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## No comments: CM on Singapore court's hearing

Zubeen death case probe: Garima reiterates transparent probe demand

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday declined to comment on the proceedings in a Singapore court related to the death of singer-composer Zubeen Garg, saying politicians should refrain from matters under judicial consideration.

His remarks came as Garg's wife, Garima Saikia Garg, issued an emotional appeal on social media, reiterating the family's demand for a transparent probe into the circumstances surrounding his death.

Responding to queries on the hearing before the Singapore Coroner's Court, Sarma said he had only read about it in newspapers and did not wish to comment, noting that his words could be interpreted in different ways.

"Politicians should not get into matters related to court. We should stay away," he said, adding that the Singapore authorities were following their own legal process, which differed from India's.



Zubeen Garg, 52, died on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea near Lazarus Island in Singapore, where he had travelled to attend the North East India Festival.

Singapore Police informed the Coroner's Court on Wednesday that Garg was severely intoxicated, had declined to wear a life jacket and drowned, adding that no foul play was suspected.

In Assam, however, a Special Investigation Team of the CID is probing the case and has arrested seven people so far.

A charge-sheet filed last month accused four of murder, one of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, and two others of criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 70 MW solar project inaugurated at Bilasipara ● Assam's solar energy target is 3,500 MW by 2030

# CM push for clean energy gains momentum

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Marking a major milestone in Assam's transition towards sustainable energy, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday inaugurated a 70 MW solar power project at Khudigaon in the Bilasipara area of Dhubri district, significantly boosting the state's renewable energy capacity.

Built at a cost of over ₹ 350 crore on nearly 1,000 bighas of land freed from encroachment, the solar power project is expected to generate around 141 million units of electricity annually while reducing nearly 1.15 lakh tonnes of carbon emissions.

The project has been developed by SJVN Green Energy Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Navratna PSU SJVN Ltd, in partnership with the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited,



and will be operated and maintained for 25 years.

Speaking at the inauguration, Sarma said the commissioning of the project has taken Assam's total solar power generation capacity to 680 MW.

"At one point of time, we had no solar power projects. Today, we are generating 680 MW of solar power," he said, highlighting the rapid progress made in recent years.

He added that the state is

steadily moving towards greater energy self-reliance, with more projects already in the pipeline.

"Another 50 MW solar power project being implemented by SJVN at Borsola in Sonitpur district will be completed by April, and we will reach around 750 MW then," the chief minister said.

Reiterating the long-term vision, Sarma announced, "Assam's solar energy target is 3,500 MW by 2030."

The chief minister said the Khudigaon project also reflects the government's policy of putting cleared government land to productive use.

"Our aim is to clear government land of encroachments and implement projects on those lands. This will generate employment and uplift the local economy," he said, adding that vacant cleared land cannot (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Homage paid to martyrs at Gajraj War Memorial

**TEZPUR, Jan 15:** The General Officer Commanding (GOC), Gajraj Corps, Lt Gen Gambhir Singh paid homage to the valiant martyrs of the nation by laying a wreath at the Gajraj War Memorial in Tezpur in Assam's Sonitpur district on the occasion of Army Day on Thursday.

The solemn ceremony honoured the supreme sacrifice of the bravehearts who laid down their lives in service of the nation, a defence statement said.

The GOC also interacted with veterans, acknowledging their lifelong dedication, sacrifices and unwavering commitment to the country.

Addressing the gathering, Lt Gen Singh said the courage, selfless service and legacy of the bravehearts and veterans will continue to inspire generations, reinforcing India's pride and strengthening the nation's resolve towards a stronger India and a brighter future. (PTI)

## Inter-state border talks to resume after Assam polls, says Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma

**SHILLONG, Jan 15:** Talks between Meghalaya and Assam to resolve the remaining disputes along the interstate border will resume only after Assam's elections, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said on Thursday.

Sangma also announced an aggressive push to complete fencing along the Bangladesh border and consultations on an ILP-like law to curb illegal immigration.

The Meghalaya CM said the second phase of border talks, aimed at resolving six remaining areas of difference, has been delayed as the Assam government is currently preoccupied with election-related activities.

"Elections are around the corner, so politically speaking, the current dispensation there and the government is not in a position to engage right now," he told reporters.

The two states had in March 2022 signed a memorandum of understanding to settle six of the 12



disputed border areas.

"Once the elections are over, we will move forward again and continue the process," the chief minister said.

On border security, Sangma said the state government, in coordination with the Centre, is pushing aggressively to complete fencing along the nearly 440-km-long international border with Bangladesh, of which around 40 km remains unfenced.

"We are moving very aggressively on that and I hope that things should be resolved soon," he said, adding that population-related is-

ssues, land acquisition problems and pending court cases have slowed work in certain stretches, particularly in West Jaintia Hills district.

He said the state government, the Border Security Force and intelligence agencies remain on high alert along the international border and that a review meeting with the BSF and Intelligence Bureau was held on December 24, 2025, to assess the overall security situation.

Sangma said the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government will invite political parties and civil society organisations to discuss its proposal for an ILP-like provision under the proposed Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, aimed at addressing illegal immigration.

"We will invite all political parties and civil society organisations to discuss this proposal. It would be incorrect for us to jump to any conclusion without actually seeing the content and the entire mechanism," Sangma (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Shivakumar to be in Delhi on Friday, may meet senior leaders over Assam polls

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** Karnataka deputy chief minister and Congress leader D K Shivakumar will be in the national capital on Friday with regard to planning for the upcoming Assam assembly elections and is likely to meet some senior leaders, sources said.

Shivakumar, who is the senior observer for Assam assembly elections along with former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, may also meet Rahul Gandhi during his visit to the national capital.

The elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly are slated in a few months' time along with other states — Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and West Bengal.

Shivakumar has been in the news for some time, ever since he reiterated his claim to the top post in Karnataka after the completion of half of the tenure of the Congress government in the state. His visit on Friday has again given rise

to talks about leadership change in the state.

Referring to his recent meeting with Rahul Gandhi at an airport in Karnataka, he on Wednesday clarified that contrary to media reports, the senior Congress leader only asked him and state CM Siddaramaiah to continue the good work.

Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress President, also downplayed speculations regarding his social media post, which read "efforts may fail, but prayers won't", linking it to his brief conversation with Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday evening.

Rahul Gandhi's brief conversation with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, and his deputy and a claimant for the CM's chair, Shivakumar, has sparked off speculations amid the ongoing power tussle between the two.

"I'm the state Congress President; he (Rahul Gandhi) is the leader of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Women-led drive puts rural women at growth engine

**HT Correspondent**  
**DHUBRI, Jan 15:** Emphasising the role of women as key drivers of grassroots economic transformation, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday launched a major women-led entrepreneurship push in Bilasipara, extending financial assistance to more than 18,000 beneficiaries under the state government's flagship Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udayamita Abhiyan.

At a programme held at the INA Ground, Sarma distributed entrepreneurship cheques to 18,375 women from the Bilasipara Assembly constituency.

Addressing the gathering of beneficiaries, popularly referred to as "Lakshmi Baideus", the chief minister outlined the phased design of the scheme and its long-term objective of enabling sustainable livelihoods.

He said the initiative begins with a seed capital grant of ₹ 10,000, which was distributed during the event. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## EU's Costa, von der Leyen to grace R-Day celebrations; historic trade deal at finish line



**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** Top European Union leaders Antonio Costa and Ursula von der Leyen will grace India's Republic Day celebrations and the two sides are set to seal the much-anticipated free trade deal on January 27 amid increasing concerns over Washington's trade and tariff policies.

With the world order looking wobbly, the European Union (EU) and India are expected to look at

forging a broader global agenda during the three-day visit of Costa and von der Leyen to New Delhi beginning January 25.

The European Union is India's biggest trade partner with bilateral trade in goods recording USD 135 billion in the financial year 2023-24. The free trade agreement is expected to significantly enhance trade ties.

At the invitation of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, European Council President Antonio Luis Santos da Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will be on a state visit to India from January 25-27 as the chief guests at the 77th Republic Day celebrations, the external affairs ministry said on Thursday.

Every year, India invites world leaders to attend its Republic Day celebrations. The leaders will also co-chair the 16th India-EU Summit on January 27.

In a readout, the EU said the summit is aimed at building on the EU-India strategic partnership and further strengthening collaboration across key policy areas.

Trade, security and defence, the clean transition, and people to people cooperation will top the agenda of the discussions, it said.

"India is a crucial partner for the EU. Together, we share the capacity and responsibility to protect the rules-based international order. This meeting will be a key opportunity to (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Amrit Bharat scheme reshapes Assam's rail network

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Assam's railway infrastructure has witnessed a major transformation over the past decade, emerging as a key driver of connectivity and economic growth in eastern and North-Eastern India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

At the centre of this shift is the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, the world's largest railway station redevelopment initiative, which goes beyond routine modernisation to reimagine stations as accessible, future-ready and regionally rooted public spaces.

With over 1,300 stations identified nationwide, the scheme focuses on improved passenger amenities, Divyangjan-friendly access, modern waiting areas, digital information (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## High-performance sports centre planned in Guwahati

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Assam is set to get a high-performance satellite sports centre in Guwahati following a partnership between the state government and a private institution, a move aimed at strengthening the elite sports ecosystem in Assam and the wider North-East.

The Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare has joined hands with the JSW Group-founded Inspire Institute of Sport to establish the centre, which will focus on seven priority disciplines—athletics, archery, taekwondo, table tennis, lawn tennis, chess and swimming.

The initiative will emphasise athlete identification, coach development and long-term performance pathways aligned with India's Olympic goals.

According to officials, the programmes are designed not only to spot promising talent but also to build a self-sustaining coaching system within the state.

Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Nandita Gorlosa said Assam has abundant sporting talent, particularly in rural and tribal areas, and the collaboration would

bring global coaching expertise and high-performance systems to the state while strengthening local infrastructure.

She said the initiative would create structured pathways for athletes and coaches to progress to national and international competitions and help position Assam as a high-performance sports hub in the North-East.

The athletics programme will begin with a state-level coaches' orientation and development initiative, combining on-ground and hybrid learning under World Athletics frameworks, supported by senior IIS experts.

This will be followed by a talent identification drive across the state.

Taekwondo and archery programmes will include talent camps and advanced masterclasses involving athletes and coaches from across the region.

IIS president Manisha Malhotra said the collaboration would introduce Olympic-level coaching, sports science support and proven development models in Assam. With programmes to be rolled out in Guwahati and other locations in (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Governor inaugurates GI Mahotsav in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday inaugurated the GI Mahotsav, titled "Promoting India's Heritage through GI Products", at the Arya Vidyapeeth College Ground here, calling it a significant step towards linking cultural heritage with economic progress.

Organised by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry with support from the Ministry of MSME and the Office of the Development Commissioner (MSME), the festival aims to showcase and promote India's Geographical Indication (GI) products at national and global levels.

Speaking at the inaugural cere-



mony, the Governor said the Mahotsav reflects the spirit of Vocal for Local by highlighting products created through the skill and dedication of artisans, farmers, weavers and craftsmen.

He described the event as a platform that provides visibility to traditional skills, cultural legacy and the local economy, and congratulated the Ministry of MSME

and PHDCCI for organising what he termed a forward-looking initiative.

Explaining the importance of GI tags, Acharya said they signify a product's unique connection to its geographical origin and embody the traditional identity, indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage of a region.

He noted that such products, preserved over generations by rural and marginal communities, have earned recognition both nationally and internationally.

The Governor said Assam holds a distinctive place in India's GI landscape, citing examples such as Muga and Eri silk, Sualkuchi weaving, Sarthebari bell metal craft, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Ambition to celebrate Assamese cinema on a global platform

# GAFF 2026 honours Bishnu Kharghoria

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** Reinforcing its ambition to position Assam as a significant hub of cinematic culture and creative excellence, the Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF) 2026 has announced that veteran actor Bishnu Kharghoria will be conferred the Lifetime Achievement Honour in recognition of his enduring contribution to Indian cinema.

The honour will be presented during the second edition of GAFF, scheduled to be held in Guwahati from January 22 to 25, 2026.

Instituted as an annual recognition, the Lifetime Achievement Honour celebrates artists whose body of work has not only shaped cinematic culture but also inspired generations of filmmakers and audiences.

Announcing the decision, GAFF Festival Director Monita Borgohain said Bishnu Kharghoria's artistic legacy represents the very values



the festival seeks to uphold.

"Bishnu Kharghoria's contribution to Indian cinema, especially to Assamese films, is profound and timeless. His performances reflect rare integrity, emotional depth and an unwavering commitment to the

craft. We are honoured to celebrate a life dedicated to cinema," she said.

Organised by Trending Now Media with support from the National Film Development Corporation and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of

India, GAFF has positioned itself as a platform that bridges regional cinema with wider Asian and global narratives.

The conferment of the Lifetime Achievement Honour, organisers said, is part of the festival's broader vision to recognise excellence while strengthening Assam's cultural footprint in the national and international film landscape.

Widely regarded as one of the most accomplished actors of his generation, Bishnu Kharghoria has been a towering presence in Assamese and Indian cinema for over five decades.

He began his film career with Bristi in 1974 and went on to deliver a series of memorable performances that helped define modern Assamese cinema.

His work in landmark films such as Kollol (1978), Firingoti (1992), Xagoroli Bohodori (1995), Pokhi (1998) and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# Exports rise 1.87 pc in Dec; trade deficit widens marginally

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** The country's exports grew 1.87 per cent to USD 38.5 billion in December last year due to global economic uncertainties, while an increase in imports led to a marginal widening of the trade deficit to USD 25 billion.

The country's exports in November 2025 was up by about 20 per cent.

Imports rose by 8.7 per cent to USD 63.55 billion during the month under review, according to government data released on Thursday.

Trade deficit, difference between imports and exports, stood at USD 25.04 billion in December 2025 as against USD 24.53 billion in November last year and USD 22 billion in December 2024.

The major sectors which witnessed deceleration in exports include petroleum products, gems and jewellery, rice, plastics, and leather products.

The global trade has been disrupted due to tariffs imposed by the US. On India, the Trump administration has levied a steep 50 per cent tariffs from August. This is impacting the country's outbound shipments from the labour-intensive sectors such as apparel.

However cumulatively, during April-December this fiscal, the country's merchandise exports rose 2.44 per cent to USD 330.29 billion.

Imports grew by 5.9 per cent to



USD 578.61 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 248.32 billion during the nine-month period of 2025-26.

Briefing the media on the latest data, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that despite global uncertainties, India's exports are recording growth.

Going by the trend, "we expect that the total exports (goods and services) are likely to cross USD 850 billion (USD 450 billion goods and USD 400 billion services) this fiscal".

"I think, services will be touching USD 400 billion first time this year," he added.

The main sectors that led to an increase in shipments included engineering, electronics, marine, and pharmaceuticals.

He added that measures such as finalisation of free trade agreements, export promotion mission and diversification into new markets are helping the exporting community deal with the high US duties.

The exports are recording healthy growth in regions including China, Russia, the Middle East.

On imports front, oil imports rose by about 6 per cent to USD 14.4 billion in December 2025. Silver imports too increased by about 80 per cent to USD 758 million.

However, gold imports dipped by 12 per cent to USD 4.13 billion.

As per the commerce ministry data, services export are estimated to have declined to USD 35.50 bil-

lion in December as compared to USD 36.97 billion in December 2024. Imports too dipped marginally to USD 17.38 billion as against USD 17.80 billion in December 2024.

Commenting on the data, Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPCC) Chairman A Sakthivel said the December 2025 export performance showing a modest growth of 2.89 per cent for the RMG (ready-made garments) sector reflects both the resilience and adaptability of the industry in a challenging global environment.

"While demand in key international markets such as the US has been uneven due to inflationary pressures and geopolitical uncertainties, Indian apparel exporters have managed to hold ground through product diversification, improved compliance, and a stronger focus on value-added segments," Sakthivel said.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President SC Ralhan said the continued expansion of exports is a clear testament to the resilience, agility and growing global competitiveness of Indian exporters.

"Exporters have not only weathered global uncertainties but have also capitalized on emerging opportunities through market diversification, value addition and product competitiveness, aided by a supportive policy ecosystem," Ralhan added. (PTI)

## Seismic Safety Conclave held at NEDFI

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 15:** A conclave on seismic safety held at the NEDFI Auditorium here recently highlighted the need for collective and coordinated efforts to mitigate earthquake risks in Northeast India, one of the country's most seismically vulnerable regions.

The awareness programme was organised by NeFocus in collaboration with RVC and brought together geoscientists, subject experts, students, researchers and government officials to deliberate on earthquake preparedness and risk management.

Gaikungam Rongmei, Director of the Earthquake Division of the Geological Survey of India, spoke on the region's high seismic vulnerability and stressed the importance of collaboration among scientific institutions, government agencies and communities to minimise potential damage.

UNICEF coordinator Anand Kanu and geologist Hemanta Borgohain shared insights on the importance of earthquake-resistant construction practices and public awareness as key components of disaster risk reduction.

A mock drill was also conducted during the event to demonstrate preparedness and response measures in the event of an earthquake.

More than 200 students, senior citizens, volunteers and media personnel participated in the programme, reflecting growing public awareness and concern over seismic safety in the region.

## Awaiting clarity on US' proposed Iran-related tariffs: Comm Secy



**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** India on Thursday said its exports to Iran are largely humanitarian and it will wait for the US executive order on the 25 per cent tariff announced by President Donald Trump on countries doing business with Tehran to assess its implications.

Trump, in a social media post on Monday, said "effective immediately", any country doing business with Iran will pay a tariff of 25 per cent on any and all exports being done with the US.

"We have limited trade with Iran. Largely, our exports of goods and services are of a humanitarian nature. We are looking

at that (announcement)...We are awaiting the details...we are awaiting the (executive) order," Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal told reporters here when asked about the implication on India of the announcement.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has said that Indian companies and banks are in full and demonstrable compliance with OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control) sanctions on Iran, engaging exclusively in clearly permitted humanitarian trade, mainly in food and pharmaceuticals.

The earlier sanctions imposed by OFAC of the US Department

of the Treasury in November 2018 led to a sharp fall in bilateral trade between India and Iran.

India had a total trade of USD 1.68 billion with Iran in 2024-25, which included USD 1.24 billion in exports primarily from the farm sector.

India's exports to Iran accounted for a meagre 0.28 per cent of its total USD 437 billion shipments in 2024-25.

India's top exported products to Iran were cereals, animal fodder, tea and coffee, spices, fruits and vegetables, and pharmaceuticals.

The US announcement is important as exporters are keeping their fingers crossed on the impact of the additional duty, as they are already reeling under the impact of the steep 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the US.

The main imports from India include dry fruits, inorganic/organic chemicals and glassware.

A key aspect of India-Iran ties is the joint development of the Chabahar port.

Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties.

India's merchandise exports to Iran rose by 1.55 per cent to USD 1.24 billion in 2024-25, while imports dipped by 29.32 per cent to USD 441.83 million. (PTI)

## Printing of Budget to take place at North Block, old address of finance ministry

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** The seat of the finance ministry may have moved but the printing of the highly confidential Budget documents would continue at the press situated in the old seat-- North Block on the Raisina Hill.

The Finance Minister and most of her team moved to the modern central secretariat office housed in Kartavya Bhawan in September 2025.

Unlike North Block, the new address, however, does not yet have a printing press tucked away from public glare. According to sources, the printing of Budget and related documents would be done at a dedicated government press in the North Block.

Earlier, the documents were printed at Rashtrap-

ati Bhavan, but this was shifted to a press on Minto Road in the national capital in 1950 after documents were leaked, and in 1980 to North Block. The printing of several hundred copies of the voluminous budget documents was such an elaborate exercise that printing staff had to be quarantined inside the printing press in the basement of North Block for up to two weeks.

With the start of printing, access to key officials involved in the exercise will be restricted as part of the customary confidentiality protocol.

Ahead of Budget, the traditional 'halwa' ceremony, which marks the beginning of quarantine for staff involved in Budget printing exercise, usually

takes place at the printing press area.

The 'halwa' ceremony is expected to take place next week marking the final stage for the preparation of Union Budget 2026-27 to be unveiled on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is going to present Budget 2026-27, her ninth straight budget, against the backdrop of GDP growth expected at 7.4 per cent in the current financial year with inflation in the comfortable zone. It is to be noted that Budget went paperless for the first time in 2021 when Sitharaman read out Budget from tablet and entire Budget documents were distributed electronically to Members of Parliament (MPs). (PTI)

## India, US trade deal 'very near'; both sides engaged on pending issues: Comm Secy

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** India and the US are "very near" to finalising the trade agreement, and it would be announced when both sides are ready, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Thursday. The negotiating teams of both sides are discussing virtually all pending issues, he said. "Its very near, but we can not put a deadline because that will happen...when both sides are ready and they feel that this is the right time to announce," he told reporters here. The talks between India and the US had never broken down, and both sides remained engaged, he added.

In the last week of December, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal held a virtual meeting with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

The December meeting between Goyal and Greer happened after the visit of a delegation led by Deputy USTR Rick Switzer on December 10 and 11.

In his arrival speech on January 12, the US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor asserted that both sides are actively engaged to firm up a trade deal. The imposition of steep 50 per cent tariffs by the Trump administration has strained the bilateral relations. Apart from the additional import duty issue, relations witnessed a severe strain on many other issues, including Trump's claim of ending the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year and Washington's new immigration policy. "The United States and India are bound not just by shared interests, but by a relationship anchored at the highest levels. Real friends can disagree, but always resolve their differences in the end," Gor has said. The Ambassador has noted that India and the US are actively engaged on the proposed bilateral trade deal days after Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick suggested Washington was not very keen to seal the deal soon. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## CM push for clean

be left unused as it risks being encroached upon again. A power purchase agreement has already been signed between APDCL and SJVN Green Energy Limited for the electricity generated from the project at a tariff of ₹ 3.92 per unit. Sarma said the project had been completed in record time and would play a significant role in making Assam self-reliant in green power. Power minister Prasanta Phukan, senior officials of APDCL and SJVN, and district officials from Dhubri and Kokrajhar were present at the inauguration.

Local residents welcomed the project, expressing hope that it would contribute to regional development while strengthening Assam's clean energy future. (With inputs from PTI)

## No comments: CM

In a detailed Facebook post addressed to the people of Assam, the government and Garg's admirers, Garima Saikia Garg said the family fully supports all investigations and seeks only the truth.

She said suspicions arose after videos from the yacht surfaced on social media following her husband's death, prompting the family to file an FIR. She added that the family cooperated fully with the Singapore Police and maintained confidentiality to protect the integrity of the investigation.

Garima said the Singapore proceedings were initiated suo motu and that the Indian High Commission was actively involved in coordinating legal and medical processes, including the post-mortem.

She noted that Garg's uncle, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, submitted a detailed statement before the Coroner's Court, raising questions on the planning of the outing, Garg's medical condition, safety arrangements on the yacht, the circumstances in which he entered the sea, the response of those present, medical assistance provided and the conclusion of no foul play. Describing these questions as a family's right and duty, she appealed to the central and state governments to closely monitor the Singapore proceedings and take all necessary diplomatic and legal steps to ensure all relevant facts are placed before the court. She also urged for speedy and effective prosecution in India based on the charge-sheet already filed, stressing that jurisdiction should not become an excuse for delay.

"We continue to seek only one thing—that the entire truth be fully and transparently examined and the guilty punished," she said, adding that the family would pursue every legal path available in good faith.

## Women-led drive

"Those who utilise this amount properly will receive ₹ 25,000 in the second phase, and in the third phase we will provide ₹ 50,000 through grant or loan linkage to help scale up their businesses," Sarma said, describing the scheme as a structured pathway to entrepreneurship rather than one-time assistance.

The chief minister said the programme reflects the government's commitment to ensuring economic security for rural households by placing women at the centre of development planning.

He added that women-led enterprises have the potential to transform village economies, create local employment and strengthen social stability. Sarma said the government's broader vision is to create a generation of financially independent women who contribute actively to Assam's growth story.

He reiterated that the success of the scheme would depend not just on financial support but also on discipline, hard work and responsible utilisation of funds by the beneficiaries.

The initiative, he said, is part of a wider effort to empower women through self-employment, strengthen rural incomes and ensure inclusive development across Assam.

## Shivakumar to be

opposed (in Lok Sabha). He was also earlier the Congress President. Can our meeting with him, discussions with him, giving respect to him and receiving him as per protocol -- be discussed in public? You (media) unnecessarily quote someone off the record, creating confusion..." Shivakumar told reporters.

"There is no message; we met him (Rahul Gandhi). He asked us to continue the good work... We have informed him of the programmes planned regarding MGNREGA (Save MGNREGA campaign) in the state. We have also discussed BJP's politics in the state," he added.

The brief conversation between the leaders took place on Tuesday at the Mandakalli Airport, as Rahul Gandhi landed there for transit, on his way back to New Delhi from Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu, where he attended an event. The former AICC president held brief conversations with Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, both separately and together. Asked about his social media post, the Deputy CM said it was not something new, and he has made this statement in the past as well. (PTI)

## Inter-state border talks

said. Emphasising that the core issue is illegal immigration, he said, "Issue is not ILP, issue is not immigration Act, issue is not MRSSA. We need laws, we need mechanisms to check it."

Urging opposition parties to engage in dialogue, Sangma said the government is open to making changes if shortcomings are found in the proposal. "We are not saying that what we proposed is going to be right, but we would only reach that conclusion if we are able to have a dialogue," he said.

Refuting claims by opposition leader Mukul Sangma that the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA) has not been implemented, the chief minister said the law is being enforced in many localities, though challenges remain due to infrastructure and investment requirements. (PTI)

## High-performance sports

the coming months, the centre is expected to play a key role in strengthening regional talent pipelines and contributing to India's Olympic aspirations.

## Amrit Bharat scheme

systems and architecture inspired by local heritage. Assam has emerged as the biggest beneficiary of the scheme in the Northeast. Of the 60 stations selected across the region, 50 are located in Assam, with a total investment of Rs 2,101 crore. The redevelopments span major cities and smaller towns alike, ensuring balanced infrastructure growth across the state. Key stations including Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Silchar, Lumding, Tinsukia, New Bongaigaon, Jorhat Town, Kokrajhar, Rangiya and Diphu are undergoing comprehensive upgrades.

Haibargaon station, inaugurated in May 2025, became the first completed Amrit Bharat station in Assam and set new standards in passenger facilities and design.

The redevelopment works include new station buildings, upgraded platforms, improved circulation, digital signage, modern waiting halls and enhanced accessibility, while incorporating Assam's cultural elements.

Passenger services have expanded with the installation of lifts and escalators, widespread Wi-Fi connectivity and strengthened safety measures, including AI-enabled CCTV surveillance and intrusion detection systems along elephant corridors. Officials said the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme marks a shift from incremental upgrades to transformative infrastructure development, positioning railway stations as centres of commerce and connectivity. The initiative is seen as strengthening regional economies, enhancing mobility and reinforcing Assam's role as the gateway to the North-East while contributing to national integration.

## EU's Costa, von

build on our partnership and drive progress in our cooperation," Costa said. Top sources said the two sides are expected to seal the proposed free trade pact at the summit.

The proposed agreement is expected to bring a qualitative change in deepening the overall bilateral ties in a range of sectors as well as at a time the world is witnessing trade disruptions in view of Washington's tariff policy. Besides firming up the free trade agreement, the two sides are likely to unveil a defence framework pact and a strategic agenda at the summit. India and the European Union have been strategic partners since 2004. The 15th India-EU Summit was held virtually in July, 2020.

"Bilateral ties have expanded and deepened across a wide range of areas, particularly following the historic visit of EU College of Commissioners to India in February 2025," the MEA said in a statement.

"The participation of EU leaders as Chief Guests at the 77th Republic Day and the 16th India-EU Summit will further deepen the India-EU Strategic Partnership and advance collaboration in priority areas of mutual interest," the ministry said.

The new strategic agenda, likely to be adopted at the summit, identifies five areas of shared interest that include security and defence, connectivity and global issues, prosperity, sustainability, and technology and innovation. Beyond the bilateral dimension, the new strategic agenda highlights EU-India joint engagement on global issues and with third partners, reflecting India's growing global influence.

Under the defence pillar, the document identified maritime security, cyber defence, and counterterrorism as areas to expand cooperation. The new strategic agenda also emphasised strengthening regional connectivity initiatives, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and advances Global Gateway and EU-India trilateral cooperation with and in third countries. (PTI)

## Governor inaugurates GI

Asharikandi terracotta, Assam tea and GI-tagged Kaji Nemu. He added that GI products enhance the income and dignity of producers while preserving traditional knowledge and sustainable practices.

Highlighting government support, Acharya referred to initiatives such as the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme, RAMP, Micro and Small Enterprise Cluster Development Programme, Credit Guarantee Scheme and the One District One Product initiative, which aim to strengthen GI-linked MSMEs.

Emphasising the role of women and youth, he said a strong GI ecosystem promotes rural livelihoods, women's empowerment and youth participation, and called for coordinated efforts by governments, industry bodies and the private sector to realise the full potential of GI products.

The Governor said the GI Mahotsav is not just an exhibition but a celebration of India's cultural soul and self-reliant future. The programme was attended by PHDCCI Secretary General Dr Ranjit Mehta, MSME Committee Chairman Vinod Karwa, former PHDCCI Northeast president A Towli Chopi, NEC Secretary Satinder Kumar Bhalla, along with artisans, entrepreneurs and other dignitaries.

## GAFF 2026 honours

several others earned him critical acclaim for his nuanced portrayals and emotional restraint.

Kharghoria's contribution has also been recognised at the national and international levels. He received the National Film Award (Special Mention) for Xagoroloi Bohudor and was honoured again with the same recognition for Baandhon in 2012. In 1996, he won the Best Actor Award at the Singapore International Film Festival for Xagoroloi Bohudor, further cementing his reputation beyond India.

Festival organisers said the honour is intended not only as a tribute to Kharghoria's remarkable journey but also as a statement of GAFF's intent to celebrate cinema that is rooted in cultural authenticity while resonating globally.

With the second edition of the festival, GAFF aims to expand its scale and influence, showcasing Assamese and Asian cinema alongside conversations on craft, legacy and the future of filmmaking.

The Lifetime Achievement Honour, to be presented during GAFF 2026 in Guwahati, will stand as a recognition of Bishnu Kharghoria's invaluable role in the evolution of Indian cinema and as a symbol of Assam's growing cultural confidence on the cinematic map. (With inputs from PTI)

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The below mentioned Borrowers of HDFC Bank Ltd. (the "Bank") are hereby notified regarding the sale of securities pledged to the Bank, for availing credit facilities in the nature of Loan/Overdraft Against Securities.				
Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loan terms, the below loan accounts are in delinquent status. The Bank has issued multiple notices to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard.				
The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell/dispose off the Securities on or after <b>23<sup>rd</sup> January 2026</b> for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrower(s) shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.				
Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 13 <sup>th</sup> Jan, 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX3793	RHEMBOR G SAIBON	9,96,150.78	07-01-2026
2	XXXXXXXXXX9802	SANTOSH KR TIWARI	40,493.00	07-01-2026
3	XXXXXXXXXX6934	JAMES K SANGMA	44,06,273.82	07-01-2026
Date : 16.01.2026				Sd/-
Place : MEGHALAYA				HDFC BANK LTD.

## AAJU expresses condolences on noted journalist Pradeep Baruah's demise

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 15: The All Assam Journalists' Union (AAJU) has expressed deep sorrow over the demise of Pradeep Baruah, veteran journalist and editor of the renowned literary magazine Prantik.

In a statement, AAJU president Pankaj Kumar Nath and general secretary Nakul Talukdar paid rich tributes to Baruah, recalling his immense contributions to Assam's literary and journalistic spheres.

They said his work left a lasting impact on the state's intellectual and cultural discourse.

Baruah, who also served as a director of The Assam Tribune, was instrumental in nurturing young writers and providing them a platform for creative expression through Prantik. The union noted that his efforts helped shape generations of literary talent in the state.

The AAJU conveyed its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and admirers of the late journalist, remembering him as a dedicated professional committed to national service and upholding the highest standards of journalistic integrity.

## Founder teacher of Jagiroad HS School dies

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Jan 15: Maneswar Bordoloi, retired teacher and founder teacher of Jagiroad Higher Secondary School, passed away at his residence in Natungaon at around 3 pm on Thursday.

Bordoloi was 92. Bordoloi is survived by his wife, a son, a daughter and several relatives.

His demise has been widely mourned in the locality, with the teachers' unit of Jagiroad Higher Secondary School and several organisations of Jagiroad expressing deep condolences over the loss of the respected educationist.

'More than 24,000 beneficiaries in West Karbi Anglong and over 14,000 in Karbi Anglong have been covered under the programme'

## CM rolls out major SHG boost in Karbi Anglong hills



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma recently launched a major welfare outreach in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, focusing on economic self-reliance and women-led entrepreneurship in the hill districts.

At a large public programme at Serdihun Aklam in Baithalanso, West Karbi Anglong, the chief minister distributed seed money of ₹10,000 each to Self-Help Group members under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA), a flagship initiative aimed at turning rural women into micro-entrepreneurs.

Addressing the gathering, Sarma said the scheme was a transforma-

tive step towards ensuring women's active role in Assam's economic growth.

He said more than 24,000 beneficiaries in West Karbi Anglong and over 14,000 in Karbi Anglong have been covered under the programme.

The financial assistance, he added, will be released in phases to support small businesses, cooperative ventures and self-employment initiatives.

The chief minister underlined that women's empowerment remains central to the government's development vision and said welfare schemes are being implemented without discrimination to ensure benefits reach the

grassroots.

He also assured that the government would extend skill development support and market linkages so that enterprises started by SHG members become sustainable.

During the visit, Sarma reviewed progress in key sectors such as rural infrastructure, healthcare, education and social welfare, reiterating the government's commitment to uplifting economically weaker sections in the hill districts.

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang praised the state government's initiatives, saying recent development projects have significantly benefited both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

He urged SHG members to utilise the seed money as start-up capital for income-generating activities that would support their families and communities.

Later in the day, the chief minister reached Diphu by helicopter and attended another cheque distribution programme at the Taralanso Open Stage.

The event was attended by Ronghang, Karbi Anglong MP Amarsing Tisso, and several Executive Members and Members of the Autonomous Council.

The programmes concluded with beneficiaries expressing gratitude for the continued support, marking a significant step in the socio-economic advancement of the hill districts.

## Army Day rally sparks month-long road safety drive in Silchar



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 15: The observance of Indian Army Day at Masimpur Military Station on Thursday marked the launch of a major public outreach initiative on road safety, as Silchar Lok Sabha MP Parimal Suklabaidya flagged off a Mega Road Safety Awareness Bike Rally titled "Pather Barta Pathe Yatra".

The programme coincided with National Road Safety Month 2026 and followed the Union Road Transport and Highways Ministry's call for MPs to spearhead road safety campaigns in their constituencies.

Indian Army Day, observed annually on January 15, commemorates the courage, discipline and sacrifices of the armed forces.

During the event, Suklabaidya paid tribute to Army personnel at Masimpur Military Station by felicitating them with traditional phulam gamochas, conveying public gratitude for their service to the nation.

Addressing the gathering, the

MP said the values upheld by the Indian Army—discipline, alertness and responsibility—must also guide civilian conduct, particularly on public roads.

He stressed that while the Army protects the nation's borders, irresponsible road behaviour continues to claim thousands of preventable lives each year.

Following the rally, Suklabaidya formally launched the month-long road safety campaign, which will cover the entire Silchar Lok Sabha constituency.

In a rare initiative, the MP himself is participating in the bike rally across all 162 Gaon Panchayats under the constituency, an effort described as unprecedented for a sitting Member of Parliament.

At 68, his active involvement in the physically demanding campaign drew attention as a strong personal commitment to the cause.

Highlighting the scale of the problem, Suklabaidya said road accidents claim over 1.7 lakh lives annually in India, mostly among

people aged 18 to 45, and result in economic losses estimated at nearly three per cent of the GDP.

Describing road accidents as a "silent pandemic", he called for transforming awareness into sustained responsible behaviour.

He said the campaign aims to turn road safety into a people's movement by reaching all 162 Gaon Panchayats, three municipal areas and the Silchar Municipal Corporation.

Planned activities include engagement with schools, colleges, government offices and local communities, along with awareness on first response during accidents, life-saving skills and provisions of the Good Samaritan Law.

The initiative builds on the earlier "Path Suraksha Jan Andolan" conducted across Assam during 2023-24.

The MP also announced that the campaign would conclude with a detailed analytical report identifying accident-prone stretches and recommending zero-fatality interventions, to be submitted to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

He reiterated that wearing helmets, using seat belts and following traffic rules are acts of social and national responsibility.

On the inaugural day, the rally passed through several areas, including Kumarpara Nizojnagar, Ranighat Bridge at Krishnapur Bairab Nagar, Tarapur, Ambicapur and Badarpur Masimpur Gaon Panchayats, besides key locations in Silchar town such as Sadarghat, the railway station, National Highway Bazar, Ashram Road and Rangirkhari Sanjay Market, drawing wide public attention.

## MAKRSU seeks PM's clarity on tribal status for six Assam communities

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 15: The Middle Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (MAKRSU) on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to clearly spell out the Centre's stand on granting tribal status to six communities in Assam. Addressing a press conference here, MAKRSU president Paresh Chandra Deka and general secretary Ratul Kumar Rajbongshi recalled that the Prime Minister had assured tribal status to the communities during the 2014 general elections.

They said although a bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2019, no tangible progress has been made since then.

Questioning the government's intent, the student leaders pointed out that more than a hundred communities across the country have been granted tribal status during the current government's tenure.

They demanded that the Prime Minister clarify his position on the long-pending issue during his forthcoming visit to Assam.

The MAKRSU leaders also voiced dissatisfaction over the alleged failure to implement key provisions of the Assam Accord, particularly Clause 6, which aims to protect the rights and interests of the Assamese people. Warning of intensified agitation, they said the community would boycott the 2026 Assam Assembly elections and mobilise public opinion against the BJP if tribal status is not granted to the six communities.

## Jonbeel Mela with rare barter system from Jan 22 at Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Jan 15: Preparations are underway for the traditional Jonbeel Mela, scheduled to be held from January 22 to 24 at Jonbeel Pathar in Jagiroad, an event renowned for preserving one of the world's rare barter-based exchange traditions.

The three-day fair will begin on January 22 with an auspicious puja at the Deosal Shiv Mandir. This year's edition will feature a collective tribute to popular Assamese singer Zubeen Garg.

Organisers said around 60 villages from Karbi Anglong and 20 villages from neighbouring Meghalaya are expected to participate in the mela. The highlight of the festival, the traditional barter system, will take place on the morning of the second day.

During the exchange, people from the plains will trade items such as sandah, pitha, laddu and raw fish with hill produce including ginger, spinach, garlic, la and dhuna, reflecting centuries-old economic and cultural ties between hill and plain communities.

Alongside the barter, a mass fishing festival will be organised at Jonbeel, open to participants irrespective of caste, religion or race.

The fair is expected to be attended by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, along with several ministers and MLAs.

At the Rajdarbar to be held at the fairgrounds, the chief minister will present Rajbhatts to 22 Tiwa kings of central Assam.

The Jonbeel Mela will conclude with another mass fishing event at the Gobha Raja's Aram Beel, followed by the traditional symbolic collection of taxes by royal officials, marking the ceremonial end of the festival.

## Bogibeel Bridge transforms connectivity across Brahmaputra

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 15: The Bogibeel Rail-cum-Road Bridge, stretching 4.94 km across the Brahmaputra, has emerged as a vital link reshaping connectivity in Upper Assam and neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, significantly improving everyday life and economic activity in the region. Connecting Dibrugarh and Dhemaji, the bridge has replaced decades of dependence on ferries and seasonal routes with an all-weather rail and road corridor.

Dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the bridge marked a major milestone in bringing modern infrastructure to one of India's most geographically challenging yet culturally rich regions.

The impact has been widely felt, particularly for residents north of the Brahmaputra, who now enjoy easier access to healthcare, education and commercial centres in Dibrugarh.

Reduced travel time has benefited students, patients, traders and workers, while farmers and small businesses have gained faster access to markets. Beyond daily convenience, the bridge has strengthened regional economies by boosting tourism, streamlining supply chains and encouraging investment.

Areas once considered remote have become better integrated into the economic mainstream of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Strategically, the Bogibeel Bridge enhances mobility along India's eastern frontier, supporting national security and disaster response.

Its dual rail-road design ensures reliability even during adverse weather conditions.

## Hojai gears up for Hindu Conference commemorating RSS Centenary Year

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 15: The Hindu community in Hojai is set to organise a major conference on January 18 as part of the centenary year celebrations (1925-2025) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The programme will begin at 10.30 am at the Manupuri Sahitya Sabha Bhawan, New Market, Hojai.

Preparations for the event were finalised at a general meeting held on December 27, 2025, at GCC Junior College, Rampur, where

the organisational framework of the conference was put in place.

Deepak Sharma has been appointed president of the organising committee, with Ramjit Chauhan, Bimal Pandit and Basanti Devi named as vice-presidents.

Birendra Bora will serve as secretary.

A 21-member Hindu Conference Organising Committee has been constituted to oversee the arrangements.

The conference will feature the hoisting of the Dharmadhvaaja (re-

ligious flag), collective devotional singing, and scholarly discussions on Sanatan Hindu traditions, along with reflections on the role and responsibilities of Hindus in contemporary society.

The organising committee has appealed to followers of Sanatan Dharma across the Hojai region to participate actively and extend their cooperation to ensure the success of the programme.

Sources said that nearly 50 such conferences are expected to be held across the district as part of the RSS centenary observance.

## Bhogali Bihu celebrations at Chachal Bihutoli reflect vibrant Assamese culture

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Jan 15: The Upper Chachal Bihu Sanmilan celebrated Bhogali Bihu with traditional fervour at Chachal Bihutoli, bringing the festive spirit of Assam's harvest festival to the heart of the city.

The day-long programme showcased the richness of Assamese culture through traditional rituals, games, music and cuisine.

The celebrations began with a Kirtan Nam performed by women devotees of the Chachal Rajohua Namghar, lending a spiritual note to the occasion. The central ritual of the festival, the lighting of the Meji, was performed by eminent writer, poet, critic and academician Dr Ananda Barmudoi, drawing enthusiastic participation from the gathered crowd.

Several distinguished personalities were present during the Meji lighting ceremony, including IAS officer Thanesar Malakar and noted author Fanindra Kumar Dev Choudhury, known for his work 'Anuradhar Desh'. The festive mood was further heightened by traditional games and activities such as Meji Seva, Kolor Dola and Kolha Bhanga, which saw active involvement from participants of all ages.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Barmudoi underscored the importance of celebrating Bhogali Bihu in an urban setting, noting that such events help preserve cultural roots amid modern city life.

He commended the Upper Chachal Bihu Sanmilan for its sustained efforts in keeping Assamese traditions alive and relevant.

The celebrations also featured a colourful cultural programme, with a group Bihu dance emerging as a major attraction and drawing applause from the audience.

The event concluded with a community feast, offering a variety of traditional Assamese dishes.

Members of the Upper Chachal Bihu Sanmilan said the organisation has been observing Bhogali Bihu for several years, and this year's celebration reaffirmed its commitment to promoting and preserving Assam's cultural heritage.

## Former Carmel School principal Sister Mabilia passes away

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 15: Eminent educationist and former principal of Carmel School, Jorhat, Sister Mabilia AC passed away at the Jorhat Christian Medical Centre on Monday, leaving behind a rich legacy of service in the field of education.

Her mortal remains were kept at Carmel School, Jorhat, on January 13, where students, teachers, alumni and well-wishers paid their final respects.

The burial was held on January 14 within the school campus.

Born on March 16, 1945, in Mangalore, Sister Mabilia felt a strong calling to serve humanity at a young age.

At just 17, she left her home in 1962 to join the Apostolic Carmel Society under the Roman Catholic Church.

She underwent extensive higher training, particularly in the field of holistic education for ICSE-affiliated institutions.

During her long career, Sister Mabilia served in various capacities across India and abroad wherever Apostolic Carmel institutions were present.

Known for her commitment to quality education, she not only guided students but also counselled parents, teachers and guardians on nurturing children into responsible citizens.

Her dedication led her to be appointed Assistant Superior General of the Apostolic Carmel Society, headquartered in Bengaluru, a position she held for 12 years and which is the second highest office in the congregation in India.

Sister Mabilia was first posted as principal of Carmel School, Jorhat, in the late 1970s and returned for another term in the mid-1980s.

During her tenures, she played a key role in the construction of the school building and Carmel Hall at Cinnamara.

Deeply attached to the town, she chose Jorhat as her final posting.

Her passing has cast a pall of gloom over the school community, with former students spread across the globe, teachers and residents of Jorhat expressing profound grief and condolence at the loss of a much-loved mentor and educationist.

## Karbi community celebrates Hacha Kekan at Taralanso

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 15: The Karbi community came together at Taralanso to celebrate Hacha Kekan, the traditional post-harvest festival, with ancestral songs, dances and rituals reflecting the deep agrarian roots of the tribe.

The central celebration was organised by the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) in association with various apex bodies.

For the Karbis, who largely depend on jhum cultivation, the festival marks the completion of Sok Keroi, the ceremonial bringing of harvested paddy from the fields to the household.

After threshing and winnowing, village youth and men perform the Hacha Kekan dance, traditionally held through the night at the house where the grain is stored, accompanied by traditional food and rice brew served to elders.

According to folklore, the tradi-



tion was first introduced by Teron Rongso during a harvest at the home of Manik Bey and has since been passed down generations.

Inaugurating the programme at the KCS central committee office, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang stressed the need to preserve indigenous traditions and said such events help

keep the younger generation connected to their cultural roots.

He also announced that following discussions with the chief minister, the state government has agreed to declare a four-day restricted holiday for the upcoming Karbi Youth Festival scheduled from February 15 to 19.

Addressing the gathering, KAAC executive member Surjo

Rongphar underlined the distinction between culture and religion, urging community members not to abandon their cultural identity irrespective of personal faith.

The programme featured performances by traditional singer John Teron, who rendered oral songs on village formation, the origin of paddy and the tradition of Lunse singing.

Cultural troupes presented the Hacha Kekan dance in the presence of dignitaries including MP Amarsing Tisso and MLA Darsing Ronghang.

Participants were also served traditional food items on wild leaves, including boiled tapioca, wild yam, rice flour preparations with jaggery and black tea in bamboo tubes.

The celebrations concluded as a reaffirmation of the Karbi community's commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage.

## Pijush Hazarika flags off Magh Bihu procession

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 15: The Bhogali Bihu celebrations at historic Nehrubali in Nagaon continued to infuse festive spirit into the town as Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika inaugurated the cultural procession on the third day of the event on Thursday.

The procession featured colourful displays highlighting the rich cultural traditions of various ethnic communities, with popular artistes including Rajesh Bhuyan, Debajit Majumdar and Yashaswi Bhuyan taking part. Speaking on the occasion, Hazarika said the Bhogali Bihu celebrations at Nagaon Nehrubali have a distinct identity and play an important role in fostering unity and harmony among different sections of society.

Ranjit Kumar Tamuli Phukan, president of the Bihu Celebration Committee, noted that Nehrubali's Bhogali Bihu is considered to be Assam's first-stage Bihu.

The multi-day celebrations, which began earlier this week, feature a range of cultural programmes and competitions and are scheduled to conclude on the night of January 18.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*A single twig breaks, but the bundle of twigs is strong. -Tecumseh*

## US imperialism and UK, EU

The past few days have really thrown the role of imperialism in sharp relief. The actions of the US — attacking a sovereign country, kidnapping an elected president, attempting to hold that country to ransom with the threat of further military force — have shocked even the most ardent supporters of the Western liberal narrative of so-called liberal democracies and failed states. The fact that Donald Trump has been open that this is about furthering US imperialist interests and claimed that Venezuela will be “turning over” tens of millions of barrels of oil to the US as a result has made it difficult for even the US closest allies to avoid some criticism of their behaviour. And yet somehow our own spineless Prime Minister manages to do so. Jeremy Corbyn is right to refer to the actions (or rather inaction) of our government as “pathetic” when ministers are unable to even state whether it is illegal to kidnap a sitting president. It is hardly a complex case of international law, and our PM is supposed to be a legal expert. However, we shouldn’t be surprised. Britain has long ridden on the coat-tails of US imperialism. The much-talked about special relationship amounts to little in international policy terms other than a slavish adherence to US priorities. In the words of Corbyn (or indeed of the Rage Against the Machine classic *Bullet in the Head*), they say jump and we say how high.

But for those who have tried to paint the neoliberal European Union as some kind of left alternative to adherence to US policy, their official statement must have come as something of a disappointment. The EU high representative took the opportunity to emphasise that the EU “has repeatedly stated that Nicolas Maduro lacks the legitimacy of a democratically elected president” and studiously avoided criticising the US attacks. This simply emphasises that the European bosses’ club has no alternative to offer on this, or any other, issue. Whether you choose to tie yourself to US imperialism or to side with European imperialism, which has done so much to stoke the flames of war in Ukraine and elsewhere, whilst ramping up anti-immigrant rhetoric and strengthening external borders, there are no good guys to be found among the various ruling class alliances.

The answer, of course is to build an anti-imperialist movement founded on the basis of true internationalism. This must be an internationalism that recognises our solidarity with the international working class, like the members of the International Brigades who 90 years ago gave their lives to fight fascism in Spain. Such internationalism is not just a thing of the past. It lives on in the international medical brigades sent across the world by Cuba to fight the scourge of poverty, disease and preventable death. It was also demonstrated very clearly by the 32 Cuban heroes who gave their lives in honour and glory to defend the elected president of Venezuela against the US.

## Artificial Intelligence an asset to media but can not be a substitute

By: Asad Mirza

At the ongoing world Book Fair 2026, in New Delhi, Abu Dhabi-based Muslim Elders Council organised a panel discussion on ‘AI for Humanity: Religious Perspective on Ethical AI’, chaired by former ambassador Dr Zikrur Rehman, former Indian Ambassador to erstwhile Palestinian Authority (PA) and consul general in Riyadh.

Sanjay Kapoor, a renowned journalist and president of the Editors Guild of India, said that reporting is an occupation, which has the greatest power compared to Artificial Intelligence (AI). The problem is that most news organisations are now spending less on reporting and are becoming more dependent on the internet. Elon Musk had said that in the future, the job of a plumber will be safe, but not that of a journalist, especially if he is limited to asking questions. But in fact, in this way, the reporter himself is strengthening AI, Kapoor further said.

Kapoor also warned about the dangers of AI and said that the media community in India is not fully aware of the dangers of AI. For example, ChatGPT, despite being two years old, can write better than a regular journalist. The result is that jobs may disappear, if journalism does not include emotional attachment, ground reporting and human experience, AI will replace journalists and people will not even know when and how it happened.

Kapoor also said that there is a dire need for regulation and oversight to control AI and unless developers and institutions take ethics and journalistic values seriously, misinformation will continue to spread. Dr. Mudassar Qamar, Assistant Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said evolution of AI and its impact on academics is big achievement and a cause of concern also. Today, there are AI tools that do everything from reference lists, literature reviews, grammar checking, etc. Some students have become completely dependent on AI, which makes research dehumanised and uncreative, but it also has positive aspects, such as help-

ing students with language difficulties. He said that both teachers and students need to strike a balance between caution and understanding in using AI.

Highlighting the possibilities and concerns of Artificial Intelligence (AI) dominating all walks of life in the world, senior analyst and columnist Asad Mirza said that AI is a tool for journalism, not a substitute. He said that as far as artificial intelligence in journalism is concerned, when artificial intelligence came to the fore, there were serious concerns that it would eliminate jobs, especially in the writing sector and content preparation. These concerns proved to be correct to some extent. In March last year, an Italian newspaper *Il Folgio* published a four-page supplement for the first time that was created entirely by artificial intelligence — i.e. the selection and editing of news, page layout, everything was done by AI.

Mirza, further said that the next day, the British newspaper, *The Guardian* gave this supplement to its AI tool and had it analysed for quality. Its submission was that the selection of news was good, editing was sharp, page layout was excellent, however, the human element was missing in the news presentation. The news seemed to be purely computer-generated. It had everything but the human emotions that are prominent in the news were missing.

Mirza said that AI can help in creating content, but human supervision over this content is indispensable. Without a human touch, news cannot connect with the reader, cannot meet his expectations. Therefore, artificial intelligence can be an aid in journalism, but it is not a complete substitute nor can it completely dominate journalism, at least not for now.

He proved from Quranic references that there is no evidence anywhere that AI is opposed or prohibited in Islam. In fact, the Quran encourages people to use their resources to improve their lives and benefit themselves. He said that Islam’s stance on AI is that it allows the use of everything new, except for worship, as long as it does not fall under the ambit of prohibition. (IPA Service)

# The Mighty Brahmaputra and Assam's agricultural economy

To call the mighty Brahmaputra the fundamental basis of Assam’s existence would not be an exaggeration, for through the bosom of this river flows uninterrupted the main current of Assam’s economy and livelihood. As a rare and magnificent gift of nature, the profound and multifaceted influence that the Brahmaputra has exerted on Assam’s agricultural economy is not limited merely to supplying water to farmlands or harvesting fishery resources; it is a vast, complex, and dynamic process that has guided the agrarian society of the state through ages of both creation and destruction. The enormous volume of water that flows from the Himalayas deposits a layer of silt every year across the entire valley, which serves as the primary driving force behind Assam’s agricultural production. The lush abundance of crops visible in this region is exceptional compared to many other parts of the world. However, the agricultural economy built around this river is not founded solely on benefits or gains; it is inextricably linked with challenges such as devastating seasonal floods, relentless erosion, and the current threats of climate change, which test the fate of farmers and the economic foundation of the state each year. Therefore, contemplating Assam’s agriculture without the Brahmaputra is as impossible and unrealistic as formulating any plan for the state’s economic development without a deep, scientific, and pragmatic analysis of the river’s nature, behaviour, and character. How to make this agricultural economy stronger and more sustainable while constantly battling the natural disasters that run parallel to the fertility of the vast plains on both banks of the river is an extremely important, sensitive, and thought-provoking issue of the present time, demanding profound attention from the intellectual community to policymakers alike.

The primary reason for the high productivity and crop diversity in Assam’s agricultural sector is the mineral-rich alluvial soil brought by the Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries, which naturally and organically enhances soil fertility each year, reducing the excessive dependence of farmers on chemical fertilisers. Because of this natural renewal process, there exists a rare possibility in many remote areas of Assam to produce abundant high-quality crops without the application of chemical fertilisers—a phenomenon exceedingly rare worldwide that accords Assam’s agriculture a unique dignity and potential. When floodwaters gradually recede from submerged fields during the rainy season, the thin layer of silt deposited there naturally provides ample essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and other micronutrients vital for crops, significantly reducing both the cost and physical labour required by farmers to prepare the soil for the next season. This fertile and soft terrain creates an ideal and favourable environment not only for traditional rice cultivation but also for cash crops such as mustard, various legumes, vegetables, and jute. Yet the reliability of this natural process is so heavily dependent on weather whims that excessive silt deposition or an abnormal increase in sandy soil can render farmland infertile, posing a serious risk. Therefore, to properly and systematically utilise this invaluable gift of the Brahmaputra, regular soil quality testing and the region-specific adoption of improved agricultural practices are essential, ensuring that nature’s blessing does not remain mere potential but transforms into a certain and sustainable path for increasing every farmer’s income. Only scientific management of the river’s water and agri-

cultural practices based on an understanding of soil characteristics can impart new momentum and direction to Assam’s rural economy, blending the traditional knowledge of our ancestors with modern science in a beautiful and fruitful synthesis. The greatest and most terrifying obstacle facing the agricultural economy centred on the Brahmaputra is the destructive seasonal floods, which, like a regular occurrence, instantly shatter the dreams, hopes, and months of back-breaking labour of farming communities and pose a massive barrier to the state’s overall economic progress. Since Assam’s rural economy is primarily agriculture-dependent, when thousands of hectares of golden rice fields or fresh vegetable gardens sink under water, the loss is not merely individual or familial but exerts a far-reaching negative impact on the state’s gross domestic production. The widespread crop damage caused by floods not only creates food shortages in the state but also leads to skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, extreme indebtedness among farmers, and a rapid rise in rural poverty—complex social problems that rear their heads. The deep anxiety and fear that arise in the minds of riverside farmers as the river water rises gradually are not just about crop loss but about profound uncertainty regarding sustaining their families throughout the year. Government aid or meagre compensation may provide temporary relief, but in the absence of any permanent and long-term solution, this problem persists year after year, remaining the primary impediment to the agricultural sector becoming self-reliant and self-sufficient. Only by developing flood-resistant crop varieties, constructing scientifically robust embankments, and adopting improved and modern drainage systems, alongside fostering a mindset of coexistence with floods, can the extent of this irreparable damage be reduced to some degree. Proper and transparent implementation of crop insurance schemes, along with accurate advance flood warning systems, can significantly help farmers prepare mentally and financially for such disasters—an urgent necessity in the current changing environment.

Parallel to floods, another heartbreaking and devastating problem is river erosion, which has silently erased vast tracts of fertile agricultural land from Assam’s map forever and rendered thousands of prosperous farming families landless and destitute in an instant. The irreparable loss caused by the Brahmaputra’s fierce and uncontrolled currents continually eroding the soft, sandy banks is not merely geographical; it is a tragic economic catastrophe involving the permanent loss of the sole source of livelihood. Land is a farmer’s primary asset and identity, and when that asset merges into the river’s depths, the family’s economic future becomes utterly dark and directionless. People displaced by losing their foundational land are forced to migrate to cities in search of alternative income or become daily wage labourers, resulting in an acute shortage of skilled labour in the agricultural sector and a gradual weakening of the traditional farming system. Merely temporary measures such as placing geobags or stones along banks are insufficient to solve this complex problem; instead, a far-sighted and long-term plan involving scientific study of the river’s course and controlled dredging to regulate water flow must be adopted at the governmental level. Rehabilitating unfortunate landless farmers and providing them with respectable alternative agricultural or livelihood options are also vital steps in the

interest of strengthening the state’s economy. The gradual widening of the Brahmaputra’s channel and the consequent shrinkage of agricultural land serve as an ominous signal for the state’s future food security; unless we become aware and proactive now, it may soon evolve into a profound social and economic crisis.

The proper utilisation of Brahmaputra water, or scientifically managed irrigation, remains a critically important yet long-neglected aspect of Assam’s agricultural economy, where vast fields turn desert-like from water scarcity during dry seasons despite the river’s immense water volume being visible. Just as excess water in the rainy season creates problems, the lack of adequate infrastructure or technology to channel river water to fields during winter—when rainfall is minimal—prevents most farmers in the state from undertaking a second crop. If the abundant water of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries can be scientifically conserved or distributed equitably for dry-season cultivation, there exists full and certain potential to double or triple Assam’s agricultural production. In the current era, where emphasis is placed on transforming agriculture from mere subsistence into a profitable enterprise through diversified cropping, ensuring year-round water supply to fields is an indispensable condition. Modern technologies such as solar-powered pumps or lift irrigation from the river can eliminate water scarcity, encouraging farmers to move beyond dependence on traditional winter rice and engage in com-

mercial cultivation of maize, wheat, pulses, and seasonal vegetables. Increasing agricultural intensity through proper utilisation of river water would attract educated unemployed youth in rural areas toward farming and play a positive role in addressing the state’s unemployment problem. The mindset and well-planned initiatives to treat this inexhaustible natural water resource not merely as a destructive force but as a tool for production are absolutely essential for a radical transformation of our agricultural economy.

Not limited to crop production alone, the Brahmaputra contributes significantly and promisingly to Assam’s agriculture-based economy through fisheries and low-cost water transportation; if developed properly and systematically, it could open a vast avenue for increasing state revenue. The demand for indigenous fish naturally found in the river remains consistently high in markets, and establishing river-centric fish farming as a systematic industry could provide a respectable livelihood for many in rural areas. Moreover, river routes offer the cheapest, smoothest, and most environment-friendly means of transporting agricultural produce from one place to another or from remote areas to markets. Although some governmental activity and progress have been observed after declaring the Brahmaputra a national waterway, modernising river ghats and transportation systems is extremely urgent to enable marginal farmers to easily and inexpensively bring their produce to markets. Especially in char-chapori areas, where abundant vegetables, milk, and other agricultural products are produced, mechanised boats or improved ferry services could play a revolutionary role in reaching the mainland. This river-centric linkage between agriculture and commerce would directly reduce the exploitation of farmers by middlemen and help them receive fair prices for their hand-

earned produce. By extending the river’s potential beyond mere production to direct connection with markets and consumers, this process could strengthen the foundation of the rural economy and establish Assam as a major hub for agricultural trade in Northeast India.

The rapid impact of climate change—a topic of global discussion and concern today—has introduced a new and complex threat to the agricultural system of the Brahmaputra Valley, dramatically altering rainfall patterns and fundamentally disrupting our traditional farming calendar. Sudden off-season floods or intense droughts accompanied by scorching sun leave farmers completely bewildered, rendering the traditional knowledge and experience of our ancestors nearly obsolete in the present context. The accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers due to global warming increases the uncertainty of the river’s water level day by day, potentially creating major challenges for future water availability for agriculture and flood intensity. In such an uncertain situation, adapting through environment-friendly farming practices—such as greater use of organic fertilisers, cultivation of low-water crops, and adoption of modern weather-forecasting agricultural technologies—is the call of the hour. Without a coordinated and sincere effort among government, agricultural scientists, and farming communities to develop climate-resilient agricultural methods, the state’s food security risks severe disruption in the future. Conservation of the riverbank environment, large-scale tree plantation, and preservation of wetlands and water bodies will not only keep the river alive but also help maintain favourable moisture and temperature for agriculture. To secure the future agricultural economy, we must cease viewing the Brahmaputra as an enemy and instead embrace it as an ally, rebuilding a balanced relationship with nature that is indispensable for our existence and future generations.

In conclusion, the relationship between the Brahmaputra and Assam’s agricultural economy is an eternal and inseparable truth that cannot be denied or neglected; rather, advancing this complex relationship with more scientific, pragmatic, and far-sighted thinking should be our primary goal. Although humans cannot fully control the river’s destructive aspect, proper governmental policies and social planning are needed to minimise damage through modern engineering techniques and technology while harnessing its creative potentials. The farmer is the backbone of our society and economy, and the Brahmaputra is the sole natural source that supplies strength and nourishment to that backbone. Only when we find a sustainable path to solve the flood problem, protect our land by preventing relentless erosion, and turn dry winter fields green through proper irrigation will Assam’s agricultural economy truly witness development and prosperity. Proper utilisation of river-centric resources can also spark an economic revolution by interesting the new generation in agriculture and establishing agriculture-based industries. The Brahmaputra is not merely a subject of our emotions or songs and poetry; it is the sole foundation of our economic progress. Upon its conservation, proper management, and judicious use depends the future of Assam and the destiny of its countless agrarian people. The dream of building a healthy, strong, and self-reliant Assam will become reality only when the mighty Brahmaputra’s vast waters cease to be a source of mere sorrow and pain and instead become an inexhaustible fountain of happiness, peace, and prosperity.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Commercial cultivation of maize, wheat, pulses, and seasonal vegetables. Increasing agricultural intensity through proper utilisation of river water would attract educated unemployed youth in rural areas toward farming and play a positive role in addressing the state’s unemployment problem. The mindset and well-planned initiatives to treat this inexhaustible natural water resource not merely as a destructive force but as a tool for production are absolutely essential for a radical transformation of our agricultural economy.

Not limited to crop production alone, the Brahmaputra contributes significantly and promisingly to Assam’s agriculture-based economy through fisheries and low-cost water transportation; if developed properly and systematically, it could open a vast avenue for increasing state revenue. The demand for indigenous fish naturally found in the river remains consistently high in markets, and establishing river-centric fish farming as a systematic industry could provide a respectable livelihood for many in rural areas. Moreover, river routes offer the cheapest, smoothest, and most environment-friendly means of transporting agricultural produce from one place to another or from remote areas to markets. Although some governmental activity and progress have been observed after declaring the Brahmaputra a national waterway, modernising river ghats and transportation systems is extremely urgent to enable marginal farmers to easily and inexpensively bring their produce to markets. Especially in char-chapori areas, where abundant vegetables, milk, and other agricultural products are produced, mechanised boats or improved ferry services could play a revolutionary role in reaching the mainland. This river-centric linkage between agriculture and commerce would directly reduce the exploitation of farmers by middlemen and help them receive fair prices for their hand-

## Centre must take all steps to hike outlay for Jal Jeevan Mission in next budget

By: Krishna Jha

Reports of the Centre planning to massively reduce the outlay of its flagship rural tap water scheme — Jal Jeevan Mission (JLM) — are ominous. This would mean cutting the outlay of the JLM by almost 60 percent from ₹ 67,000 crore allocated in Budget 2025-26 to ₹ 17,000 crore in the revised estimates of the current financial year.

Water is the stream of life. General availability of cleaner water shows the level of culture, because it shows the concern about those who suffer from lack of resources. It shows the general level of awareness about the quality of life of entire humanity. Those responsible for clean water supply have to be conscious about the fact that the quality of piped water supply must be checked at delivery point. Most of the short comings are detected here only.

The recent outbreak in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, has starkly highlighted this risk. On December 31, 2025, residents of Bhagirathpura fell ill after drinking tap water. Dozens of people died and hundreds were hospitalized after drinking the contaminated water.

A major contributor to the wellbeing of the common people is supply of clean water. Any impurity symbolizes poor quality of the sociopolitical system. Such a system almost does not have any space in its agenda of duties towards the miserably sections, the larger sections of masses living in all pervading squalor. The acute deprivation becomes a gift from the corporate sections who never try to do anything that could be added to the well being of the rest. Water is in itself a major care giver in the society. It is from this source alone, most of the challenges attack the society. Recently we saw how contaminated water played a devastating role in Indore.

In fact, in the villages of Madhya Pradesh, the drinking water has quietly turned into a public health hazard. A new report by the central government’s Jal Jeevan Mission reveals that more than one-third of rural drinking water in the state is unfit for human consumption, exposing millions to invisible but deadly contamination.

According to the Functionality Assessment Report re-

leased on January 4, 2026, only 63.3 percent of water samples in Madhya Pradesh passed quality tests, compared to a national average of 76 percent. That means 36.7 percent of rural drinking water samples in the state were found unsafe, containing bacterial or chemical contamination. The samples were collected from over 15,000 rural households across Madhya Pradesh in September-October 2024.

The situation is even more alarming in places meant to heal and protect. In government hospitals, only 12 percent of water samples passed microbiological safety tests, compared to a national average of 83.1 percent. About 88 percent of hospitals in Madhya Pradesh are supplying unsafe drinking water to patients.

In schools, 26.7 percent of samples failed microbiological tests, exposing children to contaminated water on a daily basis.

In Balaghat, Betul, and Chhindwara, more than 50% of water samples were contaminated. In Madhya Pradesh, only 31.5 percent of households have tap connections, far below the national average of 70.9 percent.

Even where pipelines exist, the system is broken; 99.1 percent of villages have piped supply, but only 76.6 percent of households have functioning taps. That means every fourth household has a dead tap or no water at all.

Even worse, tap water does not mean safe water. In Indore district, officially declared 100 percent connected, only 33 percent of households receive safe drinking water.

Across the state, 33 percent of water samples failed quality tests, confirming that the crisis is not about access alone but about toxic delivery. The central government has termed the situation a “system-generated disaster” and has warned that if water quality does not improve, funding may be reduced this year.

That warning came after a tragedy. 18 people died in Bhagirathpura, Indore, after drinking contaminated water. 429 people were hospitalised, of which 16 are in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and three on ventilators. The Madhya Pradesh High Court has now formally recognised the crisis as a public health emergency. In its order, the court stated that “the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to clean drinking water” and that the pres-

ent situation falls within the ambit of a public health emergency.

It is a development steeped in irony because Indore has been voted India’s cleanest city for several years in a row for its exemplary waste segregation and management practice among other cleanliness measures it undertook. As has become the unfortunate norm after every mishap, the blame game began swiftly with authorities pinning it on tardy progress on installing a fresh supply line.

A committee is to investigate the issue, but things should not have been allowed to precipitate such a deadly crisis in the first place. This is the second instance of a water issue in the State in the past two months.

In majority of cases, decades-old pipelines were identified as the primary cause. Many Indian cities continue to rely on water distribution networks laid more than 40 years ago. In Delhi, for instance, around 18 per cent of water pipes are over 30 years old, according to a report by the Delhi Jal Board. Cracks in these pipes — often laid alongside or below sewer lines — create repeated contamination risks.

Water contamination outbreaks in India are often associated with the monsoon months, when flooding and overflowing drains increase the risk of sewage ingress. But a review of at least 34 reported incidents over the past year shows that sewage-contaminated piped water is no longer a seasonal phenomenon.

Cases were reported across all months and seasons. In the span of just a month — between December 2025 and January 7, 2026 — at least 19 people died and more than 3,500 fell ill, largely after consuming contaminated tap water.

During this short period, at least 11 incidents of piped water contamination were reported from cities across the country, including Patna (Bihar), Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Bengaluru (Karnataka), Dehradun (Uttarakhand), Gandhinagar (Gujarat), Guwahati (Assam), Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Gurugram (Haryana). These included nine state capitals, underlining the fragile and ageing foundations of India’s urban drinking water infrastructure. (IPA Service)

# Can India's legal system combat the rising threat of digital arrest scams?

By: Harsh Gour

In recent months, India has witnessed a troubling new form of cyber-fraud: victims, especially older citizens, are being "digitally arrested" in their homes by anonymous callers. In one incident, fraudsters posing as Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officers digitally arrested an 80-year-old man and extorted ₹33 lakh. In Pune, two separate scams targeted a 77-year-old man and a 69-year-old woman, where the scammers siphoned off ₹39.5 lakh through bogus terror and drug-trafficking allegations. These high-profile stories are not anomalies.

This clandestine fraud operation exploits fear and confusion: callers claim victims are wanted by the police, Enforcement Directorate, or even the Supreme Court, then pressure them to "transfer" their savings into supposedly verified accounts.

The government's response has been urgent. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) reports blocking over 1,700 Skype IDs and 59,000 WhatsApp numbers used by digital arrest scammers. Telecom regulators have blocked hundreds of thousands of suspected SIM cards and devices linked to these frauds, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has publicly warned consumers that "there is no such thing as a 'digital arrest'". In Parliament, MHA officials detailed a nationwide awareness campaign, from newspaper advertisements and metro announcements to radio and television programmes, to educate people about these scams.

At the same time, the judiciary has taken note. A bench led by Justices Kant and Bagchi took suo motu cognisance of the issue after an elderly Haryana couple wrote in. It appointed senior advocate N.S. Pappani as amicus curiae and directed the CBI to be the primary agency to investigate digital arrest scam cases. A Rajasthan High Court bench also moved suo motu, observed that "digital arrest" has no legal standing in India and urged the state to spread constant public warnings against it.

A digital arrest scam is a highly sophisticated extortion racket where fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials such as police, CBI, Enforcement Directorate, or even RBI officials, accusing victims of heinous crimes and claiming that warrants or court orders have been issued against them. Many scammers go to great lengths to appear authentic. They use fake uniforms, forged letterheads bearing Ministry of Home Affairs or RBI seals, and mock "police station" video backgrounds. Victims are coerced into "staying online," usually via WhatsApp or Skype video, for hours under

the pretext of questioning. A recent innovation in criminal intent has been the use of deepfake technology or artificial intelligence to mimic the voices of relatives or judges, amplifying the psychological pressure. Constant threats, like "transfer ₹10 lakh now or we will send a team to arrest you", create urgent fear. Before victims can think, they are pressured to move their money, often via Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) or Unified Payments Interface (UPI), into designated bank accounts controlled by the fraudsters.

This scheme straddles a legal grey zone. Notably, "digital arrest" has no basis in Indian law. The newly enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) contains no provision for any virtual or video-call arrest. Further, they are not recognised by law (as of the date of writing), so enforcement relies on generic provisions. In practice, police use a mix of existing provisions to charge the criminals. Under the BNS, they invoke sections for cheating, criminal intimidation, extortion, and impersonating an officer. The Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act) can also apply, for instance, fraud by impersonation via computer or identity theft. In a July 2025 order in Satender Kumar Antil v. Central Bureau of Investigation, the Supreme Court noted that the official process for delivering police notices under Section 35 of the BNS cannot bypass statutory formality. The notices must be served in person, and not through unintended legislative mediums like WhatsApp or video. The judgment does not directly address digital-arrest frauds, but its emphasis on formal service provides a procedural safeguard against attempts to serve or threaten service via messaging applications.

Beyond procedural issues, enforcement faces technical hurdles. Perpetrators often operate from "scam hubs" abroad, using mule bank accounts and telecom loopholes to evade detection. The National Crime Records Bureau does not separately track digital arrests, making it challenging to obtain precise figures. However, based on media reports, government reports and court filings, the scale is massive with tens of thousands of incidents and crores of rupees lost, both increasing every year.

Why do "digital arrest" scams land with such force? At its core, the con exploits the very trust citizens place in institutions, or is it the fear thereof? Scammers pretend to carry the authority of a powerful state through symbols such as police uniforms, official seals, or court procedures. They pervert that authority into a weapon of intimidation. As the Supreme Court warned, these crimes undermine public trust by abusing the judiciary's name and authority. Each time a criminal impersonates courts and judges, misusing stamps and



seals, citizens' faith in due process erodes. If anyone with a fake video can summon you to a virtual police station, the sanctity of lawful arrest is called into question.

The prevalence of these scams starkly reveals India's digital divide and legal illiteracy. Most victims are seniors or rural residents who lack familiarity with online scams. They are often not tech-savvy and may not have experience with digital technologies, and they may be easily deceived by scammers posing as government or law enforcement officers. Many people live alone and panic at the prospect of being charged with a crime. Technology itself compounds this: the same tools (video chat, telecom networks) that connect us also enable prolonged isolation of a victim under constant surveillance. In effect, the criminals exploit what Justice Dhand of the Rajasthan High Court described as an individual's vulnerability in digital spaces, using "themes of authority, urgency and fear" to deceive even well-educated people.

Moreover, these scams highlight a paradox of our times. As V.S. Subrahmanian, professor of computer science at Northwestern University, told Al Jazeera, "digital arrest is just a newfangled form of spear-phishing," a highly targeted social engineering attack. The fraudsters research their victims, often via social media, then weave narratives that prey on personal fears (a boss's arrest, a missing parcel of contraband). If the state's messaging about its own procedures is unclear, ordinary people

have little to fall back on. Many Indians may not know that no Indian law permits an officer to arrest someone via video call. That lapse in public education remains a glaring problem.

All the while, victims often do not report immediately out of fear or shame. When they finally come forward, investigators must carefully untangle the orchestrated lies. While the law penalises and remedies each element (cheating, intimidation, etc.), the human toll remains largely hidden. These are people terrified in their own homes, thinking their reputation, freedom, or family may be ruined, only to realise later that criminals mimicked the state itself. The cost is not just in rupees: it is in shattered security.

Digital arrest scams cannot be rooted out by policing alone. A holistic, citizen-first approach is needed, one that restores trust, ensures legal clarity, and aids the vulnerable. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Supreme Court that cyber-criminals have used "digital arrest" to coerce thousands of citizens, mostly elderly, and have robbed roughly ₹3,000 crore across India.

In the aftermath of rising "digital arrest" frauds, the Court has moved beyond mere cognisance to active supervision. It appointed an amicus curiae, directed the CBI to act as the primary agency for investigating such scams, and called upon the RBI, the Department of Telecommunications, and intermediaries to consider concrete regulatory and technical measures, in-

cluding stricter SIM-issuance norms, action against SIM-box misuse, preservation of telecom data, freezing of bank accounts linked to fraud, and AI-based detection of mule accounts.

The first step must be to explicitly outlaw the core of this fraud. One way is for legislators to amend the BNS (or the IT Act) to criminalise impersonating law enforcement or judicial officers through any digital medium with the intent to defraud. Such offences should be clarified to signal that such scams are not benign fraud but would be construed as serious breaches of public order. Arrests and summons must follow formal due-process rules. Police departments should audit their procedures and issue strict internal guidelines: for example, no arrest can be effected by any form of call or message. Enforcement agencies must remind citizens that they never demand money or transfers to verify an investigation. Training can help frontline officers themselves recognise these cons and advise their communities.

Prevention depends on awareness. Government and non-governmental organisations can organise cyber-awareness drives in local languages, particularly at senior-citizen clubs, and through various channels, including community television and radio. I4C's "CyberDost" messages and State Bank of India's digital literacy materials are useful, but they need wider distribution. Banks in particular can play a role. Customers should be informed at every access point that legitimate offi-

cially will never ask them to move money to an unknown account. Online platforms (WhatsApp, Telegram) could display periodic bulletins or alerts to Indian users with warnings about these scams. Perhaps most importantly, we should invest in teaching legal rights: a simple rule of thumb could be circulated—an arrest can only be made by uniformed police with a warrant, or under a court order, and always in person. This is an institutional responsibility in a digital democracy.

On the tech side, all relevant agencies should strategically coordinate. The Supreme Court has directed the Department of Telecommunications to propose tougher SIM issuance norms. It directed the telecommunication service providers to take necessary measures to prevent the unlawful issuance of SIM boxes. It has directed all states and union territories to establish and operationalise Regional and State Cybercrime Coordination Centres, in coordination with I4C. Furthermore, the Court inquired why the RBI cannot implement fraud-detection systems, powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, to flag transfers into unusual accounts or rapid withdrawals.

Messaging and social platforms must also be part of the solution. The Supreme Court has directed information technology intermediaries to cooperate with the CBI to assist in rendering traffic and content data for the investigation of digital arrest scam cases. WhatsApp and others could detect and block bulk messages that mimic police or court communications. They could introduce a verified law enforcement channel (like X's blue check) so users know which messages are official. The recent Supreme Court decision on not using WhatsApp for police notices could be mirrored by discouraging scammers from misusing it. For example, Meta might alert users if someone with no official verification claims to be a police officer.

Victims must be treated with understanding. Their complaints should be fast-tracked and investigated. Cyber-crime reporting channels (1930 helpline, cybercrime.gov.in) should ensure timely assistance, and not rely solely on automated tickets. Every effort must be made to reassure citizens that the state will protect them from the misuse of its own name.

Combating digital arrests and tech-powered cybercrimes, the unintended byproducts of innovation and technological advancements, requires more than technical fixes. It demands a citizen-centred reorientation of law enforcement and regulations. The goal must be to preempt fear with clarity, a glaring need to examine and fill loopholes in statutes and procedures that the scammers exploit. (IPA Service)



By: Satvabrat Borah

The recent comments from Pakistani political analyst Najam Sethi have stirred fresh debate across South Asia, particularly in the context of the already strained ties between India and Bangladesh. Sethi, widely regarded as a close associate of former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, appeared on a Pakistani news channel and issued a stark warning. He suggested that India might not tolerate what he described as provocative statements coming from Dhaka and could respond in a manner reminiscent of its military actions against Pakistan in the past. Specifically, he referenced something called Operation Sindoor, implying that New Delhi could pursue a similar approach toward Bangladesh if tensions continue to escalate.

To understand the gravity of Sethi's remarks, it helps to look at the backdrop. Relations be-

tween India and Bangladesh have deteriorated significantly since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024. Hasina, who had maintained a close partnership with India for over a decade, fled to New Delhi amid massive protests and now resides there under India's protection. The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and founder of Grameen Bank, has taken a different tone in its dealings with India. While both sides insist they want constructive ties, a series of incidents and statements have created deep mistrust. One of the most contentious moments came during Yunus's visit to China in late March 2025. In meetings with Chinese officials and investors, he described India's northeastern states—the so-called Seven Sisters of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura—as landlocked. He emphasized that these regions have no direct ac-

cess to the sea and positioned Bangladesh as the sole guardian or gateway to the ocean for that entire area. He suggested that created immense opportunities for economic integration, particularly with China, which could benefit from using Bangladesh's ports and infrastructure to reach deeper into South Asia.

Those words landed like a bombshell in India. The Northeast is a sensitive region for New Delhi, not just because of its geography but due to long-standing concerns about separatism, insurgency, and external influences. Leaders in Assam and other states reacted sharply. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called the remarks objectionable and deserving of strong condemnation. BJP MP Nishikant Dubey labeled them shameful and inflammatory. The comments were seen as an attempt to undermine India's sovereignty over its own territory by framing the Northeast as some-

## From Words to warning: Could 'Operation Sindoor' repeat in B'desh?

how dependent on Bangladesh for maritime access, even though India has invested heavily in connectivity projects like roads, railways, and waterways to integrate the region more firmly with the mainland.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar responded with measured but pointed criticism. He highlighted that cooperation must be based on mutual respect and a shared vision rather than selective opportunism. He pointed out that India's Northeast is rapidly emerging as a hub for regional connectivity through initiatives under BIMSTEC and other frameworks, with expanding networks of infrastructure that reduce any perceived isolation. India has repeatedly stressed that it does not allow its territory to be used for anti-Bangladesh activities, directly refuting Dhaka's occasional accusations that exiled Awami League members or others are plotting from Indian soil.

Against this simmering friction, Sethi's intervention adds an unusual layer. As a seasoned commentator known for his candid takes on Pakistani politics and regional affairs, he is not someone whose words are easily dismissed. His proximity to Nawaz Sharif lends him credibility in certain circles, though it also colors his perspective with Pakistan's own historical rivalry with India. In his interview, Sethi argued that Bangladesh was essentially threatening India by talking about what it might do to the Seven Sisters. He predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with his reputation for a firm and assertive foreign policy, would not simply overlook such rhetoric. Drawing a parallel to India's past conduct toward Pakistan, Sethi invoked Operation

Sindoor as the kind of decisive step New Delhi might contemplate. Operation Sindoor refers to a military campaign India launched in May 2025 against Pakistan. It came in response to a horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on April 22, 2025, where militants targeted civilians based on religion, killing 26 people. India identified the attackers as linked to Pakistan-based groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. On May 7, India executed precision missile and drone strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, marking one of the most significant cross-border operations since 1971. The operation avoided direct ground invasion or targeting of Pakistani military or civilian sites initially, but it escalated into a brief five-day conflict involving air engagements and further exchanges. It demonstrated India's advances in stand-off weaponry, intelligence, and rapid response capabilities, establishing what many analysts called a new doctrine of calibrated but forceful retaliation against terrorism without escalating to full-scale war.

Sethi, reflecting on that episode from Pakistan's viewpoint, suggested that India views itself as an emerging great power that must project strength. In his words, there is a prevailing sentiment in New Delhi that the country cannot afford to appear weak when faced with perceived threats or provocations. By linking Bangladesh's statements to this mindset, he implied that rhetorical challenges to India's control over its Northeast could trigger a robust response, perhaps not identical to Sindoor but comparable in resolve and impact.

Of course, such predictions are speculative and come from a Pakistani lens, where anti-India narratives often find receptive audiences. There is no public indication that India is planning any military action against Bangladesh. New Delhi has consistently emphasized its preference for peaceful, friendly relations with Dhaka. In December 2025, the Ministry of External Affairs reiterated that India has never permitted its territory to be used against Bangladesh's interests and called for dialogue based on mutual benefit. Diplomatic channels remain open, and both countries continue to engage on issues like trade, border management, and water sharing, even if the warmth of the Hasina era is absent. Yet the underlying tensions are real. Bangladesh's interim leadership has sought to diversify its foreign relations, deepening ties with China and even Pakistan in some symbolic ways. Yunus's China visit and his framing of the Northeast as an economic opportunity for Beijing raised eyebrows in India, which sees the region as strategically vital and has countered Chinese influence through projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and enhanced Act East Policy initiatives. Meanwhile, accusations fly back and forth: Bangladesh has claimed that anti-government elements are operating from India, while India denies this and points to the need for Dhaka to rein in anti-India rhetoric and activities.

Sethi's comments, amplified by outlets like Firstpost, have reignited discussions about how far the rhetoric might go and whether miscalculations could lead to unintended consequences. In a region scarred by historical conflicts, including the 1971 war

that created Bangladesh out of Pakistan with India's decisive help, any talk of military parallels carries heavy weight. For ordinary people in both countries, the stakes are high—economic interdependence, shared rivers, millions crossing borders for work and family, and a history of cultural ties that transcend politics.

This episode reflects the challenges of neighborhood diplomacy in South Asia. Trust, once eroded, is hard to rebuild. Statements intended for domestic or international audiences can spiral into broader confrontations. Najam Sethi's warning, while perhaps exaggerated for effect, underscores a fear shared by many observers: that provocative words, if not tempered by restraint, could push even close neighbors toward dangerous escalation. Whether India would ever contemplate anything akin to Operation Sindoor against Bangladesh remains highly unlikely given the deep people-to-people links and mutual vulnerabilities. But the mere mention serves as a reminder of how fragile regional stability can be when historical grievances, geopolitical maneuvering, and domestic pressures collide.

As the situation evolves, much will depend on quiet diplomacy, backchannel talks and leaders on both sides choosing de-escalation over confrontation. India has made clear its desire for friendship, but it has also shown it will defend its core interests firmly. Bangladesh, navigating its post-Hasina transition, faces the task of balancing internal reforms with careful external relations. In this delicate balance lies the hope that cooler heads prevail and the subcontinent avoids yet another cycle of tension.

*'I-PAC takes care of elections in West Bengal'*

# Did not go to I-PAC premises as CM but as chairman of TMC: Mamata Banerjee to SC

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee told the Supreme Court on Thursday that she went to the I-PAC premises on January 8 after receiving information that certain unauthorised persons had entered into the office of Pratik Jain, who had been entrusted with TMC's election work.

Clarifying that Banerjee did not go to the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) premises as chief minister, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for her, told a bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Vipul Pancholi that the Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo went there as chairman of the party.

"I-PAC takes care of elections in West Bengal. A formal contract was entered into by the party with I-PAC in 2021.

"We assume ED (Enforcement Directorate) knows about it. There is a series of data kept with IPAC," Sibal said.

He continued saying that when the ED went there, they knew a lot of data of the party would be there.

"Why was the need to go there in the midst of an election? The last statement in the coal scam was recorded on February 24, 2024.

"What were they doing since then? Why so keen in the midst of elections? If you get hold of the information, how will we fight the elections?" he said.

## Air India, IndiGo cancel some overseas flights as Iranian airspace closure impacts services

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** Air India and IndiGo on Thursday cancelled some of their overseas flights as the Iranian airspace closure impacted services.

Flights of Air India to the US and Europe, and services of IndiGo to CIS countries, Europe, and Turkey have been impacted, according to officials.

The two airlines, as well as SpiceJet, issued advisories saying that the airspace closure will impact some flights.

Tata Group-owned Air India cancelled at least three flights to the US, and certain services to Europe will face some delays due to the Iranian airspace closure, an official said.

At least three flights -- two from the national capital to New York and Newark, and one from Mumbai to New York -- have been cancelled, the official told PTI.

Flights of IndiGo to CIS countries, Europe, and Turkey have also been impacted.

Another official told PTI that flights to Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Baku (Azerbaijan), and Tbilisi (Georgia) have been impacted, and some of the services have been cancelled.

These countries are part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Services to European cities and Istanbul (Turkey) have also been impacted due to the closure of the Iranian airspace.

The operational costs are expected to rise for the airlines as they will be forced to take longer routes, resulting in increased fuel consumption.

The Pakistan airspace closure is already pushing the expenses higher for Air India since the airline is taking longer routes for many of the West-bound flights.

In October last year, Air India CEO and MD Campbell Wilson said the estimated loss due to the Pakistan airspace closure is ₹ 4,000 crore. (PTI)

## Next 2 decades very important in making Viksit Bharat: President Murmu

**AMRITSAR, Jan 15:** The next two decades are very important in making 'Viksit Bharat', President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said, noting that the future of India depends on young people who possess a scientific temper, act responsibly and serve selflessly.

While addressing the convocation ceremony of the Guru Nanak Dev University here, she urged the higher education institutions to inculcate these values in their students.

She also urged young students to ensure that whatever profession they choose, their contribution should strengthen the nation and reinforce human values.

During her address, the president also touched upon the drug problem and said that the youngsters of Punjab have been affected the most in recent years.

This problem is impacting not only health but also the social, economic, and moral fabric of society, she said.

"A lasting solution to this problem is essential for a healthy society. In this context, the role of educational institutions like Guru Nanak Dev University is crucial. All stakeholders of this university should make every possible effort to guide the youth in the right direction," she said.



The TMC chairman had the right to go, he said.

"Why should ED go to a part of the party office which has all the information?" Sibal submitted.

Questioning the maintainability of ED's plea, Sibal said this matter should be heard by the Calcutta High Court. He said there is a pattern of interference by ED in the name of investigation exactly when elections are

due.

"The high court can hear it under Article 226 jurisdiction. That's the hierarchy. They are filing parallel proceedings," Sibal said.

He refuted ED's allegation of interference and obstruction by Banerjee and said, "The allegation that the CM took all devices is a lie. It is substantiated by their own panchama (search record). This is just to create prejudice."

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the state government and police officers, submitted that the chief minister is a Z+ protectee and, therefore, it was the duty of DGP Rajeev Kumar to accompany her when she entered the I-PAC premises.

The top court described the ED's allegation that Banerjee caused "obstruction" in its probe as "very serious" and agreed to examine whether a state's law-enforcing agencies can interfere with any central agency's investigation into any serious offence.

It stayed the FIR filed in West Bengal against ED officials who raided the I-PAC office and the residence of its director, Pratik Jain, on January 8 and directed the state police to protect the CCTV footage of the raids.

The ED's plea in the apex court follows events from January 8, when ED's officials faced obstructions during the probe agency's raids at the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC in Salt Lake and the residence of its chief, Pratik Jain, in Kolkata in connection with a coal smuggling case.

The probe agency has claimed that Banerjee entered the premises and took away the "key" evidence related to the probe.

The chief minister has accused the central agency of overreach, while her party, the TMC, has denied the ED's allegation of "obstructing" its probe. The state's police have registered an FIR against ED officers. (PTI)

## ED raids row: TMC cries political vendetta

*BJP accuses Mamata of obstructing probe*



**KOLKATA, Jan 15:** The TMC and the BJP on Thursday traded barbs over ED's raids at the premises of poll strategist I-PAC, with the ruling party in West Bengal alleging "political search" ahead of elections, while the saffron camp accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of repeatedly obstructing central agencies.

The war of words took place on a day when the Supreme Court described the ED's allegation that Banerjee caused "obstruction" in its probe as "very serious", and agreed to examine whether a state's law-enforcing agencies can interfere with any central agency's investigation into any serious offence.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said the party would not comment on the "technical legal aspects" of the case, leaving that to its senior counsel, but maintained that the ED action was politically motivated and timed with the approaching assembly polls in West Bengal.

"Our stand remains exactly the same. This case was registered in 2020. Five or six years have passed. What were they doing all these years? Were they asleep?" Ghosh said, questioning why the ED "suddenly woke up" just before elections.

Raising questions over the raid on the residence of I-PAC director Pratik Jain, Ghosh asked why no such action was taken earlier if the case was so serious. He pointed out that when the case was registered, election strategist Prashant Kishor was associated with the party, but his premises were never raided.

"Why Pratik Jain now? Because he is cooperating with our election campaign. He is a consultant involved in planning and structuring our election strategy. The party's campaign-related information, planning and data may be at his office or residence," Ghosh alleged.

Claiming misuse of central agencies, the TMC leader said the BJP was using the ED to "divert, access or disrupt" the party's campaign-related information.

"Our leader, the Tigress of Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, has firmly opposed this and is determined to

protect the party and its information base," he said, asserting that the people of the state "understand everything".

"This is nothing but a political search. The public can see it clearly," Ghosh added.

The BJP hit back, with Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat accusing Banerjee of making "unacceptable and unforgivable" attempts to obstruct the functioning of central investigating agencies.

Shekhawat alleged that the chief minister personally rushed to the I-PAC office in Kolkata during the ED raid, and senior police officers had arrived at the spot even before her. This, the BJP leader claimed, amounted to deliberate obstruction during the operation.

"Political opposition and ideological differences are natural in a democracy. But attempting to undermine or dilute constitutional institutions created under the authority of the Constitution is unacceptable," Shekhawat said. "When such institutions are weakened, it is not just a violation of constitutional propriety but an assault on the very soul of India."

He said Banerjee's conduct during the I-PAC raid was not an isolated incident, recalling an earlier episode when the chief minister had gone to the residence of the then Kolkata Police Commissioner, now the DGP, during a CBI raid in February 2019.

"A sitting chief minister physically intervening to obstruct a central agency's investigation against a senior police officer was perhaps the first such instance in the country's history," Shekhawat, who was in Kolkata to attend a programme, claimed.

From that episode to Sandeshkhali and several other cases, the Union minister alleged, she had repeatedly tried to create roadblocks in the work of central investigating agencies, either directly or indirectly.

Shekhawat further alleged that large-scale corruption had taken place in West Bengal in various centrally funded schemes, and claimed that the state government had consistently attempted to obstruct or influence investigations into these cases.

"These acts are not only inexcusable but wholly unacceptable," he said.

The political slugfest unfolded against the backdrop of the Supreme Court staying the FIR filed in West Bengal against ED officials who raided the I-PAC office and the residence of its director, Pratik Jain, on January 8, and directed the state police to protect the CCTV footage of the raids. (PTI)

## We are preparing for future wars; indigenisation key for self-reliance: Army chief

**JAIPUR, Jan 15:** Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday said the institution is moving forward as a future-ready force and underscored the need for indigenous equipment, calling it a "strategic necessity".

"The Indian Army is moving forward as a future-ready force, possessing well-trained soldiers, modern equipment, and multi-domain operational capabilities. Technology is being used to make the soldier even more capable," he told reporters in Jaipur after the Army Day parade.

He said that there has been a clear shift in the Indian Army's thinking in the last few years.

The Operation Sindoor established a "new normal" according to the Army chief. "It demonstrated the Indian Army's ability to respond with speed, coordination and precision. The operation reflected a mature and confident force, capable of safeguarding national interests through measured, firm and responsible action," he said.

"We are not just addressing current challenges but also preparing for future wars. New structures are



being created in this direction, which are being equipped and trained according to future needs," he said.

He said that new units like the Bhairav Battalion and Shakti Baan Regiment have been raised.

"This reflects the creation of an agile, responsive, and mission-oriented Army, aligned with future challenges," he said.

He said that today's parade showcased a beautiful blend of tradition and transformation.

"The Nepal Army Band reflected our strong ties, while the new units demonstrated the Army's emerging strength," he said.

"The Indian Army is fully prepared at all times for any kind of attack. We are fully prepared for future warfare. We demonstrated

this in the parade. Such preparations will continue to increase in the coming days," he said, adding that the Indian Army will continue to adapt itself with time and will bring about the necessary changes.

He said that with the display of 'Made in India' equipment, the parade reflected that the foundation of transformation is self-reliance.

"The Indian Army needs equipment in the future that is designed and developed in India. Indigenisation is not just a goal; today, it has become a strategic necessity," he said.

General Dwivedi said that special emphasis is being placed on resources that are useful for both military and civilian purposes, contributing to the overall development of the country.

On organising the parade in Jaipur, he said Rajasthan is a land where many heroes have made history and therefore the land was chosen for the Army Day parade.

He said the Russia-Ukraine conflict has underlined that the duration of any war cannot be predicted in advance, and future conflicts could last either a few days or stretch into years. (PTI)

## Two sports trainees found hanging in hostel, probe launched

**KOLLAM (KERALA), Jan 15:** Two teenage girl athletes, both trainees staying at a SAI hostel, were found dead in one of their rooms on Thursday in an apparent suicide pact, the police said.

The deceased were identified as Sandra A (18) of Chaliyam Kozhikode district and Vyshnavi V(15) of Muthakkal Thiruvananthapuram district.

According to police, Sandra was an athletics trainee studying in Plus Two, while Vyshnavi was a kabaddi player and a Class 10 student.

The incident came to light around 5 AM when fellow hostel inmates noticed that the duo had not reported for the morning training session.

When repeated knocks on the door went unanswered, hostel authorities broke open the door and found both girls hanging from ceiling fans in the room, police said.

Police said Vyshnavi was staying in a different room but had spent Wednesday night in Sandra's room. Both were seen by other hostel inmates before 12.30 am, police added. (PTI)

## Videos of 'indelible' ink getting wiped off go viral; SEC launches probe

*Marker ink from the Kores company has been in use since 2011*

**MUMBAI, Jan 15:** Maharashtra State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare on Thursday said viral videos showing people removing ink from their fingers after casting vote are under investigation, warning of action against attempts to spread a false narrative.

Social media was flooded with videos of common voters, politicians and mediapersons using Acetone to wipe off the 'indelible' ink applied with marker pens on their fingers after voting.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), however, rejected reports claiming that the ink marks on voters' fingers were being wiped off during the ongoing civic polls.

Acetone is a colourless, volatile and flammable organic solvent with a sweet, pungent

odour, widely used in nail polish removers, paint thinners, and cleaning agents due to its ability to dissolve many substances.

State Election Commissioner Waghmare said that the 'indelible' ink takes time to dry and shouldn't be wiped off.

Marker ink from the Kores company has been in use since 2011. The chemical composition of the ink is also correct, he said at a press conference.

"The viral videos of the marker ink being wiped off are being investigated and case will be filed against those trying to spread a fake narrative," he said.

Given the experience of marker pens, the 'indelible' ink will be used in the Zilla Parishad polls next month, he added.

Waghmare also said that only one complaint of bogus voting has been received,



and action has been taken accordingly.

On the issue of voters finding their names absent at polling booths where they voted in the Lok Sabha and assembly polls, he said the voters' list has been split as per ward.

It is the duty of the voter and the candidate to find out in advance, he maintained.

"The SEC has been made a soft target. The poll body cannot be blamed for everything. The assembly and Lok Sabha polling

booths may not be the same for the ward-wise polling," he said.

Waghmare said state minister Ganesh Naik went to the wrong polling booth in Navi Mumbai and hence his voting got delayed.

Earlier in the day, Mumbai Congress leader and Lok Sabha member Varsha Gaikwad posted a video of her party colleague using Acetone to wipe off the ink from his finger.

"BMC wiping off accountability? Since morning we have been receiving several reports of how the marker ink being used to show voting has been done, is easily being wiped off. My colleague and his wife here demonstrate how this ink can be easily wiped off with acetone or nail polish remover," she posted on X. (PTI)



Addressing the students in the gathering, she advised them to remember that education is not merely a means of livelihood. It is also a means of serving society and the nation.

She said that they owe a debt to society, which has contributed to their education. Making efforts to uplift those who have been left behind in the development journey can be one of the ways of repaying the debts.

The president said that after completing

formal education, students will embark on their journeys in different directions.

Some will serve in the government or private sector, others will pursue higher education or research, while many will establish their own ventures or build their careers in teaching, she said.

While each field requires different types of qualifications and skills, some qualities are equally essential and helpful for progress in every field, she added.

"These are - a continuous desire and in-

clination to learn; firm adherence to moral values, integrity, and honesty, even in adverse and difficult circumstances; the courage to embrace change; the determination to learn from failures and move forward; a spirit of teamwork and collaboration; disciplined use of time and resources; and using knowledge and abilities not for individual gain, but for the greater good of society and the nation," she said.

The president stated that these qualities will not only make them a good professional but also a responsible citizen.

She said that in the last decade, India has made remarkable progress in the fields of technology development and entrepreneurship culture.

"Today, numerous entrepreneurial opportunities from Agriculture to AI and from defence to space are available to young people. Our higher education institutions can further accelerate this progress by promoting research, strengthening industry-academia collaboration, and encouraging socially relevant innovations," she said.

The president was happy to note that Guru Nanak Dev University was established during the 500th birth anniversary

of Guru Nanak Dev and his teachings and values are the guiding principles of the university.

She also said that Guru Nanak Dev taught us that women should be given equal rights in society.

During her address, the President was happy to note that Guru Nanak Dev University is striving for women's empowerment in accordance with the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, which is evident in the dominance of female students among those receiving degrees and medals at the convocation ceremony.

She stated that it is in the interest of society and the nation that women have opportunities to move forward with full confidence, and everyone should strive for this.

She further said that Guru Nanak Dev's teachings are our shared heritage, and his thoughts and ideals pave the way for the welfare of all humanity.

By incorporating his ideals into our lives, we can find solutions to many of the problems plaguing society, she said.

Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria was also among others present on the occasion. (PTI)

## Police collect CCTV footage of ED office over 'assault' complaint

**RANCHI, Jan 15:** team of the Ranchi Police collected CCTV footage of the zonal office of the Enforcement Directorate here on Thursday, after a former Jharkhand government employee alleged assault by ED officials during interrogation, sources said.

Police personnel turned up at the ED office in the morning, after the former drinking water and sanitation department employee filed a police complaint on January 12, alleging that he was "thrashed" by ED officials during interrogation into an alleged water supply scam.

The team comprised a DSP-rank officer and the airport police station in-charge, the sources said.

The Ranchi Police, however, has not yet issued any official statement on it.

The development comes close on the heels of the confrontation between the West Bengal Police and ED officials, after the probe agency conducted searches at the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC and the residence of its chief Pratik Jain, amid allegations of forced entry and theft of documents.

On the condition of anonymity, an officer of Ranchi Police said they were scrutinising CCTV footage of the ED office here in view of the assault allegations.

CISF personnel have been deployed near the ED office to boost security, the sources said.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in Jharkhand Assembly, Babul Marandi, alleged that under the guise of police action at the central probe agency's office, attempts could be made to tamper with and destroy crucial evidence pertaining to cases involving Chief Minister Hemant Soren. (PTI)

Mein acknowledges growing demand for boarding facilities in the region

## Arunachal Deputy CM Mein stresses digitisation, restoration of rare manuscripts

ITANAGAR, Jan 15: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Thursday emphasised the importance of preserving linguistic and cultural heritage while reiterating the state government's commitment to education and community development.

Addressing the gathering after inaugurating a 60-bed hostel at Pali Vidyapeeth in Chongkham in Namsai district, Mein stressed the need to strengthen the teaching of the Pali language and local scripts, particularly the Tai Khamti script, and encouraged the institution to include local language education as part of its academic curriculum.

He also stressed the need to work towards digitisation and restoration of rare manuscripts housed in the institution's museum, recognising their historical and cultural value.

Experts will be engaged to document, digitise, and restore the manuscripts to preserve them for future generations, he added.

Reiterating the state government's commitment to education, heritage conservation, and



community development, Mein urged all stakeholders, including the local administration and community leaders, to extend continued support to Pali Vidyapeeth.

He praised the institution for promoting education, cultural harmony, and inclusive learning.

Congratulating the Pali Vidyapeeth Society

and the construction agency for the timely completion of the hostel, Mein acknowledged the growing demand for boarding facilities in the region and assured that the government would explore further expansion of hostel infrastructure.

Highlighting the historical journey of Pali Vidyapeeth, he recalled the contributions of earlier leaders and monks who helped establish the institution and secure infrastructure support through central and state assistance.

He reaffirmed the government's continued support through annual grants-in-aid and infrastructure funding.

He informed that in previous years, the state government had sanctioned funds for internal roads, drainage systems, guest house facilities, and academic support, and assured that assistance would continue in line with institutional needs. Also present were Namsai deputy commissioner CR Khampa, ADC K Tikhak, government officials, teachers, students, and others. (PTI)

## NSF calls for fair recruitment in police force

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 15: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Thursday said the ongoing entire recruitment process in the police department must be conducted with the highest standards of transparency, fairness and accountability.

It stressed that meritocracy must be strictly upheld at every stage of selection, ensuring that only deserving and qualified candidates are selected without any form of favouritism, nepotism or undue influence.

The NSF also urged the Nagaland home department and all agencies concerned to ensure that the recruitment process is completed in a time-bound manner.

In a release, the federation said it will continue to closely observe the process in the interest of justice, fairness and transparency.

It hoped that the state government will set a benchmark through this recruitment drive by upholding integrity and efficiency, thereby inspiring confidence among the people of the state.

Appreciating the home department for initiating and carrying forward the ongoing police recruitment drive across the state, the federation acknowledged the efforts of the state government in addressing long-standing vacancies in the police force and for creating employment opportunities for deserving Naga youth.

The NSF said a strong, professional and well-equipped police force is vital for ensuring public confidence in the institutions of governance.

"The recent recruitment process is a significant step towards strengthening the policing system in the state," it added.

## Tipra Motha delegation meets Tripura CM, demands timely tribal council polls

AGARTALA, Jan 15: A delegation of the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura, met Chief Minister Manik Saha and demanded timely election to the autonomous district council, a party leader said on Thursday.

The present five-year tenure of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) expires on April 18.

"A five-member delegation of our party, headed by TTAADC executive member Rabindra Debbarma, met Saha at his residence on Wednesday and discussed several important issues," TMP spokesperson C K Jamatia said at a press conference.

He said the delegation urged the CM to ensure that the TTAADC elections are held before its tenure expires.



Debbarma said the delegation also submitted a memorandum to the CM to press for the adoption of the Roman script for Kokborok language, which he said was crucial for the overall development of the

mother tongue of most tribal communities in the state.

"The CM appears to have softened his stand on the Roman script demand and we hope that Saha will take a realistic step on the issue," he

said.

Debbarma said the CM has exhorted the delegation to meet the chairpersons of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) in Delhi to introduce Roman script for Kokborok language.

"After consultation with party founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, a party delegation will shortly visit Delhi to meet the heads of CBSE and ICSE for adoption of Roman script for Kokborok language," he said.

The TTAADC has already introduced Roman script for Kokborok in schools under its jurisdiction, while students in state-run educational institutions are allowed to write the subject in both Bengali and Roman scripts, he added. (PTI)

## Over 150 NCC cadets to assist Arunachal authorities in disaster response

ITANAGAR, Jan 15: Arunachal Pradesh will soon have a strengthened disaster response support system, with 152 trained NCC cadets ready to assist authorities during emergencies, officials said.

The cadets recently completed their training at an annual camp at Dera Natung Government College here.

The camp was organised with a focus on disaster preparedness and emergency response, an official statement said.

The cadets received theoretical and practical training on disaster preparedness, basic search and rescue operations, first aid, casualty evacuation, and coordination with civil authorities, it said.

Special emphasis was laid on handling region-specific disasters such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and cloudbursts, the statement said.

"The trained cadets are now prepared to assist civil authorities and local communities during emergencies," it added. (PTI)

## 5 militants arrested in Imphal valley districts

IMPHAL, Jan 15: Five militants were arrested in Manipur's Imphal valley districts, police said on Thursday.

Three members of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon) were arrested from Mantripukhri Lamlongei Maning Leikai in Imphal East district, they said.

These KCP (N) members were accused of extorting local businesses.

A cadre of the proscribed Kangleipak Yawol Kanna Lup was arrested from Sekmai Khunou in Imphal West district.

Shagolsem Lokeshor Singh (35), the arrested person, was staying at a relief camp in Mantop Yumtham.

A member of KYKL (SOREPA) was arrested from the Uripok Achom Leikai area of the district on Wednesday. He was identified as Shamulailatpam Arbin Sharma (19), police said. (PTI)

## Nagami Mithun gets ICAR recognition

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 15: In a significant milestone and proud moment for Nagaland, the Nagami Mithun breed of the state has been officially registered by the Breed Registration Committee of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

The breed registration certificate for Nagami Mithun was presented by Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to Dr Girish Patil S, director, ICAR-National Research Centre on Mithun (NRCM), Nagaland, Dr Harshit Kumar, Scientist and other team of scientists of the institute during the animal breed registration certificate & breed conservation award distribution ceremony in New Delhi on Wednesday, an ICAR-National Research Centre on Mithun re-

lease said on Thursday.

The Nagami Mithun breed registration was applied by a multidisciplinary team comprising Dr Harshit Kumar, Dr Girish Patil S, Dr Kobu Khate, Dr SS Hanah, Dr Kathiravan Periasamy, Dr K Vupru, Dr Abhijit Mitra, Dr MH Khan (ICAR-NRC on Mithun, Nagaland), Dr SS Mukharjee and Dr A Mukherjee (ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal).

The breed has been registered with the accession number INDIA\_MITHUN\_1400\_NAGAMI\_08001.

Nagami Mithun is predominantly distributed across Kohima, Peren, Chumoukedima, Zunheboto, Phek, Tuensang, Kiphire, Noklak, Shamtong, Mon, Wokha, Tseminyu and Longleng districts of Nagaland. It is

characterised by a strong and well-built muscular body, predominantly black coat colour with white stockings, though white-patched and piebald patterns are also observed.

Nagami Mithun is mainly reared for meat production and ceremonial purposes.

ICAR-National Research Centre on Mithun, Nagaland, in an effort to conserve this magnificent breed, has established two conservation units in Khonoma and Thevopisumi in Nagaland. Further, support is being provided to Mithun farmers to establish semi-intensive Mithun units across the state.

Capacity building programmes are also being organised to train Mithun farmers on scientific Mithun production, the release added.

## Rio delves into Nagaland's challenges, calls for unity

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 15: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio delved into the multifaceted challenges currently facing the Naga society, including the Naga political issue.

Addressing the 70th conference of the Ao Kaketshir Mungdang (AKM) as the special guest at Chungtia village in Mokochung district on Wednesday evening, Rio pointed out the ongoing quest for a permanent solution to social fragmentation, the need to bridge divides within the community, governance and resources, issues surrounding the inner line permit (ILP), untapped mineral resources, and the protection of Article 371A.

He urged for unity, mutual respect, and collective teamwork among all Naga tribes to overcome these hurdles.

On the state's Initiatives and the path forward, Rio briefed the gathering on proactive steps taken by the state government, such as the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN) and the landmark consultative meeting held on September 12, 2024, which brought stakeholders together regarding the Naga political issue.

Emphasising a shift away from the "blame culture", he called for resolving disputes through sincere dialogue and discussion.

## Efforts on to transform Mizoram into major rubber producing state: Lalduhoma

AIZAWL, Jan 15: Mizoram is making concerted efforts to emerge as a major rubber-producing state, Chief Minister Lalduhoma said on Thursday.

Addressing a training programme on scientific rubber cultivation, harvesting techniques, post-harvest handling and pest management here, he said the state government launched the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission in 2024.

The CM said the mission was formulated after consultations with the Rubber Board of India and a study of the Tripura Rubber Mission to ensure a systematic and well-planned approach.

Lalduhoma claimed that progress under the mission had surpassed initial expectations due to the enthusiastic response from farmers willing to take up rubber cultivation.

He said that despite attaining Union Territory status over five decades ago, Mizoram lacked a crop that could distinctly establish its identity. However, after the



Zoram People's Movement government assumed office and implemented focused policies, the state was declared the "Ginger Capital of India" by NITI Aayog, he added.

Lalduhoma said that passion fruit, locally known as 'Sapthei', was another promising crop with strong potential.

Rubber, he said, was among the crops through which Mizoram could build a strong agricultural identity.

According to officials, Mizoram

has around 50,000 hectares of land suitable for rubber cultivation. The state government has prioritised rubber farming due to its environmental and economic benefits, including afforestation, water conservation, timber value and favourable market prospects.

Officials said the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission was launched on October 18, 2024, with implementation by the Land Resources, Soil and Water Conservation Department beginning in early 2025.

## VB-G RAM G scheme aligns with India's Viksit Bharat goals: Rijiju

ITANAGAR, Jan 15: Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday said the VB-G RAM G scheme aligns with the country's Viksit Bharat 2047 goals for a developed India.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Sarok festival at Bana in Arunachal Pradesh's Bichom district, Rijiju said over the past decade, India has significantly improved its infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water and mobile connectivity, and ensured delivery of basic facilities like water, rice and cooking gas to every village.

"During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the government decided to undertake special efforts to enhance people's lives under PM Narendra Modi's leadership. Focusing on Viksit Gaon for Viksit Bharat, the government came up with the VB-G RAM G bill," Rijiju, the Union Minister for Parliamentary and Minority Affairs, said.

He added that under the scheme, "we have extended job guarantee from 100 days under MGNREGA to 125 days." Rijiju alleged that during the Congress era, MGNREGA was plagued by corruption, with funds often siphoned off through fake bills and only minor works executed.

"Panchayat members distributed meagre funds, ran bulldozers, dug pits, inflated bills and pocketed money. Villages cannot develop this way," he alleged.

The minister said that unlike MGNREGA, VB-G RAM G incorporates strict accountability measures. Projects, such as village water tanks, will be biometrically verified, geo-tagged, satellite-mapped and digitally accounted, ensuring schemes reach the ground. (PTI)

## Arunachal CM, Dy CM pay tribute to soldiers on Army Day

ITANAGAR, Jan 15: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday paid tributes to soldiers on the occasion of Army Day, lauding their unwavering dedication and supreme sacrifice in safeguarding the nation.

Army Day is observed on January 15 to mark Field Marshal K M Cariappa taking over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, replacing his British predecessor General Sir FRR Bucher in 1949. "In celebrating Indian Army Day, we salute the unmatched valour, unwavering dedication and supreme sacrifice of our brave soldiers who stand as the shield of the nation," Khandu said in a post on X. (PTI)

GOVT. OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT  
OF POLICE :: UDALGURI  
:: DISTRICT :: UDALGURI ASSAM ::

The above is photograph of Rashmita Deka (30Yrs), W/O- Pranab Jyoti Sarma, Vill-Niz. Jhaprabari, PS-Harisinga, Dist- Udalguri who has been missing since 02/01/2026 from her house.

This refers to Harisinga PS GDE No-06, Dtd. 03/01/2026 and this office Man Missing Register Entry No. 02/01/2026

**Descriptive Roll of the Missing Person:**

1. Complexion	- Fair
2. Age	- 30 Yrs
3. Height	- 5.1 Feet
4. L/known	- Assamese
5. Wearing	- Not noted

All efforts may be made to trace out / recover the above noted missing person at the earliest and result thereof may be intimated to this office at the following helpline numbers for further necessary action: 6026901138 (Cell phone).

Sd/-  
Addl. Superintendent of Police (Crime)  
Udalguri, Assam.

DIPR /D/HLT/273/16-Jan-26

GOVT. OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT  
OF POLICE :: UDALGURI  
:: DISTRICT :: UDALGURI ASSAM ::

The above is photograph of Tina Deka (24Yrs), W/O- Dhurba Deka, Vill-Adola, PS-Harisinga, Dist- Udalguri who has been missing since 01/01/2026 from her house.

This refers to Harisinga PS GDE No-12, Dtd. 01/01/2026 and this office Man Missing Register Entry No. 01/01/2026

**Descriptive Roll of the Missing Person:**

1. Complexion	- Fair
2. Age	- 24 Yrs
3. Height	- 4.1 Feet
4. L/known	- Assamese
5. Wearing	- Not noted

All efforts may be made to trace out / recover the above noted missing person at the earliest and result thereof may be intimated to this office at the following helpline numbers for further necessary action: 6026901138 (Cell phone).

Sd/-  
Addl. Superintendent of Police (Crime)  
Udalguri, Assam.

DIPR /D/HLT/274/16-Jan-26

GOVT. OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT  
OF POLICE :: UDALGURI  
:: DISTRICT :: UDALGURI ASSAM ::

The above is photograph of Rangjali Boro (26Yrs), W/O- Bipul Boro, Vill-Niz. Gopipur, PS-Paneri, Dist- Udalguri who has been missing since 26/12/2025 from Kochubil.

This refers to Harisinga PS GDE No-13, Dtd. 05/01/2026 and this office Man Missing Register Entry No. 03/01/2026

**Descriptive Roll of the Missing Person:**

1. Complexion	- Swarthy
2. Age	- 26 Yrs
3. Height	- 5.4 Feet
4. L/known	- Assamese & Bodo
5. Wearing	- Dokhana

All efforts may be made to trace out / recover the above noted missing person at the earliest and result thereof may be intimated to this office at the following helpline numbers for further necessary action: 6026901138 (Cell phone).

Sd/-  
Addl. Superintendent of Police (Crime)  
Udalguri, Assam.

DIPR /D/HLT/275/16-Jan-26

## AIFF says truncated ISL gets AFC recognition

ISL, Super Cup champions to get indirect slots



**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Thursday said the sport's continental body AFC has accorded recognition to the truncated 2025-26 Indian Super League with winners of the country's top two divisions getting indirect slots to Asian Champions League 2 through zonal qualifiers.

Due to a delayed start to the season, the clubs will not be able to play the mandatory 24 matches in the season -- including top division league and domestic cup -- to be eligible to feature in the AFC Champions League 2.

Most clubs are expected to play a total of sixteen (16) matches during the season, including a minimum of three (3) games in the AIFF Super Cup and 13 in ISL.

"With the exception of any additional slot(s) allocated to a Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.4 and 3.5, Member Associations that fail to fulfil the Member Association Eligibility Criteria shall, subject to Article 4.4, be eligible to be allocated only indirect slots for the relevant AFC Club Competition," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) wrote in a letter to the AIFF dated January 15.

"In such cases, the number of direct slots for the relevant Member Association(s) in the relevant AFC Club Competition shall be wholly converted into indirect slots (e.g. 2+1 becomes 0+3)," Shin Man Gil, the AFC's deputy general secretary, competitions and football, said in the letter.

The 2025-26 season of the ISL is scheduled to begin on February 14, with all 14 teams confirming their participation on Tuesday. Ninety-one matches will be played in the curtailed season, with each team playing single-leg matches (13) against each other.

"In light of the foregoing, kindly be informed that, should the 2025/26 ISL s season be organised as proposed in your letter, Article 4.3 of the Entry Regulations shall apply for the purposes of entry into the rele-

vant AFC club competitions," the AFC letter stated.

Earlier, the ISL clubs had urged the AIFF to request the AFC for a one-time relaxation in the minimum requirement of 24 matches so that they can play in the ACL 2.

Heading to the club's proposal, AIFF's deputy secretary general M. Satyanarayan wrote to the AFC, seeking a one-time exemption for this season.

"In light of the exceptional circumstances impacting Indian football this season, we respectfully request that your esteemed office grant the AIFF and the clubs participating in the ISL, a one-time exemption from the minimum requirements set forth in the AFC Regulations."

"Specifically, we request that a minimum of sixteen (16) matches be deemed sufficient for clubs participating in the ISL to qualify for direct entry into club competitions organized by the AFC, and the ISL season scheduled to take place between 14 February 2026 and [...] along with the Super Cup held between 25 October 2025 and 7 December 2025, be considered to be sufficient for the purposes of maintaining direct entry slots in the relevant club competitions organized by AFC.

"Such an exemption would significantly support the AIFF's efforts to restart the league, serve as an important encouragement to the clubs during this challenging period for all stakeholders in Indian football," Satyanarayan added.

Last Saturday, the AIFF had asked the clubs to send the details of the venues where they plan to play their home games to start working on the fixture and finalise broadcast and commercial rights partners.

The ISL 2025-26 season has been in a limbo since the AIFF's commercial partner FSDL, owned by the Reliance Group, put it on hold last July due to uncertainty over the Master Rights Agreement (MRA) between the two parties.

The MRA ended on December 8, 2025 as negotiations fell through. (PTI)

## Indira Gandhi Stadium remains best option at hand

# India Open chaos chance for organisers to fix things before World C'ships

**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** It was intended to be a dress rehearsal for the BWF World Championships in August and the ongoing India Open Super 750 badminton tournament has managed to expose all possible operational gaps that need to be plugged before the marquee competition.

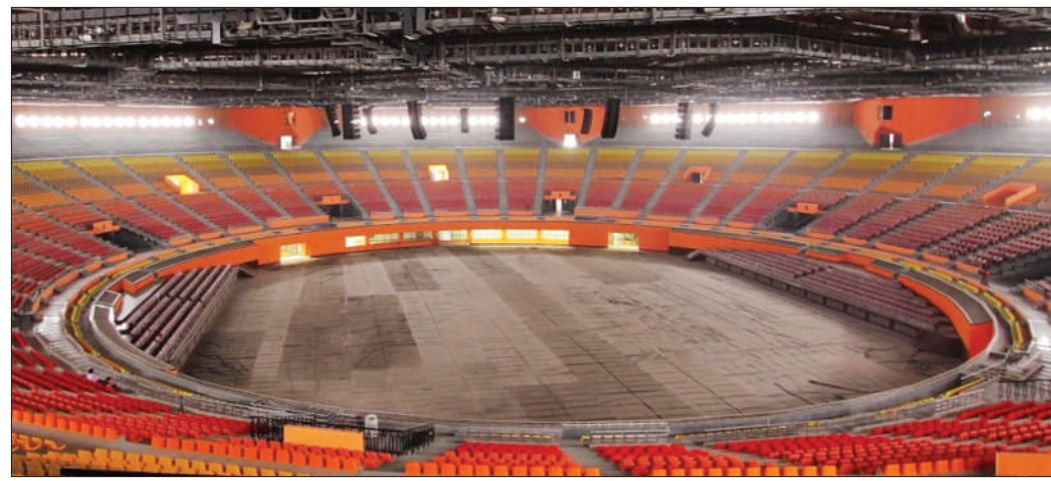
While concerns over playing conditions, air quality and extreme cold in the national capital have dominated early discussion, a range of venue-related issues including on-court lighting, have also come into focus at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, which is hosting the event for the first time.

"We were aware of the challenges and we will make it better during the World Championships. There are no major issues. Even the monkey incident (seen in the spectators' gallery on Wednesday), we take it as a lesson. We will be better prepared and put extra guards. The BWF also has confidence in us," Badminton Association of India (BAI) secretary general Sanjay Mishra told PTI.

Among the more visible shortcomings has been the positioning of the commentary tribune, located at a considerable height, making it difficult for commentators to closely track on-court action.

"We would have liked to be a little closer to the action. Right now, we are watching more on the screen while commenting. It is also quite dark, making it difficult to see the action properly. Even basic facilities are an issue as the toilet is too far and we have to go all the way down to access it," said a commentator on conditions of anonymity.

Lighting has also drawn scrutiny. French shuttler Christo Popov, after his first-round win over Wang Tzu-wei, said the lighting was adequate but added that overall playing conditions could improve. During PV Sindhu's match, the lights briefly dimmed during rallies, an incident officials later attributed to



human error.

"If you look closely, the lighting is patchy and uneven. Even basic power and technical systems were not fully ready when we arrived. For an event of this level, everything needs to be in place at least a day in advance, not just before the first match," said a venue technician. Access within the stadium complex has emerged as another challenge.

The intersection near the mixed zone, accessed by players, officials, technical staff, broadcasters and journalists, has seen heavy overlap, leading to congestion.

Several players were seen jogging through the mixed zone as part of warm-up routines, while others appeared to struggle to locate basic facilities such as toilets.

Officials said the issues were being identified and reviewed on a daily basis. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has been conducting regular venue inspections, assessing functional areas including the field of play, warm-up courts and media zones as part of an ongoing review process.

"We acknowledge the concerns raised by several players and teams regarding venue conditions at the YONEX-SUNRISE India Open 2026, held at the Indira Gandhi

Sports Complex in New Delhi," the BWF said in a statement.

"The Indira Gandhi Sports Complex represents a significant upgrade from the KD Jadhav Stadium, and a comprehensive review of all tournament facilities and operational processes is currently underway."

"The findings from this review will guide further improvements as we prepare to host the BWF World Championships 2026 at the same venue in August," it added.

Both BWF and BAI have taken immediate steps to address weather-related concerns during the tournament, with heaters installed in warm-up and practice areas, the mixed zone and food courts amid the cold conditions.

The grander showpiece in August, however, will pose a different challenge, with high temperatures and humidity expected during the summer months. While pollution levels are typically lower during that period, sustained heat and humidity could place additional demands on athletes, officials and operational systems.

"There are no issues with accommodation, transportation or food. Pollution is not something we control. There won't be cold and pollution issues during August, and to

address the heat we have air-conditioning systems in place, so we will have no issues," Mishra said.

India will host the World Championships for the first time since 2009, with the event seen as a key test of the country's ability to deliver large-scale international tournaments as it eyes the 2036 Olympics.

"Any international event, not only badminton, is not just about the federation. It is a matter of pride for the entire country. It is a big event for us and we will pull it off with the help of the state and central governments," Mishra said.

**IG Stadium is best option**  
Asked if the BAI had considered moving the India Open out of the capital, Mishra said suitable alternatives were limited.

"We do not have too many stadiums that meet BWF norms. It is not just about four courts. There are seating capacity requirements and the need for rooms and halls. IG is the best option," he said.

"We had thought of Kochi, but it would have been too hot and the venue lacks seating. Balewadi in Pune has a few issues. The National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati is good but hotel room requirements cannot be fulfilled," he explained. (PTI)

## U-19 World Cup: Henil grabs 5/16 as India skittle out USA for 107

**BULAWAYO (ZIMBABWE), Jan 15:** Henil Patel led a ruthless bowling effort with a five-wicket haul as India bowled out USA for a meagre 107 in 35.2 overs in their ICC Under-19 World Cup opener, here on Thursday.

The right-arm seamer finished with impressive figures of 5/16 from seven overs with one maiden, ripping through the USA middle order after India opted to bowl under overcast conditions.

Henil struck in his very first over, inducing an edge from Arinder Gill (1) to Vihaan Malhotra in the slips, before the tall tear-away pacer Deepesh Devdaran joined in by having Sahil Garg (16) caught by Henil at third man to reduce USA to 29/2 in nine overs.

Henil then took control of the innings with a devastating double blow, removing captain Utkarsh Srivastava for a five-ball duck before dismissing wicketkeeper Arjun Mahesh (16) in the same over as USA slipped to 35/4.

He was back again soon, drawing a loose drive from Mahesh that flew to third man for his third wicket, and USA never recovered from the collapse.

Leg-spinner Khilan Patel struck immediately on his introduction, trapping Amogh Arepally (3) as USA slid to 39/5 in the 16th over.

Nitish Sudini offered some resistance with a counter-attacking 36 off 52 balls, striking four boundaries and adding 30 runs with Adnit Jhamb (18) for the sixth wicket to take USA past 50.

However, Henil returned to mop up the tail, dismissing Sabirish Prasad (7) and Rishabh Shimpi (0) to complete his five-for as USA were bundled out in 35.2 overs.

India are in Group B alongside Bangladesh and New Zealand.

### Brief Scores

**USA 107;** 35.2 overs (Nitish Sudini 36; Henil Patel 5/16) vs India. (PTI)

## Block-level cluster sports meet held at Loringtheipi

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 15:** The Block Level Cluster Sports Meet was successfully organised recently at the Udhorjan Ramsing Tisso Village Ground in Loringtheipi under the Langsompri Block, drawing wide participation from local youth.

The two-day event was conducted by MY Bharat Kendra, Diphu-Karbi Anglong, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, in collaboration with the Udhorlangso Youth Club.

A range of team and individual events were held to promote fitness and community bonding.

Team competitions included men's volleyball and women's kabaddi, while individual athletic events featured long jump and 100-metre races for both men and women. Winners in all categories were felicitated with cash prizes, trophies, medals and certificates in recognition of their performance and dedication.

The meet was formally flagged off by Jiten Bey, adviser of the Udhorlangso Youth Club and state vice-president of BJYM Assam Pradesh, who highlighted the importance of encouraging sportsmanship and athletic development at the grassroots level.

Among those present were advisers Uttam Rongphar, Kamsing Timung, Rupsing Singnar, Burasing Tisso and Junaki Englengpi, along with youth club representatives Mirjuly Rongpharpi, vice-president, and Sone Tisso, general secretary.

The event attracted a large number of spectators and local supporters.

Organisers thanked the participants, volunteers and residents of Loringtheipi for their cooperation, saying the meet played a significant role in promoting health, unity and sporting talent in the Karbi Anglong region.

## Neeraj off to Potchefstroom for pre-season training after Ministry's MOC approves assistance



**NEW DELHI, Jan 15:** Two-time Olympic medal-winning Indian javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra has begun his pre-season training in his preferred South African base of Potchefstroom after the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) approved a 32-day camp for him under new coach Jai Chaudhary.

Chopra parted ways with Czech legend Jan Zelezny as his coach last week, deciding to partner with Chaudhary, who was his formative coach and trains javelin throwers in Panipat, which is the superstar's home town.

The 28-year-old will stay in Potchefstroom, a major training base for javelin throwers from across the world, till February 5 and the total sanctioned assistance for him stands at ₹ 11.80 lakh, a source in the Sports Authority of India (SAI) told PTI.

Mission Olympic Cell, which decides on the financial and logistical assistance to elite athletes in the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), met here on Wednesday. Chopra's support team at the training camp also includes his long-time physiotherapist Ishaan Marwaha.

"The focused training block is aimed at sharpening his physical conditioning, strength, and technical consistency ahead of marquee events lined up this year, including the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games," the source said.

"According to the approved proposal, the financial assistance will cover his training camp expenses, local logistics, gym and training ground access, airport transfers, and out-of-pocket allowances," he added.

The affable Haryana-man was hampered by an adductor muscle niggle last year even though he managed to breach the long-awaited 90m mark in the Doha Diamond League.

But a major disappointment for him was the eighth-place finish at the Tokyo World Championships in September last after which he decided to take a break to address his fitness issues.

He was the defending champion in Tokyo but was in clear discomfort throughout the competition. Chopra is expected to begin his 2026 season at the Doha Diamond League in May.

### Other proposals

A total of ₹ 1.40 crore was approved for proposals from athletes cutting across disciplines in the 167th meeting of the MOC.

"This includes Sachin Yadav's request for specialised javelin throw equipment at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium in Delhi," the source said. Yadav had hit the headlines with a fourth place finish at the World Championships last year, outperforming Chopra in his very first outing at the showpiece.

The MOC is next expected to meet in mid-February and according to well-placed sources, a rigorous review of the existing list of core and developmental group athletes would be undertaken at this meet.

"The meeting on Wednesday was held online and though a review was to be done in this one itself but we decided that a review of athletes should be done in an in-person meeting. So, that's why the February meeting would be significant," the source said.

The number of core group athletes currently stands at 118, comprising 57 able-bodied and 61 para-athletes. (PTI)

## Preparing on dusty wickets in Canterbury helped me to find game plans for sub-continent: Mitchell

**RAJKOT, Jan 15:** Batting mainstay Daryl Mitchell said preparing at New Zealand Cricket's specially designed pitch marquee facility at Lincoln helped him master the spin-friendly tracks in the sub-continent.

Trailing by only one rating point to super star batter Virat Kohli in the ICC rankings for ODI batters, Mitchell has been in a red-hot form against India in their backyard, having notched up scores of 130, 134, 84 and 131 not out in the last four outings.

The 34-year-old Mitchell produced a splendid 117-ball 131 not out here on Wednesday to defy India, powering New Zealand's se-

ries-levelling seven-wicket win in the second ODI.

"There's been plenty, plenty mornings in the marquee down in the South Island in Lincoln on some prepared dusty wickets to try and find ways to come up with game plans in this part of the world," Mitchell told reporters.

"That's the stuff that a lot of people don't see...the work that you put in, away from the shiny lights and the TV, but it's always nice I guess when you get the rewards from that."

"I just love playing for my country, I love travelling the world and playing international cricket and I am very lucky to do that across all

three formats," Mitchell added.

The pitch marquee facility at Lincoln helped New Zealand players to recreate specific conditions ahead of any given tour, and allow them to train even during the winters.

The 34-year-old has, in particular, enjoyed a lot of success in the Asian subcontinent, scoring 1,457 ODI runs at 56.03 with five centuries and six fifties.

From 15 matches in India, he has garnered 801 runs at 66.75 with three tons and as many fifties.

In Pakistan, he has 576 runs in 12 matches at 48 with two centuries and two fifties, whereas he's yet to play ODIs in Sri Lanka. (PTI)

## BPL hit by Bangladesh players' boycott; BCB show-causes its director for offensive remark

**DHAKA, Jan 15:** Bangladesh's cricketers boycotted their domestic T20 league match here on Thursday, demanding the resignation of BCB director M Najmul Islam, whose derogatory comments against them amid an ongoing standoff with India prompted the Board to issue a show-cause notice to him. Toss was delayed in Thursday's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) game between Naokhali Express and Chattogram Royals here after neither of the two teams showed up at the venue.

Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) President Mohammad Mithun, while addressing a press conference here, said the players will remain firm in their call to boycott BPL even though the BCB has assured them of action against Najmul.

The furore started after Najmul, while reiterating Bangladesh's refusal to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup on account of "security worries", rejected concerns surrounding players' remuneration should the country withdraw.

He stated that the players would not be compensated as they have not justified the support so far, having failed to win a single ICC event. The statement caused an outrage with CWAB calling for his immediate ouster from BCB. (PTI)

## Roger Federer revisits the Happy Slam and holds court on contemporary tennis



**MELBOURNE, Jan 15:** On his much belated farewell tour to the tournament he first described as the "Happy Slam," Roger Federer has held court on contemporary tennis.

The 20-time major winner was as diplomatic as ever, of course. He said he wouldn't

be the one to remind Carlos Alcaraz about how hard it is to complete a career Grand Slam when you've already got three of the four major titles.

He also wouldn't enter discussion on speculation that Serena Williams might be considering a comeback — a rumor the 23-time major winner has denied.

Federer won five U.S. Open titles, five at Wimbledon and three in Australia before he finally completed his career Grand Slam in 2009 with a victory at Roland Garros, where Rafael Nadal was dominant on the clay.

Top-ranked Alcaraz won the back-to-back Wimbledon titles in 2023 and 24, and two French titles in a row in 2024 and last year, and won the U.S. Open in 2022 and last year. He's never gone past the quarterfinals in Australia, where archrival Jannik Sinner has won the past two titles.

"He knows about it. It's like Rory (McIlroy) going to the Masters, you know, those things are tough," Federer said Thursday, shortly after the draw was held for the first

major of the year. "His momentum (now) shifts toward the first round and then it's point for point mentality. That's what it is."

"But it's true, at his young age, to be able to complete the career Grand Slam already now, I mean, would be crazy. ... I hope he does because for the game, that would be an unbelievable special moment."

Of course, there's 127 other men in the draw with other ideas, Federer noted, including his own long-time rival and 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

The Alcaraz-Sinner has emerged in the last two years, with the pair splitting the eight majors between them.

"The rivalry between Alcaraz and Sinner, I think, is a great one. They play incredible tennis," Federer said. "That French Open final was unreal. It just ended up in this most crazy fashion, maybe one of the greatest games we've ever had in our sport."

Federer is back visiting the Australian Open for the first time since his semifinal loss in 2020 and his later retirement in 2022,

and he'll play a leading role in the tournament's first gala opening ceremony to be staged on Saturday night.

He was asked about the prospects of Serena Williams returning to the tour.

Williams last month issued a social media post saying she's "NOT coming back" after a spokesman for the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) said the 23-time Grand Slam champion had registered with the sport's drug-testing body.

That is the first step that would be required by a player seeking to come out of retirement.

"I mean, I heard that she entered the doping program, and then I heard that she said she's not coming back," Federer said. "I mean, obviously for the game it would be incredible ... Serena is such a legend to come back."

"If she decides not to do it, or just maybe give herself an option — it's great to have options in life, in my opinion. Let's see what she does and wait for an announcement, or not." (AP)