Joburg Super Kings on Thursday, while Lungi Ngidi bowled just two overs for Pretoria Capitals in the Qualifier against Sunrisers Eastern Cape.

Capitals' Dewald Brevis also injured his finger during his match-winning 75 against Sunrisers on January 21.

"I think the proof is in the pudding. I think we've had a few guys that have gone down with injuries, unfortunately. Look, it is a very tight schedule. But that's the nature of the beast. And players knew what was coming," Morris replied to a question from 'PTI-Bhasha' during select media interaction facilitated by SA20.

"Obviously, you're playing day in, day out. Don't put it past the IPL. It's the same because you've obviously got to travel, you've got high-intensity games. You go to bed late at night and the next morning you're up, you're travelling." he added.

Morris underlined the importance of man management.

"And the next day you've got training and recovery. So, it is about man-management. Obviously, the coaching staff, they know exactly what they need to do. Potentially, there could be a case of maybe rotating squads.

"But when you've got a good team that's winning and trying to get into a play-off, you don't really want to do that. So it's difficult."

Morris, who had played 42 ODIs, 23 T20Is and four Tests for South Africa, said.

Morris, who is doing commentary in this edition of SA20, said players need to find a way around the mental and physical stress of playing in a highly competitive league.

"It really is tough on the body. Mentally, it really does drain you. As a professional cricketer, you find a way to do something. You find a way to win a game. Fortunately, we've got a couple of fit boys. We've had a few injuries. Hopefully not too bad," he said.

Morris, however, is pleased with the performance of the players included in the SA squad for next month's T20 World Cup.

"I think it's been a great run for the guys that are in the squad. I think in general, around the whole tournament, even the guys that aren't in the squad, I think it's been a great performance from them," he said.

"I like to think that a lot of the South African players stepped up nicely. I mean, there's no better practice going into a big tournament," he noted.

Morris, who joined Rajasthan Royals for a then record Rs 16.25 crore during IPL 2021, said he was pleased to see premier pacer Kagiso Rabada performing well after suffering a rib injury.

"I'm happy that Rabada is running in again. Obviously, coming back from injury he was very nervous coming into that first few games. Obviously, that's natural with an injury, But hitting those lengths that we've come to know so well. So happy to see KG going," he said.

Morris felt spinners will play a key role in the T20 World Cup, and said South Africa's Keshav Maharaj and George Linde can make an impact.

"I think Keshav Maharaj bowled beautifully. He has been vital to Pretoria Capitals doing well. He bowled really well. He's led well. Maybe a slightly slow start to the tournament, but he's figured out a way on different types of pitches to do the business," Morris said.

The 38-year-old then lauded Linde for holding his own on pitches that have been batters' allies.

"George Linde bowled really, really nicely. And if we can get those two bowling in tandem and really asking the right questions to international batters, then we'll be in good stead. I'm a big fan of spinners in T20 cricket because I do think they affect the game a lot, even when the wicket is good.

"We've seen at a place like Centurion, it's a paradise to bat on. But if you look at the stats, the spinners are the ones that actually break partnerships," he added. (PTI)

I'm following Rohit Sharma's footsteps as Gambhir and Suryakumar want it from me: Abhishek

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Swashbuckling India opener Abhishek Sharma said he has been following the aggressive template set by former skipper Rohit Sharma in T20I powerplays after being encouraged to do so by head coach Gautam Gambhir and captain Suryakumar Yadav.

Having made his T20I debut in July 2024, Abhishek's minute-a-mile batting approach has helped him take the No. 1 spot in the ICC rankings for batters in that format.

In 34 matches so far, he has cracked two tons and seven fifties to score 1199 runs at a strike rate of 190.92.

"Rohit bhai has done a lot for the country. There is always pressure because of the starts he used to give in the powerplay," Abhishek told JioHotstar when asked about Rohit's influence on him.

"When I came into the team, the coach and captain wanted the same from me. I felt it suited my style too because I love to attack from the first few balls. I have been following in Rohit bhai's footsteps and I am really happy to play in this manner and do well for India," he added.

Abhishek said while there is room for improvement in his game, he has complete role clarity.

"I wouldn't say I am fully matured yet, because there is always room to improve. But I feel my job is to play aggressive cricket in the first six overs.

"I have been practicing a lot for that. I know if I give a good start or show good intent early, the team can follow that momentum (and) that is what I always think about," he said.

With the T20 World Cup a fortnight away, Abhishek said he has been practicing against specific kind of bowlers he would come across in the competition.

"If I want to play aggressive cricket and show intent, I have to practice a certain way. That is what I always do before matches. When

I get a week or 10 days, I keep in mind the bowlers I will face in the next series or matches. It all comes down to how I execute those plans.

"For the upcoming T20 World Cup, I have been practicing for that too. I know we will play all over India in different conditions against different teams, so preparation is key," he added.

The 25-year-old said he tries to replicate match situations at nets to the extent that he prefers facing bowlers with similar style that he would face from the opposition camp. "I try to get similar bowlers to bowl at me in the nets. For every bowler in the other team, I find someone similar to practice against," he said.

"I ask them to bowl outswingers, in-swingers, and use the new ball. I also ask them to take certain fielders out for me."

In his bid to remain ahead of the competition, the left-hander has also worked on the scenarios of bowlers taking pace off the ball against him.

"I know (that) especially going into the World Cup and any match, they won't give me a lot of pace. I realised that in the last few matches, so I have been working on it," he said.

Abhishek said working on his back lift also helped him generate smooth flow of the bat.

"I have always had a high grip holding position on the bat. The only thing I worked on was my back lift. I used to keep it a bit low, but now I keep it above my waist so I can get a smooth flow," he said.

"When it was low, I was getting late on some balls so I practiced that. But the back lift and the grip are both natural for me," Abhishek added. (PTI)

Indian challenge ends in Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA, Jan 23: P V Sindhu and Lakshya Sen suffered straight-game losses to their respective opponents in the women's and men's singles quarterfinals, marking the end of Indian challenge in the USD 500,000 Indonesia Masters badminton tournament here on Friday.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, lost to top seed and world number four Chen Yu Fei of China 13-21 17-21 in the quarterfinal contest that lasted 42 minutes to bow out of the Super 500 event.

With Friday's loss, Sindhu trails Fei 6-8 in head-to-head record. The Indian's last win over Fei was way back in 2019. In the men's singles, Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze medallist, was beaten 18-21 20-22 by Thailand's rising talent Panitchaphon Teeraratsakul in a close match that lasted 46 minutes. The 21-year-old Thai had also accounted for 2024 Paris Olympics bronze medallist Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia in the pre-quarterfinals. On Thursday, Kidambi Srikanth and Anmol Kharb had bowed out of the men's and women's singles competition respectively. (PTI)

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