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'BJP, allies have high winning chances in 103 Assembly seats out of 126' Too early to make poll projections, says CM

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday claimed that the ruling BJP and its allies have high winning chances in 103 of the 126 Assembly seats, ahead of state elections likely in March-April.

He, however, maintained it was too early to make poll projections as both ruling and Opposition parties were yet to finalise alliances and seat-sharing arrangements.

"The BJP has winning chances in 103 seats this time. Earlier, it was in 90. After delimitation, the number has increased by 13-15," Sarma told reporters on sidelines of a programme at Dimoria in Kamrup Metropolitan district.

The delimitation exercise was completed in 2023 and both Lok Sabha and Assembly constituency boundaries were redrawn without affecting the total number of seats.

Sarma said while BJP and its allies' prospects are high in 103



seats, in about 22 seats they expect to put up a symbolic fight but not necessarily win.

"Whether we win 100 per cent of the seats or are confined to 90 or 80 per cent, it will be for the public

to decide," he added.

The chief minister also took a swipe at state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, maintaining that the opposition leader was thinking about him all the time.

"Gogoi is from the elite class, from the 'raja ghar' (king's family). That he is giving me so much importance makes me happy. I never thought I would be so important. He is constantly thinking about me," Sarma said in a sarcastic tone.

Asked about a poll result projection released on Saturday which predicts a hat-trick for the NDA, Sarma said, "This is not the time for predictions as even alliances of the NDA or the UPA are not clear. Which party will contest in how many seats is not clear."

He maintained that though the projection has shown BJP with good prospects, the picture will be clearer by February.

An NGO, Peoples Pulse Research Organisation, in the first poll projection for the 2026 Assembly polls, had predicted that BJP will win 69-74 seats, far ahead of Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Game over for illegal encroachers in state: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Over 1,700 acres of reserve forest land in Assam's Hojai district have been cleared of encroachments, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. He asserted that no encroachment will be tolerated.

"Game over for illegal encroachment at Jamuna-Moudanga RF. Mission completed as 5,250 bighas reclaimed through peaceful, lawful & decisive action," Sarma said in a post on X on Saturday, referring to an eviction drive on 1,732.5 acres in the area.

"No cheat codes needed. Consider this your warning: Illegal encroachment will not be tolerated," Sarma asserted.

Since the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led government came to power in 2021, it has carried out a series of evictions to clear land from alleged encroachments, mostly affecting the Bengali-speaking Muslim population.

Sarma had said during his press interaction on New Year's Day that so far, eviction drives have been



carried out to clear 1,45,000 bighas (47,850 acres) of land.

On November 3 last year, the chief minister asserted that eviction drives to clear encroachments will continue and "illegal Miyas" cannot have peace under his government.

'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. (PTI)

Six people injured after Sarba's convoy meets with an accident



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 4: At least six people, including four police personnel, were injured on Sunday after an escort vehicle in the convoy of Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal met with a road accident in Assam's Dibrugarh district, police said.

The incident occurred near Hatiali area under the jurisdiction of Chabua police station when one of the escort vehicles in the minister's motorcade collided with a civilian vehicle. At the time of the accident, Sonowal was travelling to his native

village Bindhakata in Chabua.

Dibrugarh Senior Superintendent of Police Gaurav Abhijit Dilip confirmed the incident and said that all the injured persons were promptly shifted to hospital in an ambulance that was accompanying the convoy.

"Six people sustained injuries in the accident, of whom four are police personnel deployed as part of the security escort," the SSP said.

Doctors at Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH), where the injured were admitted, said that all of them were stable and out of danger. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

13 children fall ill after consuming soapberries

JORHAT, Jan 4: At least 13 children have fallen ill after consuming washnuts or soapberries in Jorhat district, officials said on Sunday.

According to a senior health department official, the incident took place at Bor Soycoffe Tea Estate in Titabar earlier during the day.

"The minors consumed the soapberries on Saturday evening while playing. Parents complained about the seriousness later in the night, and the minors were taken to the garden hospital," he added.

As their condition worsened, the children were shifted to Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH) on Sunday morning, the official said.

Doctors at the hospital said all the 13 kids are undergoing treatment and their health was being closely observed.

"Out of all the children, three have been admitted to the ICU in critical condition. The remaining 10 are out of danger," JMCH superintendent Manab Gohain said. (PTI)

USUKA delegation visits family of youth killed in Kheroni police firing



HT Correspondent
KHERONI, Jan 4: In the aftermath of the violent clashes in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, a delegation of the United Students Union of Karbi Anglong (USUKA) visited the residence of Linus Phangcho, the youth who lost his life in police firing, to express solidarity with the bereaved family.

The delegation, led by USUKA president Bibison Teron and secretary Jintu Hazarika, handed over a formal condolence letter and described the incident as a "dark day" for the region.

The student leaders expressed deep sorrow over the killing, stating that the incident has shocked the people of Assam.

Speaking to the family, Teron said USUKA extends its condolences and sympathy to the family of Linus Phangcho and urged the Government of Assam and the

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council to fulfil their commitment to carry out eviction from Village Grazing Reserve and Professional Grazing Reserve land at the earliest.

USUKA secretary Jintu Hazarika strongly condemned the police action, stating that the government must ensure that such incidents do not recur during democratic protests.

He further demanded that those injured and the family of the deceased be provided employment by the government.

The student organisation launched a sharp attack on both the Assam government and the KAAC, holding them responsible for the escalation of violence.

The leaders said the public had been protesting in a democratic manner to protect their "Jati, Mati and Bheti" (identity, land and base), but their voices were ignored by the authorities.

Holding the BJP-led government accountable for the bloodshed, the USUKA leaders claimed that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi, Shah likely to visit Assam this month: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah are likely to visit the state later this month.

"Honourable prime minister might come on January 17-18. The Union home minister has been invited on January 29. Both the invitations are in the preliminary stage," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Three cybercriminals arrested in Assam: Police

MORIGAON, Jan 4: Police have arrested three persons in Assam's Morigaon for allegedly siphoning off lakhs of rupees as loans from banks and financial institutions using fake documents, an official said on Sunday.

Morigaon additional superintendent of police (crime) Samiran Baishya said police were on the lookout for the trio since last year after a case against them was registered at (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

1,534 meritorious students felicitated at Changsari People's readiness for rapid technological change must: CM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday felicitated 1,534 meritorious students from Bezera and Sualkuchi for their outstanding performance in the HSLC and Higher Secondary Examinations, 2025. The felicitation ceremony was held at Changsari in Kamrup district.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said that ever since he was elected as the MLA from Jalukbari constituency in 2001, he has been honouring students who excel in the HSLC and HS examinations.

He noted that while only 288 students were felicitated in 2002, the number of awardees has increased significantly over the years, reaching 2,116 students this year.



Highlighting the fast-changing nature of society, Sarma said the pace of change has become so rapid that even those who initiate transformation often struggle to keep up. He pointed out that ad-

vancements in medical science have increased life expectancy, meaning today's students may live well beyond 90 years and will witness several major shifts in technology, lifestyle and work patterns

during their lifetime.

Referring to technological evolution, the chief minister recalled how television entered India during the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi with black-and-white broadcasts, later moving to colour, and eventually being overtaken by mobile phones and smartphones.

He said similar transitions occurred in office work, from typewriters to computers and laptops, and now to artificial intelligence-driven systems.

Sarma observed that artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-learning are transforming almost every sector, adding that the era of software as it is traditionally known is nearing its end. He also spoke about changes in food production, medical science and healthcare, noting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Textiles ministers' national meet in Guwahati



GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Textiles ministers' national conference will be held in Guwahati from Thursday with the theme 'India's Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage & Innovation', an official said here on Sunday.

The two-day meet is being or-

ganised by the Ministry of Textiles, in collaboration with the state government.

The conference aims to bring together Union and state ministers of Textiles, and senior officials of Union and state governments, to deliberate on a coordinated na-

Deliberations align with the national vision of developing a USD 350 billion textile industry

tional strategy for positioning India as a global textiles manufacturing hub.

The deliberations align with the national vision of developing a USD 350 billion textile industry and achieving USD 100 billion in textile exports by 2030, the official said. The inaugural session will be attended by Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Union MoS for Textiles Pabitra Margherita, among others.

India becomes world's largest rice producer, surpasses China: Agri min

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: India has become the world's largest rice producer, beating China, with a total output of 150.18 million tonnes, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Sunday, as he released 184 new varieties of 25 crops.

These new high-yielding seed varieties would boost crop production and enhance farmers' income, he said, while directing the ministry officials to ensure that these new varieties reach farmers quickly. The minister unveiled 184 improved varieties of 25 field crops developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research at an event held in the national capital, according to an official statement.

Addressing the event, Chouhan said the country has achieved great success in the development of high-yielding seeds. Since the gazette notification process began in 1969, a total of 7,205 crop varieties have been notified, including rice, wheat, sorghum, maize, pulses, oilseeds, fiber crops, among others.

Chouhan informed that 3,236 high-yielding varieties have been approved by the Narendra Modi government, as compared to 3,969 varieties notified between



1969 and 2014.

The minister noted that India has transformed from being a food-deficient country to becoming a global food provider.

Chouhan stated, "India has surpassed China in rice production and has become the world's largest producer."

India's rice production has reached 150.18 million tonnes, compared to China's 145.28 million tonnes, he said, describing it as an unprecedented achievement. India is now supplying rice in overseas markets, he said.

Chouhan said the country has abundant foodgrain stocks, thereby ensuring India's food security.

Elaborating on 184 advanced varieties released on Sunday, the minister said that farmers will be benefited as they will help in achieving higher yields and better quality of produce.

He emphasised the need to ensure that high-quality seeds reach every farmer's field. The minister also asked farm scientists to focus on increasing the production of pulses and oilseeds to make India self-sufficient.

Chouhan said that the country has entered a new era of agricultural revolution on the strength of the development of high-yielding and climate-resilient

seeds. The Union minister said that this achievement is the result of the collective efforts of the ICAR's All India Coordinated Projects on crops, state and central agricultural universities, and private seed companies.

The 184 recently released varieties include 122 cereals, 6 pulses, 13 oilseeds, 11 fodder crops, 6 sugarcane, 24 cotton (including 22 Bt cotton), and one each of jute and tobacco.

These varieties, which have been developed by ICAR institutes, state/central agricultural universities, and private seed companies, are climate-resilient, high-yielding, and resistant to major pests and diseases.

"These newly released varieties have been developed to address challenges such as climate change, soil salinity, drought, and other biotic and abiotic stresses, while also supporting natural and organic farming practices," the statement said.

Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi noted that seed multiplication rates have been increased by 1.5 to 2 times to strengthen seed availability. National and state seed corporations are ensuring quality seeds at affordable prices, he added. (PTI)

India's first commercial tropical trout farm to be inaugurated in Hyderabad today

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh will inaugurate India's first commercial-scale tropical Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS)-based Rainbow Trout farm and research institute in Hyderabad on January 5.

The facility, established by Smart Green Aquaculture Ltd at Kandukur Mandal in Ranga Reddy District, Telangana, demonstrates that high-value cold-water species can be farmed year-round in tropical climates using precision engineering and advanced water recirculation technologies, an official statement said.

The project overturns the long-standing assumption that premium aquaculture species are geographically constrained to specific climatic zones, establishing technology rather than climate as the primary determinant of aquaculture viability.

The facility also functions as a live training and demonstration platform, providing youth with hands-on experience in advanced aquaculture systems, automation, and biosecurity.

Major investment in Fisheries Sector
The Centre has significantly ramped up investments in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in recent years. Since 2015, cumulative investments totalling ₹38,572 crore have been approved or announced across various schemes.

Cold-water fisheries are emerging as a high-potential segment, driven by rising market demand for

premium species, expanding export opportunities, and increasing investments in sustainable aquaculture technologies.

Trout farming, largely concentrated in Himalayan and hill states such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, leverages cold, well-oxygenated water from snow-fed streams and rivers.

Production and expansion
The Department of Fisheries has developed rainbow trout hatcheries that have substantially increased fish production and created local employment.

With new hatcheries and advanced aquaculture techniques, annual production of 14 lakh trout seeds has been achieved.

Uttarakhand has signed an MoU with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) under the vibrant village scheme to provide trout fish.

The Department of Fisheries has also notified the development of cold-water fisheries clusters in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

The government is driving aquaculture as a strategic growth engine through focused investments, technology adoption, and institutional reforms, transitioning the sector from subsistence-led practices to a technology-driven, market-oriented ecosystem aimed at meeting growing domestic demand and export opportunities. (PTI)

India-EU trade pact: Goyal to visit Brussels this week

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Brussels this week for talks with his EU counterpart on the proposed trade pact, for which negotiations are in the last phase, an official said.

During the two-day visit on January 8-9, Goyal will meet the Executive Vice-President and European Commissioner for Trade of the European Union, Maros Sefcovic.

The minister will leave tomorrow night, the official said.

On January 7, the minister will first visit Liechtenstein to hold talks on ways to boost trade and investments between the two countries.

Liechtenstein is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). India and EFTA implemented a free trade agreement on October 1, 2025.

EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Goyal's Brussels visit comes at a crucial stage in the ongoing India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, as both sides intensify efforts to conclude a comprehensive, balanced, and mutually beneficial trade agreement at the earliest.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal too will reach Brussels.

On December 15, Agrawal said that the negotiations between India and the 27-nation bloc, the EU, have entered the "most difficult" stage, and both sides are engaged to bridge the differences and close the talks soon.

He said that the European Union's (EU) carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) is on the discussion table.

The 16th round of negotiations

between the two sides concluded earlier this month (3-9 December) here.

Key chapters such as goods, services, investment, rules of origin, and technical barriers to trade were discussed.

In June 2022, India and the EU bloc resumed negotiations for a comprehensive FTA, an investment protection agreement, and a pact on geographical indications after a gap of over eight years. The talks were stalled in 2013 due to differences on the level of opening up markets.

India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU was USD 136.53 billion in 2024-25 (exports worth USD 75.85 billion and imports worth USD 60.68 billion), making it the largest trading partner for goods.

The EU market accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total exports, and the bloc's exports to India constitute 9 per cent of its total overseas shipments.

Besides demanding significant duty cuts in automobiles and medical devices, the EU wants tax reduction in products like wine, spirits, meat, poultry, and a strong intellectual property regime.

Indian goods' exports to the EU, such as ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, can become more competitive if the pact sails through. The India-EU trade pact negotiations cover 23 policy areas or chapters, including trade in goods, services, investment, trade remedies, rules of origin, customs and trade facilitation, competition, government procurement, dispute settlement, intellectual property rights, geographical indications, and sustainable development. (PTI)

Himachal to bring new industrial policy soon: CM

SHIMLA, Jan 4: The Himachal Pradesh government will soon bring a new state industrial policy, and the government aims to make the state a strong economic hub, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Sunday. The chief minister interacted with CEOs and entrepreneurs from leading industries in India and abroad as part of a three-day Him MSME Fest-2026 organised here. Extensive discussions were held on the expansion and promotion of industries in the state. The state government and entrepreneurs signed 37 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) for setting up enterprises worth ₹ 10,000 crore on this occasion. Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that the state government is undertaking new initiatives to develop an investment-friendly ecosystem so that the state can become a reliable. (PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

I Manjarul Hoque Laskar, S/O- Late Basharat Ali Laskar, Vill- Paschim Nilbagan, P.O. Nilbagan, P.S.-Hojai, Dist. Hojai (Assam) That, my actual and correct name is Manjarul Hoque Laskar and my father's actual and correct name is Basharat Ali Laskar. That, in my Voter ID vide No. CBD4236140 wherein my name has been inadvertently recorded as Manjarul Hoque Laskar instead of Manjarul Hoque Laskar. That, in my Aadhaar Card vide No. 9271-3526-8970 wherein my father's name has been inadvertently recorded as Md. Basharat Ali Laskar instead of Basharat Ali Laskar. That, the aforesaid, Manjarul Hoque Laskar & Manjarul Hoque Laskar are the names of same and single person i.e. of mine and Basharat Ali Laskar & Md. Basharat Ali Laskar are the names of same and single person i.e. of my father.

Manjarul Hoque Laskar

Contd. from Page 1...

Too early to make poll

with victory possibilities in 25-29 seats.

In the current Assembly, the BJP has 64 members, while its allies AGP, UPPL and BPF have nine, seven and three MLAs each.

In the opposition camp, the Congress' strength is 26, AIUDF has 15 members and CPI(M) one MLA. There is one Independent legislator also, belonging to Rajgor Dal. (PTI)

BJP's wall writing campaign

Assembly elections, adding that election management committees have already been constituted across all Assembly constituencies and panchayat levels in the state.

He was accompanied at the press interaction by Anup Barman, Co-Convenor of the Election Management Committee and General Secretary of the Assam Pradesh BJP.

Outlining the campaign, Baruah said the wall writing drive will be formally inaugurated on January 5 in the presence of Assam Pradesh BJP president and Darrang-Udalguri MP Dilip Saikia.

The ceremonial inauguration will be carried out by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in front of Kendriya Vidyalaya at Khanapara under the Guwahati Capital Mandala.

He said that following the inauguration, BJP Members of Parliament, ministers, MLAs, state morcha presidents, district presidents, Zilla Parishad members, mayors, municipal chairpersons and anchalik panchayat members will simultaneously take up wall writing activities in their respective areas across Assam.

Baruah added that in the first phase, the campaign will carry messages highlighting the party's focus on the protection of civilisation, culture and life; safeguarding land and rights; women's economic empowerment; transparent and merit-based recruitment; and the vision of a developed, secure and self-reliant Assam.

The slogans will also emphasise the BJP's commitment to Assam's security and appeal to voters to support the party for the state's development.

Six people injured after Sarba's

Hospital authorities added that none of the injuries were life-threatening and the patients were kept under observation as a precautionary measure.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Rajya Sabha MP Rameswar Teli, who was also part of the convoy, escaped unhurt in the incident. Officials said both parliamentarians continued their journey after ensuring that the injured were taken care of.

Preliminary reports suggest that the collision took place due to sudden movement of vehicles on the busy stretch of road, though a detailed inquiry is underway to ascertain the exact cause of the accident. The damaged vehicles were later removed from the road to restore normal traffic movement.

Police officials said necessary legal procedures have been initiated and further investigation is in progress. The incident briefly disrupted traffic in the area, but normalcy was restored soon after.

Sonowal, who is also the former Chief Minister of Assam, frequently travels across the state for official and personal engagements, accompanied by a security convoy as per protocol.

USUKA delegation visits

administration's failure to engage in timely and meaningful dialogue with the protesters led to the tragic loss of life, which, they asserted, could have been avoided.

People's readiness for rapid

the emergence of bioengineered food, genetic screening, preventive healthcare and robotic surgeries. He mentioned that robotic surgical procedures have already been performed at Guwahati Medical College and that in the future, doctors may operate on patients from distant locations using advanced technologies.

Stating that developments driven by artificial intelligence represent only the "tip of the iceberg", the Chief Minister urged students not to rely solely on textbook learning.

He called upon them to prepare themselves in line with future human resource requirements and to choose fields aligned with Industry 4.0. He added that the Assam government has also been adapting to these changes by upgrading ITI courses to include artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality and machine learning.

Sarma further said that the government plans to install an advanced proton therapy machine costing Rs 500 crore at Guwahati Medical College for cancer treatment and has made arrangements to store solar power generated during the day through pump storage systems for use during peak demand.

Stressing that meritorious students carry greater responsibility, the chief minister said their higher achievements must translate into greater contributions to society. He concluded his address by reading out the citation presented to the awardees.

MLA Kamalpur Diganta Kalita, Kamrup District Commissioner Deb Kumar Mishra, noted social worker Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, renowned singer Pulak Banerjee, career counsellor Dr Gouranga Sarma and several other dignitaries were present at the function.

Modi, Shah likely to visit

Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme at Changsari in Kamrup district.

"Both of them are likely to come, though the programmes have not been confirmed yet," he added.

Sarma had said earlier that Modi will lay the foundation stones of the 32-km Kaziranga Elevated Corridor project, Twin Tube underwater tunnel from Gohpur to Numaligarh, and a new railway line between Kokrajhar and Gelephu in Bhutan, during his likely January visit.

The prime minister is also expected to witness a 'Bagurumba' dance performance by 10,000 artistes. (PTI)

Three cybercriminals arrested

Moirabari police station of the district under various sections of the BNS and IT Act.

"Based on specific information, an operation was carried out and the three were apprehended from their residences on Saturday night," he said.

Baishya said the accused allegedly prepared fake documents in the names of different individuals and obtained loans running into lakhs of rupees from banks and financial institutions.

"The activities of these three accused came to light during interrogation of other accused in similar cyber-crimes," the ASP said. (PTI)

US control of Venezuelan oil may unlock \$1 bn stuck dues for India, lift output



NEW DELHI, Jan 4: A US-led takeover or restructuring of Venezuela's oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, potentially unlocking close to USD 1 billion in long-pending dues while accelerating the revival of crude production from fields it operates in the sanctions-hit Latin American nation, analysts and industry sources said.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020.

Its flagship overseas producer, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), jointly operates the San Cristobal oilfield in eastern Venezuela, but output has been severely curtailed as US restrictions blocked access to critical technology, equipment, and services - leaving commercially viable reserves effectively stranded.

Venezuela has failed to pay OVL USD 536 million in dividends due on its 40 per cent stake in the field up to 2014, and a near-equivalent amount for the subsequent period for which Caracas has refused to permit audits, effectively freezing settlement of the claims.

Sanctions could be eased after a dramatic US operation removed President Nicolas Maduro and

placed the country's vast oil reserves under American oversight, analysts and energy executives said.

Once sanctions are eased, OVL can move rigs and other equipment from places, such as its parent ONGC's oil fields in Gujarat, to San Cristobal to revive output that has plummeted to 5,000-10,000 barrels per day, officials in the know of the matter said. The onshore field can produce 80,000-1,00,000 bpd with more wells and better equipment, they said, adding that San Cristobal needs rigs similar to those operating in Gujarat, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) owns many such rigs.

US control of the Venezuelan oil sector also means exports to the world would start soon, and OVL can recoup its past USD 1 billion dues from San Cristobal from such revenues, they said. In fact, OVL had sought a 'specific licence' sanctions waiver, similar to one Office of the Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had granted to Chevron to operate the oilfield and export oil from it.

OVL and other Indian firms can also take more fields in Venezuela and revive production from the Carabobo-1 Area - another Venezuelan heavy oilfield with Indian interest. OVL holds 11 per cent interest in Carabobo-1, while Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and

Oil India Ltd (OIL) hold 3.5 per cent stake each.

Venezuelan national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PdVSA) is the majority stakeholder in both San Cristobal and Carabobo-1.

Post the US action, PdVSA may undergo restructuring, analysts said. In the worst-case scenario, its stake can be taken over by a US company or any new entity that Washington may erect.

OVL and other international companies - Repsol of Spain has 11 per cent stake in Carabobo-1 - are most certainly likely to continue in the projects with their holdings, analysts said.

US President Donald Trump has already stated that, as part of the takeover, major US oil companies would return to Venezuela, which has the world's largest oil reserves, and refurbish badly degraded oil infrastructure.

Analysts said the US cannot replace all the international companies and will need firms like OVL not just for their expertise but also for the market they bring in.

India will be a key buyer of Venezuelan crude once the Latin American country is able to restore its lost glory with help from the US and other companies.

"If sanctions are eased - as seen in past geopolitical episodes, such as Panama in 1990, when aid and trade restrictions were lifted shortly after the removal of General Manuel Noriega - trade flows can resume rapidly. Under such circumstances, Venezuelan barrels could again return to Indian refineries," said Nikhil Dubey, Senior Research Analyst at Kpler, in a post on LinkedIn. Major Indian refiners, such as Reliance Industries, Rosneft-based Nayara Energy, IOC, HPCL-Mittal Energy and Mangalore Refinery, have the complexity needed to run these grades efficiently in blends to produce fuels like petrol and diesel.

"India is actively diversifying its

crude basket - not only to reduce its dependence on Russian oil, but also amid ongoing India-US trade discussions, where lowering exposure to Russian barrels remains a key theme. In that context, if sanctions on Venezuela are eased, Venezuelan crude could offer additional flexibility to Indian refiners and help ease supply concentration risks," Dubey said.

Before 2019, Venezuela exported 707 million barrels of crude oil a year, with the US absorbing about 32 per cent and China and India 35 per cent. By 2025, exports have declined to 352 million barrels a year, with China taking 45 per cent and unknown others 31 per cent. Kpler Risk & Compliance expects US and allied authorities to prioritise asset freezes, criminal investigations, and the dismantling of evasive trading networks rather than immediately easing restrictions.

China, Venezuela's primary residual buyer, is likely to pause lifting until PdVSA authority and payment channels are clarified in the near term.

Explaining the US move, analysts said Trump is trying to decouple the American economy from the rest of the world. With Venezuelan oil under its belt, the US will no longer be dependent on OPEC producers like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"In a way, Trump has sent a strong message to Saudi Arabia. His logic of having discovered Venezuelan oil and so being its true owner, also holds good for the Middle East. After all, it was US firms which discovered oil in Saudi Arabia and other places, and as a corollary, it can also capture Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud," an analyst tracking the sector said.

With its own oil and gas production and Venezuelan output, the US will no longer be dependent on any other part of the world for its energy needs. (PTI)

Assam steps up healthcare outreach in tea gardens

Under CM's visionary leadership, healthcare is reaching the last worker in the tea gardens: Kaushik Rai

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Stating that healthcare is now reaching even the last worker living in tea garden areas, Minister Kaushik Rai on Saturday said that the Assam government, under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has placed strong emphasis on the health and welfare of tea garden workers. He was addressing a large gathering at Dewan Tea Estate, which has been selected as a pilot site for the Swasthyaban Shramik Yojana in Cachar district.

Speaking at the programme, the Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Mines and Minerals and Barak Valley Development described the initiative as a reflection of the state government's people-centric governance model. Thanking the Chief Minister for approving the pilot project, he said the scheme marks a decisive step towards improving the quality of life of tea garden workers, who form the backbone of Assam's tea economy. Congratulating the residents of Dewan Tea Estate for being chosen among 20 tea gardens across the state, he said the government's approach goes beyond announcements and focuses on sustained service delivery. He added that inclusive development is possible only when health, dignity and social security are addressed together.

Minister Rai also placed on record his appreciation for outgoing Cachar Deputy Commissioner Mridul Yadav, IAS, who attended the programme on his last day in the district. He



lauded Yadav's administrative commitment and effective coordination in strengthening district-level implementation of welfare schemes.

Further strengthening healthcare infrastructure in tea garden areas, the minister announced that ₹ 3 lakh has been approved for each of the 27 tea garden hospitals in Cachar district for their upgradation into Ayushman Arogya Mandirs. He also laid the foundation stone for

repair and renovation works of seven tea estate hospitals under Lakhimpur Legislative Assembly Constituency.

Addressing the gathering, Cachar DC Mridul Yadav said the Swasthyaban Shramik Yojana has clear guidelines and practical objectives that can significantly improve health outcomes in tea garden areas. Expressing confidence in the district health machinery, he assured that the

administration would extend full cooperation to achieve the goal of "Health for All" for the tea garden population.

Earlier, Joint Director of Health Services Dr Shibanda Roy outlined the core objectives of the programme, stating that early detection of diseases and timely medical intervention remain its primary focus. He spoke about common and preventable illnesses prevalent among tea estate workers and assured that the Health Department would take all necessary steps to ensure sustained medical support for the community.

As part of the initiative, a comprehensive health camp was organised at Dewan Tea Estate where specialist doctors and general physicians provided OPD services, laboratory investigations, eye screening, non-communicable disease and malaria screening, child immunisation and free medicines. A total of 293 patients were examined across various departments, reflecting strong outreach and participation.

During the programme held at Dewan Nichline Main Durga Mandap, nine tuberculosis patients from Lakhimpur Legislative Assembly Constituency were handed over Nikshya Poshan Kits by the minister, the district commissioner and other dignitaries, reinforcing nutritional and social support under the national TB elimination drive. The programme was attended by PRI members of Lakhimpur LAC, the SDM and health officers of Lakhimpur and Hari-nagar BPHCs, NHM district programme manager Rahul Ghosh and other officials.

Congress launches 'Raijor Padulit Raijor Congress'

Party engages citizens to shape election manifesto and highlight grievances

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4: With the Assam Legislative Assembly elections, 2026, approaching, political parties across the state have begun their election campaigns. The opposition Indian National Congress has launched a special programme aimed at engaging with the public and preparing its election manifesto to strengthen party outreach.

The programme, titled "Raijor Padulit Raijor Congress," seeks to understand the grievances, complaints and aspirations of citizens from all sections of society and incorporate them into the Congress election agenda.

On Sunday, Dhubri Lok Sabha MP and senior Congress leader Rokibul Hussain addressed reporters at a press conference held at Rongjali Complex in Kokrajhar.

He said that the people of Assam are eager to bring an end to the BJP government led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, which he alleged has failed to address citizens' concerns.

Hussain stated that the Congress

party is fully prepared to contest the upcoming assembly elections, even though the exact schedule is yet to be announced.

Hussain claimed that the BJP government is distributing scheme benefits using funds collected from public taxes while the state carries a debt of ₹ 1.60 lakh crore. He contrasted this with the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government, stating,

"While Himanta Biswa Sarma used to mock the previous government for celebrating Bihu at others' expense, the present BJP administration is itself collecting taxes from the people and redistributing them as scheme benefits. We also gave benefits, but our government did not function in this manner."

He further alleged that the people are dissatisfied with the "autocratic" functioning of the current state government.

The Congress MP asserted that if voted to power, the party would implement more welfare schemes and benefits than those currently offered by the BJP-led administration in Assam.

Tea-time adda sparks vision for Sivasagar's future

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 4: A get-together billed as 'Adda with a Cup of Tea' drew wide attention from the citizens of Sivasagar. The programme was organised by Sibsagar Girls' College on its premises on January 3 with the aim of creating a common platform for dialogue and exchange of ideas. Initiating the programme, the principal of the college, Dr Protim Sharma said that in today's fast-paced world, the need to come together and discuss issues face to face has long been felt.

He added that centrally located Sibsagar Girls' College was happy to provide such a platform for meaningful interaction.

The first edition of the adda was held on the theme 'Sivasagar of My Dreams' (Xopunar Sivasagar) and witnessed the participation of a large number of distinguished personalities from the town.

Participants represented diverse fields such as literature, journalism, sports, medicine, law, history, tourism, art and culture, drama, environment and social work, among others.

Prof J P Saikia, Vice Chancellor of J B University, highlighted the importance of community engagement in all spheres of the develop-

ment process and stressed the need for robust infrastructure to enable progress in every sector, including education.

Noted author Prema Gogoi briefly recalled the rich heritage of Assamese writing in Sivasagar, tracing it back to the days of Arunodoi.

Veteran sports personality Manoj Bhagawati pointed out that while sports infrastructure in the town remains inadequate, the District Sports Association is making efforts to develop facilities such as the Piyoli Phukan Indoor Stadium and a full-fledged cricket playground at Kalugaon.

Theatre personality Prasanta Sarma spoke on the need for well-equipped auditoriums to nurture and promote young talent in dramatics. Social activist Sarat Hazarika expressed concern over the lack of coordination among various government departments, while educationist Dr Prasanta Chutia identified unplanned urban growth as one of the key reasons behind the slow pace of development in the town. ONGC official Jayanta Patar emphasised that a peaceful environment is essential for development and must go hand in hand with progress.

Dr P P Chetia laid stress on the

beautification of historic monuments and tanks in and around Sivasagar to attract tourists. Amitabh Baruah, president of Rangpur Sahitya Sabha, said that the town urgently needs a modern railway platform along with stoppages of premium trains such as the Rajdhani Express and Vande Bharat Express. Dr Sukalyan Das and Dr Rajib Baruah highlighted the need for improved medical facilities to cater to the people of the town and surrounding areas.

Several other distinguished citizens actively took part in the adda, including octogenarians Sonaram Baruah and Hem Baruah, Dipali Bhattacharyya Baruah, president of Sivasagar District Sports Association Ponaram Mili, educationists Raman Sarma, Dr Saumarjyoti Mahanta, Dr Ranjit Kumar Baruah, Pabitra Pran Bhattacharyya, Dr Jehiruddin Khan, artist Rupam Bezbaruah, cultural activist Plabita Borthakur, advocate Diganta Mangal Neog, Bandana Kaushik Bordoloi, Sanjay Parikh, Manirul Islam Bora, Brazil Chutia, Bhoirah Munda, Santosh Dutta, Phulbar Dishingia and others.

The deliberations were moderated by journalist Kaushtove Moni Kakoty and Associate Professor of Sibsagar Girls' College, Sanjay Das.

Karbi villages gear up for Rongker Karkli festival

Traditional community prayers to be held across Karbi Anglong



HT Correspondent

KHERONI/DIPHU, Jan 4: A festive atmosphere has enveloped villages across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong as the Karbi community prepares to celebrate Rongker Karkli, one of its most significant traditional festivals on January 5. Some Karbi villages, however, have chosen to observe the festival later with celebrations planned on February 15.

The region is abuzz with activity as men and women join hands to clean their villages and decorate ritual sites.

Rongker is an annual community prayer deeply rooted in Karbi tradition and reflects the rich cultural heritage of the community.

Primarily an agrarian society, the Karbi community

performs Rongker to seek divine protection for their villages.

The rituals focus on warding off evil spirits and negative influences, praying for good health and protection from diseases and natural calamities and seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest in the coming agricultural cycle.

Preparations for the festival highlight a strong sense of unity among villagers. From remote hamlets to larger settlements, traditional religious customs are being meticulously followed to ensure that the ceremonies are conducted with due sanctity.

As the sun set on Saturday, final arrangements were being put in place to welcome the deity and to pray for the well-being of the community in the year ahead. Among the villages set to celebrate Rongker on Sunday is Solok Enghee Arong in West Karbi Anglong. Village community leader Sikari Kathar said that according to traditional beliefs, the community offers prayers and sacrifices once a year for good health, a good harvest and the overall well-being of the village, while also expressing gratitude to the almighty.

Hundreds of Karbi villages across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong observe Rongker on January 5, although there is no fixed date for the festival.

Each village decides a convenient time after the harvest season. Another date on which a large number of Karbi villages traditionally observe Rongker is 5 February.

BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary lays foundation stone for Girls' Hostel at BBEC

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4: The Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Hagrama Mohilary, on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the construction of a Girls' Hostel at Bineswar Brahma Engineering College (BBEC), Bijulibari near Chandrapara in Kokrajhar.

The new hostel, to be constructed at a cost of ₹ 8.20 crore, will be a three-storey RCC building with a capacity of 100 beds. The project will be funded under the NEC Fund for the financial year 2025-2026.

Addressing the media during the event, Mohilary said that the Assam Assembly elections are likely to be held in April, before Bihu, but no decision has been made yet regarding seat-sharing among NDA allies. He emphasised that the BPF will seek more seats in the upcoming elections, stating, "We should not demand fewer seats. Later there may be adjustments and compromises, but we should not start by asking for less."

He also clarified that there is no question of an alliance between BPF and UPPL in the BTC. While the BPF has no objection to NDA arrangements at the state or national level, Mohilary said such an alliance would not be acceptable in BTC.

He reiterated that he would step down if any such alliance were formed locally.

Three killed in elephant attacks in Hojai in four days



HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 4: Three people have lost their lives in elephant attacks in Hojai district during the first four days of the new year, leaving local residents gripped by fear and insecurity. The incidents have once again highlighted the growing problem of human-elephant conflict in the area, particularly during the winter months when food scarcity in forests forces elephants to move towards human settlements.

The most recent incident occurred late on Saturday

night in the Radhanagar area, where a herd of elephants entered residential localities after moving out of the Kurnakata reserved forest in search of food. During the incident, 60-year-old Pravech Biswas was killed, while several houses were damaged, triggering panic among residents.

Local people said repeated incidents of elephant intrusion and attacks have created a constant sense of anxiety in the villages. Forest department officials stated that they are investigating the incident and have intensified efforts to create awareness among villagers to help prevent such tragedies in the future.

Earlier, Basudev Chauhan of Milik Basti and Anil Singh of Theplaguddi were also killed in separate elephant attacks. These incidents have deeply affected the families of the victims and underlined the increasing tension between wildlife conservation and human safety in the district.

Residents of Hojai are now voicing serious concern over how to maintain a balance between forest habitats and expanding human settlements, so that both human lives and wildlife can be protected. They stressed that unless effective long-term solutions are implemented urgently, the prevailing atmosphere of fear in the villages is likely to continue.

Unidentified body found at weekly market in West Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 4: Panic prevailed in the Mailoo area of West Karbi Anglong on Saturday following the recovery of an unidentified man's body from the local weekly market premises.

According to sources, local residents spotted the body early in the morning and immediately informed the authorities.

The identity of the deceased has not yet been established and no one has come forward to claim the body so far.

Police personnel reached the spot soon after being alerted and cordoned off the area. An investigation has been initiated to ascertain the cause of death and to establish the identity of the deceased.

The body was later sent to Diphu for a mandatory post-mortem examination.

Police officials said they are also checking missing persons' records at nearby police stations to gather more information and leads in the case.

Bhaona artiste Arup Saikia honoured at first International Satradhikar Conference



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Writer and Bhaona artiste Arup Saikia was honoured as an International Bhaona Artiste at the inaugural International Satradhikar Conference held at Satsangi Damodar Alga Satra in Barkurha, Nalbari. Established by Damodardeva in 1592, the Satra is one of Assam's oldest spiritual and cultural institutions.

The first-ever International Satradhikar Conference was organised under the aegis of Satra Sanskritik Samaroh Samity, Namghar Sanskritik Samaroh Samity and Dihanam Sammilan Samity of Assam. During the ceremony, Saikia was felicitated with a plaque, cheleng and gamosa in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Assam's traditional culture through Bhaona.

Arup Saikia is widely acclaimed for promoting the ideas of Sankardeva and the values of Assamese neo-Vaishnavism across communities in Assam, India and abroad. He has performed Bhaona in English for the first time from Assam and showcased his art in international venues including Moscow, Dubai, Singapore, Finland and Hong Kong.

The conference was presided over by Achyut Goswami as president and Phanihar Kalita as executive president, with Bimal Rai Medhi serving as Secretary. The event, organised for the first time in Assam, aimed to highlight the unsung talents of the state and celebrate its rich cultural heritage.

NFR modernises New Bongaigaon workshop

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) achieved significant infrastructure and operational milestones at the New Bongaigaon (NBQ) Workshop during December 2025, reaffirming its continued focus on modernisation, operational efficiency and excellence in rolling stock maintenance in line with Indian Railways' broader reform and upgradation initiatives.

Adding to these achievements, the C&W Workshop, New Bongaigaon was awarded the Ministry of Railways Rajbhasha Shield along with a cash award of ₹ 14,000 by the Railway Board for outstanding implementation of Rajbhasha during 2024, bringing pride to NFR.

During the month, the NBQ Workshop also developed an indigenous test bench for assembled DEMU DPC bogies.

This facility enables pre-installation testing of traction motors and early detection of defects.



The system includes mandatory one-hour run tests, real-time monitoring of vibration and bearing temperatures and precise backlash measurement using high-accuracy dial gauges, resulting in significant savings of time and manpower.

Mid-Life Rehabilitation (MLR) of LHB coaches has also been successfully initiated at the New Bongaigaon Workshop following the allotment of a Rolling Stock Programme for 25 coaches.

Through effective planning and optimal utilisation of available resources, interim arrangements were created by utilising the old Coach Lifting Shop after relocating ICF

Periodic Overhauling activities to the new Light Coach Repair Shop. These proactive measures enabled the smooth commencement of MLR activities, while a proposal for a dedicated MLR shed is being progressed to strengthen long-term maintenance infrastructure.

NFR has further relocated all Periodic Overhauling activities of DEMU rakes from the old Wagon Paint Shop to a newly commissioned DEMU shed at the New Bongaigaon Workshop.

Planned under the 2021-22 infrastructure development initiatives, the modern covered facility has enhanced operational efficiency, streamlined workflow and improved safety and productivity, thereby strengthening rolling stock maintenance capabilities.

These developments underline Northeast Frontier Railway's sustained emphasis on infrastructure development, innovation and operational efficiency, reinforcing its commitment to safe and reliable railway operations.

10,000 artists to perform Bagurumba dance in Guwahati

Mega cultural showcase planned in presence of PM Modi on Jan 17



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 4: In a major cultural initiative, around 10,000 artists will perform the traditional Bodo Bagurumba dance in Guwahati on January 17 in the presence of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi.

The large-scale performance is expected to be one of the biggest cultural showcases of indigenous traditions in the state. Bagurumba is a vibrant and graceful folk

dance of the indigenous Bodo community of Assam and the Northeast.

Traditionally performed by women, the dance is known for its butterfly-like movements, rhythmic footwork and colourful traditional attire, including Dokhona and Aronai.

The performance is accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as the Kham, Jotha, Serja and Sifung, adding to its distinctive charm. The dance symbolises harmony with nature and reflects the cultural richness and heritage of the Bodo community.

The upcoming mass performance is expected to draw national attention and highlight Assam's indigenous culture on a grand platform.

The mega Bagurumba dance event is being organised under the aegis of the Government of Assam with the aim of cultural promotion as well as strengthening integration among communities across the state.

Earlier, the Zumoir Binodini performance held in February 2025 had similarly showcased Assam's cultural diversity and fostered a spirit of unity.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Happiness is good health and a bad memory. -Ingrid Bergman

Rupee's downturn and RBI role

It does not make sense for India to deplete its hard-earned foreign currency reserves to temporarily protect the Rupee's exchange value. In fact, Indian Rupee's downturn vis-à-vis other major currencies has not adversely impacted the country's impressive economic growth, at least for the present. On the contrary, it has made exports cheaper and imports dearer. This should help the country reduce its overall large annual trade deficits although increasing imports of cheap non-essential items from China continues to be a major concern. The country's export growth in 2025 shows positive momentum, with significant year-on-year jumps in late 2025, particularly in November, reaching nearly 20 percent for merchandise, driven by key sectors like electronics, agricultural products, and services, despite some global trade challenges, leading to cumulative growth of over five percent for the April-November period. India should not be too concerned about its Rupee exchange-rate fall as long as it does not hurt the economic growth.

India's central bank intervened aggressively in currency markets during December, selling dollars to prop up the rupee, echoing its earlier heavy-handed efforts to stem a one-way decline in the currency rate. The rupee rallied to an intraday high of 89.75 against the US dollar on the interbank order matching system, from near 91.00 seen prior to the intervention. It was last trading at 90.28. The Indian Rupee's downturn has outpaced the US Dollar's own decline since April, 2025. In October, the RBI sold a net \$11.9 billion to support the Rupee. As in the past, it proved to be only temporarily effective. The RBI intervention has failed to arrest the Rupee's decline. The exchange value of INR in 2025 showed a much bigger loss to other major global currencies such as EURO (21 percent), Pound Sterling, Australian \$, Japanese Yen, and UAE's Dirham than US\$. It may be time for Indian exporters to seriously try to tap these markets to push Indian goods and services while containing higher priced (in Rupee) non-essential imports.

At the same time, it must be appreciated that the RBI has been trying to continuously bolster India's foreign exchange reserves which saw a significant increase of \$1.68 billion, reaching \$688.94 billion, in the third week of December. It was primarily driven by higher gold holdings and a modest rise in foreign currency assets. The country's gold reserves strengthened considerably, reflecting a diversification strategy. Special Drawing Rights (SDR) and the IMF reserve position also saw slight upticks. As of last September, the RBI held approximately 880 tonnes of gold, with a significant portion (around 575.8 tonnes) now stored domestically in India -- marking a major shift towards onshoring reserves -- while about 290.3 tonnes remain with the Bank of England (BoE) and Bank of International Settlements (BIS). This increased domestic storage reflects a strategic move to secure assets amid global financial uncertainties, with the RBI bringing back 274 tonnes since March 2023.

Nanjing Massacre: How atrocity is remembered, denied and rewritten

By: Prabir Kumar Talukdar

If you move slowly through the pages of history, certain events will make you pause and ask an uncomfortable question. How did humans reach this far, carrying such an enormous capacity for violence against their own kind? By any reasonable measure, we should have destroyed ourselves long ago. And yet, we survived. The real question is not how, but at what cost.

The year was 1937. The world was still reeling from the aftershocks of the Great War and the deep economic wounds of the Great Depression. Liberal democracies appeared fragile; international institutions hollow. In 1933, Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany, thereby openly dismantling the postwar order through rearmament and destructive racial ideology. Around the same time, the League of Nations failed to restrain aggression in Asia and Africa, exposing the limits of collective security. Europe seems like it is rehearsing for the next Great War with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, where civilian bombing and ideological warfare became normalised. Across continents, militarism, economic despair, and racial thinking converged, in which large-scale violence against civilians became an everyday event. It was within this global climate of collapse and impunity that 1937 unfolded.

Farther east, a new power had already announced its arrival. Imperial Japan, reshaped through rapid modernisation and a Western-style military, had secured two decisive victories within a single generation. Its defeat of Qing China in the Sino-Japanese War signalled the collapse of the old East Asian order; its victory in the Russo-Japanese War stunned the world and overturned long-held assumptions about racial and imperial hierarchies. For the first time, a non-European power had defeated a major Western empire in modern warfare. These victories fostered a sense of historical destiny within Japan, a destiny that increasingly linked national survival, military expansion, and imperial authority. As years followed, economic strain, population pressure, and faith in military solutions pushed Imperial Japan toward unchecked continental expansion. In 1931, the Mukden Incident provided the pretext for the occupation of Manchuria, followed by the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo. International condemnation proved ineffective, and Japan's subsequent walkout from the League of Nations confirmed what military leaders had already concluded: expansion would carry little cost. By the mid 1930s, restraint had given way to momentum. When hostilities escalated into full-scale war with China, already in the middle of a civil war in 1937, the violence that followed was not an aberration, but the culmination of years of unchecked militarism and imperial ambition.

When Japanese forces entered Nanjing on 13th December 1937, the massacre that followed was not a sudden collapse of discipline, but the logical endpoint of a world already conditioned to accept conquest without consequence and violence without accountability. As historian Akira Fujiwara notes, an initially small clash at Marco Polo Bridge was quickly turned into "an all-out war of aggression" by Tokyo's hard line government. The Chinese

capital Nanjing became a target.

In December 1937, the Japanese army overwhelmed Nanjing (then China's capital) with unimaginable savagery. Troops under General Matsui Iwane carried out orders for "the destruction of Nanjing," committing numerous mass executions, bayoneting, arsoning, and tens of thousands of rapes over six weeks. Soldiers tortured and slaughtered civilians and prisoners of war; houses and shops were looted and burned, and over a third of the city was destroyed. By most estimates, some 100,000 to 200,000 Chinese were killed in this orgy of violence, though Chinese officials fixed the toll at 300,000. (The true number remains disputed, but even the lowest figures rank Nanjing among "one of the worst wartime atrocities in history".) Afterwards, surviving Japanese leaders were tried in war-crimes trials. Matsui and his deputy, Hsiao Tani, were convicted and executed.

Japanese Debate and Denial
In postwar Japan, the Nanjing Massacre became fiercely controversial. Many Japanese journalists and thinkers struggled with the legacy of it. One of the first was veteran reporter Katsuichi Honda, who in 1971 visited China and wrote the first Japanese exposé on the atrocities. His book *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame* inspired a generation of researchers. But Honda also documented the fierce backlash. In Japan, a "denial literature" sprang up. Right-wing activists and some politicians began calling the massacre a fabrication or gross exaggeration. Honda describes how, by the 2000s, "books of the denial school... by sheer numbers have overshadowed" serious scholarship. He warned that to the Japanese unaware of the evidence, this "quantity over quality" of denial could distort history. These revisionist claims found an arena in education. Until the 1990s, even official history textbooks (required in all schools) downplayed or omitted many wartime atrocities. By the late 20th century, reformers like historian Nobukatsu Fujioka formed groups (such as the "Society for History Textbook Reform") to promote a "positive view" of Japan's past. One infamous new textbook published in 2001 soft-pedalled the Nanjing events and suggested Japan's wars were "to liberate Asia." This sparked outrage at home and abroad. In truth, by the 1990s, mainstream textbooks already did mention Nanjing and related crimes -- a concession to decades of debate led by scholars like Saburo Ienaga -- but many conservatives still pressed for further revisions. The result is that even today, many Japanese youth grow up with mixed messages. The massacre is officially recorded, but right-wing voices insist it's slanted or one-sided. In public life, this has led to painful conflicts. A few Japanese leaders have apologised or expressed remorse, but others have angered China by questioning the historical record. Notorious revisionists insist Nanjing was "an illusion" and label victims as propaganda tools. Honda Katsuichi and other Japanese critics have condemned these denials. He argues that obscuring the past serves a nationalist agenda: by denying guilt, Japanese leaders can more easily pursue future military or territorial ambitions without "unwarranted feelings of guilt". In practice, denial has rarely pre-

vented in Japan's courts or academia. Civil lawsuits brought by Chinese women against Japanese deniers have repeatedly affirmed the massacre's reality (victims won three consecutive cases, underscoring that the evidence is overwhelming). But the persistence of denier books and Internet arguments means the Nanjing debate remains a live wound in Japan's society.

Chinese memory and legacy
China's view of Nanjing is very different. From childhood, the Chinese are taught that December 1937 was a national tragedy. In China's official history textbooks, the Nanjing Massacre is an undisputed fact and a central element of the war story. One young Chinese student explained that to them, it "is not a scholarly issue, but an issue relating to ethnic identity and emotion. Chinese... learn that the Nanjing Massacre involved the slaughter of 300,000 people. The Chinese public remembers it as an indisputable fact, just like the Earth is round." Such collective memory leaves no room for debate at home, like the 300,000 figure. Japanese who refuse to acknowledge the massacre are widely seen in China as historical revisionists.

In Nanjing today, the memory of the massacre is enshrined in a sprawling Memorial Hall, built on the very grounds where victims were buried. Museum curators have deliberately centred survivors' voices. The Chinese president attends annual remembrance ceremonies, underscoring that the massacre's legacy is deeply felt in China's national consciousness. Taiwanese and Western observers note that survivors themselves often call for Japan to learn from history; they sometimes even thank modern Japanese visitors for acknowledging the past. As the daughter of Iris Chang -- whose bestselling *Rape of Nanking* exposed the atrocity to the world -- remarked, "we must solidify memory with memorials, because forgetting means a second massacre".

Remembering the Past, Facing the Future
What happened in Nanjing looms large over both countries. For China, it is a sacred memory of martyrdom and resilience. For the Japanese, it remains a subject of shame and controversy. Leading historians and authors -- from Iris Chang and Rana Mitter to Japan's own Yoshihiko Kashiwabara and Fujiwara Akira -- agree on the basic fact that a horrific massacre took place, and it must not be forgotten. Yet the meaning of those events is still contested. Chinese voices emphasise the human cost and "universal" legacy of peace, while some Japanese voices try to minimise or rationalise it. As Honda and others have urged in Japan, honesty about Nanjing and other wartime crimes is part of a commitment never to let such barbaric atrocities happen again. In that spirit, the wounds of Nanjing live on as lessons for future generations -- a solemn legacy of a time when empire and ideology unleashed terror, and a universal call for remembrance and peace.

Five years later, in 1942, thousands of kilometres away from Nanjing, another journey began. In the Slovak Republic, 997 people, consisting of young men, women, and children were herded onto a train bound for Auschwitz. This was the start of another episode of human monstrosity - the Jews Holocaust.

US Forces capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro

In a stunning and unprecedented development that has shaken the foundations of international relations, the United States military launched a large-scale operation against Venezuela on January 3, 2026, resulting in the capture of President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. President Donald Trump announced the news in the early hours of the morning via his Truth Social platform, stating that American forces had successfully executed the strike and removed the Venezuelan leader and his spouse from the country. The operation, described by Trump as a coordinated effort between the military and law enforcement, marked a dramatic escalation in longstanding tensions between Washington and Caracas, drawing immediate global condemnation, cautious support from some quarters, and profound uncertainty about the future of Venezuela.

The events unfolded in the predawn darkness over Caracas, Venezuela's capital. Residents reported hearing multiple loud explosions, accompanied by the roar of low-flying aircraft and sudden power outages across parts of the city. Eyewitness accounts described plumes of smoke rising from key military sites, including Fuerte Tiuna, the country's largest military complex, and La Carlota airbase. Fires burned visibly in the distance, and streets filled briefly with panicked civilians before an eerie calm settled in. The Venezuelan government quickly accused the United States of a grave act of aggression, declaring a state of emergency and calling on citizens to mobilize in defence of national sovereignty. Vice President Deley Rodriguez, in an emotional audio message broadcast on state television, demanded immediate proof of life for Maduro and Flores, confirming that their whereabouts were unknown following the chaos.

Trump's announcement came swiftly after the strikes. In his post, he declared that the United States had carried out the operation to hold Maduro accountable for what the administration has long described as his role in running a narco-state. Hours later, at a press conference from his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, Trump elaborated on the mission's success, praising the bravery of American service members and noting that no U.S. personnel were lost. He shared a photograph purportedly showing Maduro aboard the USS Iwo Jima, a U.S. amphibious assault ship, appearing restrained and under guard. Trump emphasised that the action was justified under

existing indictments against Maduro, and he revealed plans for the United States to temporarily oversee Venezuela's affairs until a safe transition to democracy could be arranged. "We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper, and judicious transition," he stated, hinting at increased American involvement in Venezuela's vast oil sector.

Details of the operation emerged gradually through official statements and media reports. Sources familiar with the mission indicated that elite U.S. special forces, including the Army's Delta Force and possibly elements of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team, played central roles in the ground component. The raid targeted Maduro's location, reportedly one of his secure residences or safe houses in or near Caracas, where forces moved with precision to apprehend him and his wife before Venezuelan defences could fully respond. Supporting airstrikes neutralized key military assets, such as anti-aircraft systems and command facilities, ensuring the extraction team's safety. Attorney General Pam Bondi confirmed that the couple had been indicted in the Southern District of New York on charges including narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation, and possession of machine guns and destructive devices. She described the indictment as part of a long-running case accusing Maduro of partnering with Colombian rebel groups to flood the United States with drugs, undermining national health and security.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Satyabrata Borah

Bondi vowed that the Maduros would face the full force of American justice on U.S. soil. This bold move did not occur in a vacuum. It capped months of escalating pressure from the Trump administration, which had built a substantial military presence in the Caribbean region. Since August 2025, the U.S. had deployed warships, including the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, thousands of troops, and fighter jets, framing the buildup as a counter-narcotics effort under Operation Southern Spear. Strikes on suspected drug-trafficking vessels in the Caribbean had become routine, with dozens of boats destroyed and over a hundred individuals killed, according to reports. Oil tankers linked to the Venezuelan regime were seized, and sanctions tightened, crippling the economy further. The administration had doubled the bounty on Maduro's head to \$50 million and designated elements of his government as terrorist organizations. All this stemmed from 2020 indictments accusing Maduro of narco-terrorism, com-

pounded by U.S. rejection of his 2024 reelection as fraudulent and support for opposition leader Edmundo González as the legitimate winner. Venezuela's descent into the crisis provided a broader context. Once one of the wealthiest nations in Latin America due to its massive oil reserves, the country has suffered under years of economic mismanagement, corruption, and authoritarian rule. Hyperinflation ravaged the currency, leading to widespread shortages of food, medicine, and basic services. Millions fled as refugees, creating one of the largest migration crises in modern history. Nicolás Maduro assumed power in 2013 following the death of his mentor, Hugo Chávez, whose socialist revolution initially brought popularity through oil-funded social programs. But as global oil prices plummeted and governance faltered, the Bolivarian dream soured. Maduro's regime cracked down on dissent, rigging elections, imprisoning opponents, and relying on loyal military factions to maintain control. International isolation grew, with the U.S. and many Western nations recognising the opposition-controlled National Assembly as the legitimate authority. The capture of a sitting head of state by foreign military forces is extraordinarily rare in modern history, evoking comparisons to the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, where dictator Manuel Noriega was seized on similar drug-trafficking charges and later convicted in American courts. That operation, too, occurred on January 3, adding an eerie historical parallel. Legal experts immediately debated the constitutionality and international legality of the Venezuela action. Some U.S. lawmakers, like Senator Mike Lee, initially questioned whether it amounted to an act of war without congressional approval. However, after briefing from Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Lee accepted the framing that the strikes protected personnel executing a valid arrest warrant, falling under presidential authority. Rubio reiterated that Maduro was not the legitimate president and anticipated no further military action now that he was in custody. Global reactions poured in swiftly, revealing deep divisions. Russia, a key ally of Maduro, condemned the operation as a violation of international law and demanded clarification. Iran echoed similar sentiments, calling it an assault on sovereignty. China expressed concern over instability in the region. In Latin America, responses varied: Mexico and Brazil decried the intervention as crossing unacceptable lines, invoking UN Charter principles against the use of force. Argentina's President Javier Milei, however,

celebrated it as a blow against narco-terrorism. European nations like France and Italy voiced reservations about unilateral military actions while acknowledging concerns over drug trafficking. The United Nations faced calls for an emergency Security Council meeting, though veto powers complicated any unified response. Within Venezuela, the immediate aftermath remained tense but surprisingly subdued. Pro-Maduro supporters gathered in pockets, waving flags and denouncing imperialism, but widespread unrest did not materialize immediately. The military's stance proved crucial; Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López affirmed loyalty to the constitution but avoided direct confrontation. Opposition figures, including María Corina Machado, hailed the development as an opportunity to restore democracy, calling for free elections and the recognition of González as president. Exiled Venezuelans in places like Miami erupted in celebration, seeing the end of an era that had driven them from home. The longer-term implications are profound and unpredictable. With Maduro removed, power nominally passes to Vice President Rodríguez, but her authority is uncertain amid the power vacuum. Trump indicated U.S. intentions to stabilize the country and tap its oil resources, potentially involving American companies in reconstruction. Critics warn of prolonged occupation risks, insurgency from Chavista loyalists, or spillover effects destabilizing neighbors like Colombia. Economically, Venezuela's oil infrastructure, long neglected, could see renewed investment, but rebuilding trust and institutions will take years. Humanitarian concerns loom large, with fears that any chaos could exacerbate the refugee crisis or lead to violence.

This event reshapes geopolitics in the Western Hemisphere. It signals a return to assertive U.S. interventionism under Trump, prioritizing national security threats like drug trafficking over traditional non-intervention norms. For proponents, it represents justice against a criminal regime that endangered American lives through narcotics. Detractors view it as neo-imperialism, setting dangerous precedents for powerful nations targeting disliked leaders. As Maduro and Flores head to trial in New York, the world watches Venezuela's next chapter unfold, hoping for peace amid the ruins of a fallen dictatorship. The operation's success in tactical terms is undeniable, but its strategic legacy will be debated for decades, influencing how nations balance sovereignty, justice, and power in an interconnected world.

Alcohol-Free Picnic

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The yearning of urban society to escape for a while from the mechanical clamour of daily life gives birth to this joyous festival known as picnic or bonhoh. A picnic is an aesthetic endeavour to unite human finitude with the vastness of nature. The true purpose of a picnic is to take temporary respite from everyday struggles, breathe freely under the open sky, strengthen the bonds of affection with relatives and friends, and discover oneself in the serene environment of nature. But it is regrettable that in recent times the pure concept of this recreation has been perverted by the poisonous vapour of degenerate culture, the central point of which is the unrestrained prevalence of alcohol consumption in the name of picnics. When the intoxication of liquor enters the beautiful objectives of a picnic, the definition of joy changes and degenerates into chaotic excitement. Alcohol robs people of conscience, intellect, and sensitivity, resulting in loud shouting and indecent behaviour instead of nature's melodious music. In such a situation, it is not merely necessary but an unavoidable responsibility for the conscious section of society to raise its voice in favour of alcohol-free picnics in the interest of preserving our cultural existence and social stability.

Picnic spots are generally chosen beside rivers, at the foot of hills, or near forested areas where nature roams freely. People go to such places in search of peace, to move away from the artificiality of the city and gain proximity to trees, plants, rivers, and birdsong. Yet in reality, it is observed that some picnic groups transform even that tranquil environment into the city's uproar through the alcohol bottles they carry and loud sound systems. When people, intoxicated by liquor, behave unrestrainedly in the lap of nature, it becomes a grave threat not only to humans but also to the biodiversity of the area. Research and observations show that during the picnic season, wild animals in the vicinity of picnic sites suffer intense stress. Loud music and unnatural human shouting disrupt birds' habitats and breeding processes. Plastic waste, broken glass bottles, and leftover food discarded after drinking not only pollute soil and water but also cause the death of many innocent creatures. Nature is not an object for our enjoyment; it is the foundation of our survival. An alcohol-addled mind cannot comprehend this truth. Through alcohol-free picnics, we can demonstrate our sense of responsibility towards nature. Only when the mind remains steady can people experience the true music in the murmuring of rivers or the whispering of the wind. Therefore, making picnics a medium of reverence towards nature rather than a source of pollution and disorder is the call of the times. In today's busy lifestyle, opportunities for family members to sit together, talk, or spend time are very rare. Picnics provide that opportunity, where three generations -- grandparents, parents, and grandchildren -- can enjoy together. But when alcohol enters such a family gathering, the entire environment loses its sanctity. In our society, drinking in front of elders is considered disrespectful, and for the younger ones it becomes a source of very wrong education. Children and adolescents always imitate their elders. When they see that alcohol consumption is an indispensable part of celebrating joy, the seeds of future addiction are sown in their tender minds. In contrast, in an alcohol-free picnic, children witness the true nature of pure joy. They learn that life can be enjoyed through laughter, games, songs, music, and cordial conversation. Women also feel safer and more comfortable in an alcohol-free environment. Often, undesirable situations or quarrels arising from the influence of alcohol create fear in the minds of women and children, turning a day of joy into horror. Therefore, keeping picnics completely alcohol-free is the duty of every conscious citizen in the interest of family safety, children's mental development, and preserving social etiquette.

Another highly sensitive and important aspect related to picnics is the increasing statistics of accidents and untimely deaths. Every year during this winter season, newspapers carry news of tragic road accidents occurring on the way to or from picnics, the primary cause of most of which is driving under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol relaxes the nervous system, increasing the driver's reaction time and

reducing the ability to make correct decisions. Many innocent lives end prematurely due to excessive speed while intoxicated in the excitement of the picnic. Not only road accidents but also incidents at picnic sites -- such as drowning in deep river water under the influence, or fights breaking out over trivial matters -- are frequent. Becoming crippled for life or embracing death for a moment's fleeting excitement cannot be the act of a person with a sound mind. The concept of alcohol-free picnics can play a crucial role in preventing these unwanted accidents. When every member of the group remains consciously alert, they become more responsible towards one another and capable of protecting themselves from dangers. Life is a gift from God, and no one has the right to destroy it through neglect under intoxication. Safe travel and returning home with happy memories should be the main success of a picnic, and this is possible only through alcohol-free conduct.

Picnics also have a special role in the economy of Assam and the development of rural tourism. The natural beauty of Assam holds immense potential to attract tourists from within the country and abroad. However, the chaotic environment created at our picnic sites often repels dignified tourists who prefer peace. Visitors from outside or locals with cultural sensitivities hesitate to visit places where the atmosphere is polluted by gatherings of drinkers. If we can develop our picnic spots as alcohol-free, clean, and family-centred recreation centres, it will bring a new surge to the tourism industry. A healthy and peaceful environment always attracts more people, opening avenues for local earnings. Alcohol-free tourists generally show greater interest in local culture, food, and handicrafts, directly benefiting the rural economy. On the other hand, a picnic culture centred only on alcohol brings disrepute to the place and negatively affects local social life. Local businesses can profit by selling traditional pitha, fruits, and customary foods rather than depending solely on alcohol or farmed meat. Thus, from an economic perspective as well, promoting alcohol-free picnics is a profitable and long-term step towards development. A change in mindset cannot happen suddenly, but a collective effort for alcohol-free picnics is essential. Considering alcohol consumption as a sign of sophistication in the name of modernity is utter foolishness. True modernity means thoughtful living, health awareness, and social responsibility. Today's youth must realise that life can be celebrated without resorting to addiction. The efforts currently being made by various social organisations and the administration to build public opinion in favour of alcohol-free picnics require active cooperation from the people to succeed. We can include creative activities in picnic programmes. Instead of merely eating, drinking, and dancing, we can organise literary discussions, quiz competitions, displays of local folk culture, practice of musical instruments, or group games. Such programmes not only make the time enjoyable but also aid our mental and intellectual growth. The pure joy of consciously enjoying nature and human company is incomparable to lying unconscious from drinking. We must convey this message to our children: the source of joy is not inside a bottle but within our minds and in the world around us.

In conclusion, an alcohol-free picnic is not merely a process of abstaining from liquor for one day; it is a resolve to build a healthy and strong society. It reflects our character, restraint, and refined taste. We should not allow such a destructive force as alcohol to find patronage in a popular festival like the picnic and dim our glorious identity. If every picnic group questions its conscience and shows the courage to abstain from alcohol, we will witness radical change in a very short time. Alcohol-free picnics give us physical well-being, mental peace, family unity, and a beautiful environment. Come, let us all take this pledge that we will keep our picnics alcohol-free. Let us carry with us laughter, joy, and affection, and bring home only golden memories. The intoxication of alcohol is momentary, but the proximity to nature and the love of dear ones experienced with a healthy mind is eternal. This small step of ours will guide future generations towards a healthy culture and establish a pure stream of recreation in the heart of Assam. No artificial addiction is needed to celebrate life; what is needed is only an indomitable desire to live and a pure heart.

Beyond Budgets: Mobilising private capital for India's health financing gap

By: Nimisha Chadha

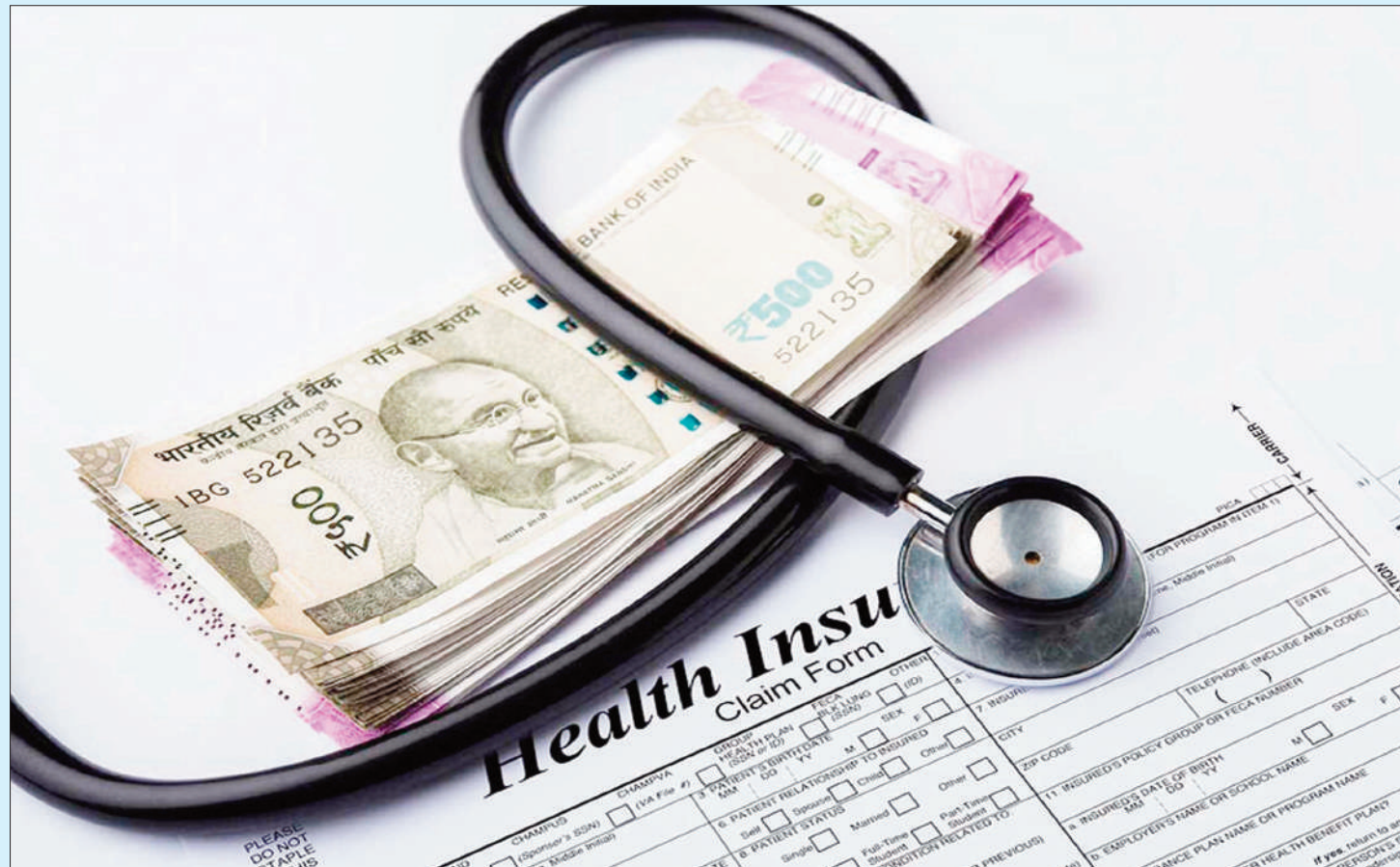
India has demonstrated a commitment to expanding health financing in recent years, yet it remains far from attaining universal health coverage (UHC). Despite increasing budgets, large parts of the system still operate with shortfalls, signalling a gap between ambition and outcomes. Government health expenditure (GHE) rose from 1.4 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in FY18 to 1.9 percent in FY24. Between FY21 and FY25 (budget estimates) alone, GHE increased at a compounded annual growth rate of 18 percent, rising from INR3.2 lakh crores to INR6.1 lakh crores. By FY22, GHE's share of total health expenditure had also increased to 48 percent (from 29 percent in FY15), while the share of out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) fell to 39.4 percent (from 64.2 percent in FY14), supported by publicly financed insurance schemes.

However, despite this progress, GHE continues to remain below the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 recommendation of 2.5 percent of GDP, leaving a persistent gap between current spending and policy objectives. Further, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), India's UHC Service Coverage Index — a proxy for service access rather than financial protection — stood at 69 percent (on a scale of 0-100) in 2023. A study that adapted the WHO UHC framework found substantial geographic and wealth-based disparities, with district-level coverage ranging from 26.4 percent to 69.4 percent across 687 districts.

INR154,574 crore is required annually to achieve targets across five priority programmes — non-communicable diseases, tuberculosis, vector-borne diseases, mental health, and trauma and burns — which together account for 66 percent of the nation's disease burden. However, in 2022-23, Union and State expenditures associated with these priority programmes amounted to INR50,477 crore, falling short by INR104,097 crore.

The National Health Systems Resource Centre's 2025 financial gap analysis uses a normative costing approach to estimate that INR154,574 crore is required annually to achieve targets across five priority programmes — non-communicable diseases, tuberculosis, vector-borne diseases, mental health, and trauma and burns — which together account for 66 percent of the nation's disease burden. However, in 2022-23, Union and State expenditures associated with these priority programmes amounted to INR50,477 crore, falling short by INR104,097 crore. In parallel, estimates suggest that, with the adoption of new technologies and a greater focus on prevention and wellness, India will require an additional US\$156 billion to achieve the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Given the magnitude of underfunding, government financing is likely to remain insufficient to adequately support India's public health priorities and infrastructure gaps. Further, while healthcare in India is predominantly domestically financed, in the context of declining foreign development assistance for health globally, even modest losses in external assistance may register as significant. Collectively, this points to the need to mobilise additional resources and private capital — through corporate social responsibility (CSR), public-private partnerships (PPPs), and innovative financing mechanisms — to finance public health priorities, infrastructure development, and health innovation.



Mobilising Private Capital for Health: Opportunities and Challenges

Beyond government budgets, in 2013, India became the first country to mandate CSR spending (two percent of the average net profit from the previous three years for companies of net worth \geq INR 500 crore, or turnover \geq INR 1,000 crore, or net profit of \geq INR 5 crore), which has since become a significant source of health financing. In FY 2023-24, CSR allocations to healthcare amounted to INR 7,150.81 crore, representing 20.48 percent of total CSR spending. While the legislation has helped generate additional funds for human development and improve transparency, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) notes that it comes with challenges, including the lack of government guidance on fund distribution, unequal distribution of funding across states, a focus on spending targets over social impact, and the need for greater oversight and enforcement mechanisms.

Further, while India's NHP 2017 encourages PPPs, a 2021 review by the National Health Systems Resource Centre of PPPs under the National Health Mission finds that, in India's healthcare sector, PPPs operate largely as government-funded service contracts rather than as tools for capital mobilisation. Ambiguity in contracts, differences in objectives, limited performance monitoring, and inadequate capacity building across actors constrain their potential. However, the review recognises PPPs as essential in India, requiring course correction before further expansion.

Collectively, this points to the need to mobilise additional resources and private capital — through corporate social responsibility (CSR), public-private partnerships (PPPs), and innovative financing mechanisms — to finance public health priorities, infrastructure development, and

health innovation. Beyond traditional private contributions, innovative financing mechanisms have also begun to emerge. The Impact Investors Council (IIC) documents that in 2024, investments in the Indian health sector reached US\$648 million, positioning it as the third-largest impact investing sector, accounting for 13.4 percent of total impact investment flows. However, the majority of the investments between 2022 and 2024 were directed towards sub-sectors such as diagnostics and decision support, pharmacies (both online and offline), and medical devices, with primary and secondary healthcare receiving significantly smaller shares.

The blended finance market in India — which involves the strategic use of concessional capital from public and philanthropic sources to mobilise private capital from commercial investors to support projects with high development impact potential but limited commercial viability — has grown eightfold between 2010 and 2022. In a decade, funding from blended finance transactions in India amounted to approximately US\$5 billion, of which health-focused sectors secured 15 percent, primarily directed towards infrastructure and service delivery solutions. Upskilling healthcare workers for emergency response also saw significant funding in the post-pandemic period, alongside additional investments at the climate-health nexus.

However, blended finance in healthcare remains underutilised globally. NITI Aayog has highlighted that challenges such as the lack of a strategy to mobilise private sector investment, the need to shift from input-based budgeting to outcome-based funding, high transaction costs and long timelines in structuring blended finance solutions, limited transparency among concessional capital providers and private investors, and an underdeveloped ecosystem, among others, hamper

its adoption at scale.

Social bonds (debt securities that raise funds for social projects) and impact bonds (outcome-based contracts that use private funding to cover upfront capital for service delivery, with investors repaid only if outcomes are achieved) have also begun to emerge as financing tools for health. Between 2006 and 2024, the cumulative aligned social bond volume from India amounted to US\$6.6 billion, of which US\$5.5 billion was issued in 2024 alone. Healthcare accounted for 8 percent of cumulative social-bond proceeds. In parallel, Indian non-banking financial companies raised around US\$1.8 billion in labelled social loans in 2024, earmarked to support microfinance, affordable housing, and education, among others. However, healthcare is underrepresented here.

Health-focused impact bonds such as the Utkrish Impact Bond — the world's first impact bond for maternal and newborn health in Rajasthan — and Pahal's Tuberculosis Impact Bonds have also helped mobilise capital under pay-for-results structures. However, their potential remains largely unrealised due to limited government capacity to design and manage pay-for-results contracts, high transaction and design costs, and the need for robust data systems.

Additionally, according to a 2020 IIC analysis of 422 impact enterprises across sectors, there is an estimated debt financing gap of INR1,564 crore (approximately US\$216 million), indicating that demand for impact debt significantly exceeds supply. For healthcare specifically, this gap is estimated at INR166 crore. Hurdles such as the inability of impact enterprises to meet collateral requirements, weaknesses in the management and data systems of young enterprises for financial reporting and creditworthiness assessment, and the absence of a regulatory framework defining impact investment as a distinct asset class hamper

the sector's growth. The study also indicates that healthcare is among the top three sectors served by both debt and equity impact investments. However, it also notes that investors tend to prefer ownership equity in emerging impact enterprises over debt.

Nevertheless, taken together, the private capital mobilised remains modest compared to the annual public health financing gap of INR104,097 crore and the additional US\$156 billion required to achieve health-related SDGs. With declining international funding, it is imperative to increase efforts to mobilise private capital to attain India's public health goals.

Way Forward

To scale private capital mobilisation, India must establish an institutional and regulatory architecture that lays the foundation for channelling private resources towards public health priorities. This requires the development of standardised criteria to build transparency and accountability, distinguish credible impact-focused entities, reduce information asymmetries, and improve the efficiency of capital flows. In parallel, by modifying the guidelines for CSR use, these resources can be deployed more efficiently through innovative financing structures.

While the private sector has a role to play, differences in objectives mean private capital should be mobilised as a complementary source of financing, with the government retaining primary responsibility.

Additionally, PPP models are currently used primarily as government-funded service contracts. Redesigning PPPs around performance-linked outcomes within pay-for-results structures can help improve their efficiency. Further, PPPs remain underutilised as tools for capital mobilisation, which should be actively encouraged. At present, India's impact bonds remain at the pilot stage but can be scaled, which will require dedicated institutional architecture, robust monitoring mechanisms, and standardised results frameworks. The debt financing gap across impact enterprises also reflects inadequate de-risking mechanisms that deter traditional lenders. Pair-lending models, where concessional development bank debt is matched with commercial lending, should be established with transparent pricing criteria (tied to creditworthiness and social impact metrics) and flexible debt structures. Regulatory frameworks must also formally recognise impact debt as a distinct asset class. Ring-fencing CSR allocations as first-loss provisions and portfolio guarantees would also simultaneously de-risk conventional lenders and address collateral gaps, transforming CSR into leverage-maximising catalytic capital rather than grant-making instruments.

However, it must be noted that while mobilising private capital can help increase the funding available for healthcare, a 2025 report by the World Bank highlights that increasing public resources is fundamental to achieving rapid progress in health and UHC, particularly in reducing financial hardship arising from high OOPE. The report notes that no country has achieved high levels of health coverage without public sources providing the majority of the funding, reflecting the ability of governments to effectively pool financial risks arising from healthcare concerns and promote equity. While the private sector has a role to play, differences in objectives mean private capital should be mobilised as a complementary source of financing, with the government retaining primary responsibility. (Courtesy: ORF)

Supplements that support gut health may also benefit skin health

by Jessica Freeborn

A recent scoping review of over 500 studies sought to map out the currently available research on how oral supplements of probiotics, prebiotics, and synbiotics affect skin outcomes.

The review was published in Nutrition Reviews.

The research implies a possible benefit of probiotics for some skin outcomes, highlights the focus of existing literature, and discusses critical areas of future research.

This review sought to get an expansive look at the research conducted regarding certain supplement use and skin-related outcomes. Researchers asked the following question:

"In humans and animals (population), what evidence is available on the effects of oral probiotics, prebiotics, and synbiotics on maintaining and optimizing skin health and function, and preventing or managing skin conditions (concept) across all study settings relevant to oral delivery (context)?"

Where is the research right now?

As the authors describe in the review, probiotics are live microorganisms, prebiotics are certain substrates that host microorganisms use, and synbiotics are a mix of probiotics and prebiotics.

All of these can offer health benefits. Researchers identified a broad range of information in six databases and from sources like clinical trial registers.

They took into account published and unpublished work, peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed. Researchers excluded certain topical substances that affected the skin microbiome.

They included 516 animal and human studies and seven secondary reports of some of the included studies.

Infants were the most common population studied, with adults aged sixty and under being the second most common category.

When it came to skin disease prevention, research primarily focused on supplementation during pregnancy and infancy.

For skin health and function, the focus was mainly on adults and older adults. Finally, with skin disease management, the authors note that 66% "of the available evidence on disease management outcomes pertains to children 0 to 18 years old."

In addition to research in people, there was also substantial animal research in the review. Almost 90% of the animal research used mice.

Over 200 studies in humans examined oral probiotics, while 34 examined oral prebiotics, and 41 looked at oral synbiotics. The most common genus of probiotic was Lactobacillus.

Among human studies, about two-thirds had fewer than one hundred participants, 63% of the studies specifically focused on people who already had skin diseases, and 65% focused on the supplements in question as the only intervention. The median intervention time was 12 weeks.

In terms of outcomes, a little over half of them were about eczema management or prevention. The next biggest outcome category related to aspects of skin health and function.

Overall, there was a high level of available evidence regarding atopic dermatitis, and the next most for skin aging, wrinkling, elasticity, or UV response.

There was also some available evidence regarding psoriasis and acne, while other areas, like skin cancer, only had limited available evidence.

Probiotics may help with eczema, acne

Many studies highlighted the beneficial effects of the studied products.

For example, of the experimental and observational studies, 72% that examined management or severity of atopic dermatitis, or eczema, reported at least one positive outcome, and 54% that exam-

ined prevention or prevalence reported at least one positive outcome.

Other studies reported at least one positive effect of probiotics or synbiotics on the severity of acne.

When it came to systematic reviews, 96% of them examined the prevention and management of skin conditions. Most meta-analyses suggested that the supplements could help prevent and decrease the severity of atopic dermatitis.

Amy Huang, MD, a board-certified dermatologist with Medical Offices of Manhattan and contributor to Labfinder, who was not involved in this review, commented on its findings to Medical News Today: "It is well known that imbalances in the microbiome can either trigger or worsen diseases, especially inflammatory skin and gut conditions like atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, and inflammatory bowel diseases. This is the reason why pediatric dermatologists often recommend probiotics to children with eczema. This [review] provides a good review of the current evidence on pre and probiotics use in dermatologic conditions."

Review limitations

While this scoping review was quite extensive, it is possible that the authors missed work that should have been included. Researchers used a specific definition for probiotics that could have impacted the results.

There was also a change in the categorization of some species that impacted some of the studies. Since it was a scoping review, the researchers also did not assess evidence quality, and they included a broad range of study types, so it is important to look at the results cautiously.

Additionally, this review does not capture possible adverse effects not related to skin outcomes. Several review authors further noted conflicts of interest.

Less than 20% of the human experimental studies reported on ethnicity, so researchers could not categorize based on

ethnicity, which may be a critical factor in future research.

Another limitation is that a substantial number of the studies were from Europe and Asia. Asia was also the main source of relevant animal studies. Since probiotics were the most common supplement studied, it is important to take into account the limited evidence about the other supplement types.

Certain skin conditions were more likely to be studied in certain populations, such as older children being the focus of acne-related studies. Thus, it is important to remember that the evidence is not equal across all groups.

Any included studies and systematic reviews had limitations. For example, systematic reviews that only included studies written in a specific language may have then excluded relevant data, and language restrictions may introduce possible bias.

The systematic reviews also "suggest significant heterogeneity between studies." Other areas where there was a lack of information at times were on the type of probiotic strain and dosing, and information on participants' diets.

Clinical implications

Review author Wendy L. Hall, PhD, professor of nutritional sciences at King's College London, noted the following regarding the clinical implications of the research:

"There is encouraging evidence that probiotic supplements may help prevent or manage some skin conditions, particularly atopic dermatitis. We also see emerging potential for supporting skin health in other skin conditions and in the general population. However, clearer guidance for clinicians will depend on better standardisation of probiotic strains, doses and outcome measures across trials."

Tanya Evans, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director of the Skin Cancer Program at the Melanoma Clinic at MemorialCare Saddleback



Medical Center in Laguna Hills, CA, who was not involved in the review, noted that it "is a highly comprehensive and well-structured scoping review that maps the global landscape of probiotics/prebiotics/synbiotics in dermatology."

According to Evans, the most promising finding of the review related to "atopic dermatitis prevention, with substantial evidence," while there was "emerging evidence [on] acne, psoriasis, skin aging, pending stronger trials."

It is, however, "too early to recommend [probiotics, prebiotics, or synbiotics] for rosacea, melasma, alopecia, skin cancer, and other conditions," she added.

Continued research

Researchers identified several components that should be the focus of future research. For example, regarding atopic dermatitis, they suggest that an umbrella review would be helpful to examine evi-

dence consistency.

For other areas like skin cancer, the authors encourage more randomized controlled trials in people to examine efficacy. Since the least-studied group was older adults, this can be a focus of future research.

The authors also note that dietary patterns and geographical differences can affect microorganisms in the gut. This may be an aspect of future research as well.

Hall highlighted the following components of future research to MNT: "Future studies need to consider factors like habitual diet, which can influence both the gut microbiome and skin health. We also recommend more research on the effects of synbiotics on skin conditions, health and function. Studies in underrepresented groups such as older adults are needed, and in less-studied conditions like rosacea, alopecia and melasma."

"There's also a need for updated systematic reviews to help summarize the evidence in areas where there are now a sufficient number of trials for this kind of evidence synthesis, such as acne, in order to guide the development of clinical dietary guidelines," she added. (Courtesy: MNT)

RED FORT BLAST

Accused used 'ghost' SIM cards to communicate with Pakistani handlers



SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Investigations into the "white-collar" terror module linked to the blast near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10 last year show that highly educated doctors used a sophisticated web of "ghost" SIM cards and encrypted apps to coordinate with Pakistani handlers, officials claimed on Sunday.

The outcome of the investigations essentially formed the basis for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to issue a sweeping directive on November 28 last year, mandating that app-based communication services like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal must be continuously linked to an active, physical SIM card within the device.

The officials said the probe into the "white-collar" terror module and the blast led to a web of "ghost" SIM cards being used by the arrested doctors, including Muzammil Ganaie, Adeel Rather and others, as part of a tactical "dual-phone" protocol to evade security agencies.

Each accused, including Dr Umar-un-Nabi, who was killed while driving the explosives-laden vehicle near the Red Fort, carried two to three mobile handsets, they said.

The accused carried one "clean" phone registered in their own names for routine personal and professional use to avoid suspicion and one was the "terror phone" used exclusively for WhatsApp and Telegram communication with their handlers in

Pakistan (identified by codenames 'Ukasa', 'Faizan', and 'Hashmi'). The SIM cards for these secondary devices were issued in the names of unsuspecting civilians whose Aadhaar details were misused, the officials said.

Jammu and Kashmir Police further unearthed a separate racket where SIMs were issued using fake Aadhaar cards, they added. According to the officials, the security agencies noted a disturbing trend where these compromised SIMs remained active on messaging platforms across the border in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) or Pakistan.

By exploiting features that allow messaging apps to run without a physical SIM in the device, the handlers were able to direct the module to learn IED assembly via YouTube and plot "hinterland" attacks, despite the recruits initially wanting to join conflict zones in Syria or Afghanistan.

To plug these security gaps, the Centre has invoked the Telecommunications Act, 2023, and Telecom Cyber Security Rules to "safeguard the integrity of the telecom ecosystem", which includes a rule that within 90 days, all Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUEs) must ensure their apps function only if an active SIM is installed in the device.

The order further directs the telecom operators to automatically log out users from apps like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal in case of the absence of an active

SIM, the officials said, adding that all service providers, including Snapchat, Sharechat and Jiochat, must submit compliance reports to the DoT.

This feature of using apps without a SIM is posing a challenge to telecom cyber security as it is being misused from outside the country to commit cyber frauds and terror activities, the DoT statement had said while explaining the reasoning behind the move.

The directive is being fast-tracked in the Jammu and Kashmir telecom circle. While officials admit it will take time to deactivate all expired or fraudulent SIMs, the move is seen as a critical blow to the digital infrastructure used by terror networks to radicalise and manage "white-collar" operatives.

Failure to comply with these norms will attract stringent action under the Telecom Cyber Security Rules and other applicable laws, the officials said. The "white-collar" terror module began to unravel on the intervening night of October 18-19, 2025, when posters of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) surfaced on walls just outside Srinagar city. The posters warned of attacks on police and security forces in the valley.

Treating it as a serious matter, Senior Superintendent of Police, Srinagar, G V Sundep Chakravarty formed several teams to conduct an in-depth investigation into the case. After piecing together the statements of the arrested accused, the probe led the Srinagar police to Al Falah University in Haryana's Faridabad, where two doctors -- Ganaie, a resident of Koil in south Kashmir's Pulwama and Shaheen Sayeed from Lucknow -- were arrested. A huge quantity of arms and ammunition, including 2,900 kg of ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate and sulphur, was also seized.

The car explosion case near the Red Fort claimed 15 lives and is being investigated by the National Investigation Agency. (PTI)

India voices 'deep concern' over developments in Venezuela

Calls for peaceful resolution of issues



NEW DELHI, Jan 4: India on Sunday voiced "deep concern" over the US capturing Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military operation, and said it is closely monitoring the unfolding situation in the oil-rich South American country.

In its first reaction to the unprecedented American action in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, early on Saturday, New Delhi also called for a peaceful resolution of the situation through dialogue to ensure stability in the region and reaffirmed its support for the well-being of the people of that country.

The United States brought Maduro and his wife, Lady Cilia Flores, to New York to face drug trafficking-related charges. Venezuela, denouncing the US action, has announced a state of national emergency.

"Recent developments in Venezuela are a matter of deep concern. We are closely monitoring the evolving situation," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"India reaffirms its support to the well-being and safety of the people of Venezuela," it said.

New Delhi also called upon "all concerned to address issues peacefully through dialogue, ensuring peace and stability of the region".

The US carried out the military assault on Caracas after consistently accusing Maduro of being involved in drug trafficking.

The Venezuelan leader had stridently denied the charges.

In its brief statement, the MEA said the Indian embassy in Caracas has been in touch with members of the Indian community and will continue to provide all possible assistance to them.

On Saturday night, India advised its nationals to avoid all non-essential travel to Venezuela and urged all those who are in that country to exercise extreme caution. "In view of recent developments in Venezuela, Indian

nationals are strongly advised to avoid all non-essential travel to Venezuela," the MEA said.

"All Indians who are in Venezuela for any reason are advised to exercise extreme caution, restrict their movements, and remain in contact with the Embassy of India in Caracas," it said.

There are around 50 NRIs (non-resident Indians) and 30 PIOs (persons of Indian origin) in Venezuela, according to the embassy in Caracas.

After Maduro and his wife were flown out of Caracas, US President Donald Trump told a news conference that his country will run Venezuela until a transition of power can take place.

"We are going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," Trump said.

The US president also said the "extremely successful" operation should serve as a warning to anyone who would threaten American sovereignty or endanger American lives. (PTI)

Modi likely to inaugurate conference of Speakers of Commonwealth Parliaments

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to inaugurate the conference of presiding officers of Commonwealth nations here on January 15, an official said on Sunday.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will host the four-day Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC) at the Central Hall of the Samvidhan Sadan from January 14-17.

At the CSPOC held in Guernsey last year, the Lok Sabha Speaker had said that the focus of the conference in India would be the application of artificial intelligence and social media in the working of Parliaments.

The conference will have sessions on the topic 'AI in Parliament: Balancing Innovation, Oversight and Adaptation'; 'Social Media and its Impact on Parliamentarians'; 'Security, Health and Wellbeing of Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff'.

A special plenary on 'The Role of Speakers and Presiding Officers in maintaining strong democratic institutions' will be a highlight of the confer-

ence.

The presiding officers will also deliberate on innovative strategies to enhance public understanding of parliament and citizen participation beyond voting.

The CSPOC brings together the Speakers and Presiding Officers of the national parliaments of the independent sovereign states of the Commonwealth. It was created in 1969 as an initiative of then Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada Lucien Lamoureux.

The aim of the CSPOC is to maintain, foster, and encourage impartiality and fairness on the part of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments.

It also seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of parliamentary democracy in its various forms; and develop parliamentary institutions.

At the Guernsey meeting, Birla acknowledged the CSPOC platform as an invaluable opportunity for member countries to exchange best practices, strengthen parliamentary cooperation, and collectively work towards building a just and equitable future. (PTI)

Ballari: Police arrest 26 in banner dispute-linked clashes

BALLARI (KARNATAKA), Jan 4: Police on Sunday said they had arrested 26 people in connection with multiple incidents of violence, including stone-pelting and firing, linked to disputes over banners and bunting here. "Based on evidence collected during the investigation, including witness statements and video footage, police traced and arrested 26 accused and produced them in a court," police said in a statement. 10 Congress workers and 11 BJP workers were among those arrested, all of whom were taken into custody after undergoing medical examinations as part of the arrest procedure, it added.

In connection with the incidents, six cases have been registered at the Brucepote police station and are under investigation.

Police said the probe in all the cases is continuing to establish individual roles and to identify any further involvement in the violence.

Clashes erupted on January 1 in the Avambhavi area on Siruguppa Road, ahead of the inauguration of a Mahatma Jyoti Baobab statue scheduled for January 3 near Valmiki Circle. The violence reportedly stemmed from disputes over the erection of banners and bunting by supporters of ruling Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and BJP MLA G Janardhana Reddy.

During the clashes, stone-pelting occurred, and firing was allegedly carried out by private security personnel, resulting in the death of a man identified as Rajasekhara Reddy.

Several police officers, personnel, and members of the public also sustained injuries in the violence.

The BJP alleged that Gangavati MLA Janardhana Reddy was the target of the attack.

"There was a deliberate attempt to eliminate Janardhana Reddy. Petrol bombs and country-made bombs were brought to the spot," Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka told reporters. (PTI)

Jharkhand govt diluted core spirit of PESA Act, claims BJP

RANCHI, Jan 4: BJP on Sunday alleged that the JMM-led government in Jharkhand has diluted the core spirit of the PESA Act, 1996, as the exact definition of 'gram sabha' in the legislation has been "sidelined" in the notified rules.

Leader of Opposition (LoP) Babul Marandi accused the Hemant Soren government of "tampering" with the core spirit of the PESA Act to "benefit mining mafia and conversion syndicates".

BJP leader Arjun Munda said that the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act specifies that the self-governing system -- based on customary laws, religious practices, and traditions that have existed since ancient times -- shall be called the 'gram sabha', whereas the PESA rules notified by the Jharkhand government mention only "traditions" while defining 'gram sabhas'.

"Rules are made to implement the Act in order to strengthen and mature the system. But in the notified PESA rules, the exact definition of gram sabhas in the Act has been sidelined like a 'cold-blooded murder'," the former Jharkhand chief minister

told reporters here.

He said every rule has its "own definition or preamble that explains in detail what is covered under it".

"But when one reads the newly approved PESA rules, one will find that the points mentioned in the PESA Act, 1996, are missing from the notified rules," he claimed.

There are around 10 states that have Fifth Schedule areas where PESA rules under the provisions of the PESA Act have already been implemented, the BJP leader said.

"In most of these states, the gram sabha has been defined in conformity with the spirit of the Act," the former Union tribal affairs minister said.

However, upon examining the PESA rules in Jharkhand, one finds that the state government has "subtly omitted certain core phrases -- such as customary laws and social and religious practices -- from the provisions related to the gram sabha and village governance", he claimed.

When the "core spirit of the Act is thus diluted, the potential consequences in the future can well be imagined", Munda

added. "I had earlier expressed apprehension over the delay in notifying the PESA rules. After its notification, the government's intention behind framing these rules became clear," Munda stated.

The newly notified rules now clearly reveal "the state government's intention to dilute the provisions of the Act and include phrasing that could easily deceive tribals", he claimed. "The administration will interpret them in its own way, and institutions will view the rules in their own way," the BJP leader said.

If the state government is committed to the core spirit of the Act, it should explicitly incorporate the provisions regarding the gram sabha, as stated in the law, into its rules, the former Union tribal affairs minister said.

Leader of Opposition (LoP) Babul Marandi also alleged that the way the Hemant Soren government has "tampered with the core spirit of PESA to implement it, clearly shows that all this has been done with an objective to benefit mining mafia and conversion syndicates". (PTI)

US attack on Venezuela violation of UN charter: Left parties

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: The US attack on Venezuela is a blatant violation of the UN Charter, the Left parties said on Sunday, while raising concerns over statements from President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The Left parties also held a protest at the Jantar Mantar here against the US action.

In a statement, the parties said they "strongly denounce and condemn the US aggression against Venezuela and the kidnapping of President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores". The statement, jointly issued by the CPI(M), CPI, CPI(ML) Liberation, AIFB and RSP, said it was an attack carried out against a sovereign country in blatant violation of the United Nations Charter.

"US President Donald Trump, in his address, stated that they would capture the oil reserves of Venezuela, laying bare the real intentions behind this aggression. The US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, went a step further and warned that Cuba and Mexico would be their next target," the Left parties said.

"These statements, coming days after the release of the US National Security Strategy 2025, make it clear that US imperialism seeks to impose its hegemony over the entire world, even if it

means carrying out military attacks. The US wants to impose the Trump corollary of the infamous Monroe doctrine that treats the entire Western Hemisphere as its backyard and run its writ," it said.

The Left parties said reports coming from Venezuela indicate that people are mobilising in large numbers against US aggression and to defend their country's sovereignty.

"We extend our wholehearted support and solidarity with the fighting people of Venezuela," they said. The Left parties also called for nationwide protests against US aggression and in solidarity with the people of Latin America.

"We appeal to all peace-loving, anti-imperialist people of our country to mobilise in large numbers and actively participate in these protests. The Government of India must join the voices of countries across the world condemning US aggression and stand firmly with Venezuela," they said.

Hours after an audacious military operation that plucked Maduro from power and removed him from the country, Trump said on Saturday that the United States would run Venezuela at least temporarily and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other countries. (PTI)

Cancel elections where candidates won unopposed, hold polls again in such wards: Uddhav to SEC

MUMBAI, Jan 4: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday demanded that civic elections where candidates, almost all from ruling parties, won unopposed should be cancelled and polls re-initiated in these wards.

Speaking along side Maharashtra Navnirman Sena president Raj Thackeray, Uddhav claimed the atmosphere in the country is like democracy has been taken over by mobocracy.

The two cousins also unveiled their alliance manifesto for Mumbai civic polls on the occasion.

Raj Thackeray asserted that Marathi has to be respected and the mayor of Mumbai and other cities in the state will be Marathi.

Uddhav Thackeray said since his government was dislodged and the Eknath Shinde led the state government (in June 2022), the wealth of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is being splurged for contractors.

If the BMC's expenditure budget is Rs 15,000 crore, then the amount needed to give to contractors for different works in form of advance mobilisation is Rs 3 lakh crore, he claimed.

The former chief minister alleged this is a scam of Rs 3 lakh crore and that the kickback money was being used for the civic polls.

The BJP and its Mahayuti allies have won 68 seats unopposed in the

Maharashtra civic polls scheduled for January 15.

Uddhav Thackeray alleged that after vote-stealing, the ruling parties are now stealing candidates.

"If the SEC has courage, it should cancel elections where candidates were chosen unopposed, initiate poll process again in those wards," the Sena (UBT) chief said.

The former Maharashtra CM said having candidates chosen unopposed is like denying voters, especially 'GenZ', the chance to exercise their franchise.

MNS head Raj Thackeray, in a warning to the ruling dispensation, said power is not permanent and claimed the BJP was setting a wrong precedent.

The ruling party should not complain when its successors resort to such tactics in a more refined way, he stressed.

The MNS president said the BJP had approached the Supreme Court under similar instances in West Bengal where ruling party candidates were chosen unopposed in local body polls, and sought to know the BJP's stand on it.

Incidentally, the BJP has gone on the offensive on the issue of unopposed victories with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, at a road show in Chandrapur during the day, saying the people's mandate would prevail even if opposition parties went to court. (PTI)

Over 80 per cent of psychiatric patients in India do not receive timely care: Indian Psychiatric Society

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: The Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) has expressed deep concern over the persistently high mental health treatment gap in India, noting that nearly 80-85 per cent of individuals suffering from psychiatric disorders do not receive timely or appropriate care. This stark reality, which is supported by national and global evidence, was highlighted during the curtain raiser event of the 77th Annual National Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society, AN-CIPS 2026, to be held from January 28-31 at Yashobhoomi in Delhi.

Mental health experts warned that despite advances in treatment and increasing awareness, the majority of people with mental illness continue to remain outside the formal healthcare system.

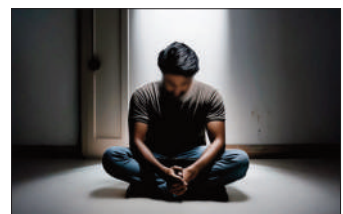
Data from the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) indicates that India faces one of the widest treatment gaps in the world, with over 85 per cent of people suffering from common mental disorders not seeking or receiving treatment.

In a global context, more than 70 per cent of individuals with mental illness do not receive care from trained healthcare professionals, and in many low-income countries, fewer than 10 per cent of those in need ac-

tually access necessary treatment. India, with its vast population and limited mental health infrastructure, remains particularly vulnerable to this challenge. Addressing the gathering, Dr Savita Malhotra, President of the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS), emphasised that mental illnesses are among the most treatable health conditions if identified early and managed appropriately. "Mental health disorders are highly treatable, yet the majority of patients in India continue to suffer in silence. The fact that over 80 per cent of people do not receive timely psychiatric care reflects deep-rooted stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate integration of mental health services into primary healthcare.

"This is not just a medical concern; it is a social, economic, and developmental issue that demands that India faces one of the widest treatment gaps in the world, with over 85 per cent of people suffering from common mental disorders not seeking or receiving treatment.

Social stigma and discrimination remain major barriers, as individuals fear being labelled, judged, or marginalised by family, workplace and society.



Lack of awareness further compounds the problem, with many people failing to recognise early symptoms of mental illness as medical conditions requiring professional help. Another significant contributor to the treatment gap is the acute shortage of mental health professionals in India. Dr Nimesh G Desai, Chairperson, Organising Committee and former Director of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), highlighted the serious consequences of delayed or absent treatment. When psychiatric care is delayed, the illness often becomes more severe and chronic, leading to greater disability, family distress, loss of productivity and a significantly increased risk of self-harm and suicide, he said.

"Mental health must be addressed with the same urgency and seriousness as physical health. Strengthening community-based

services, training primary care doctors, and improving referral systems are essential steps to bridge this unacceptable treatment gap," Desai said.

Highlighting the role of the upcoming national conference, Dr Deepak Raheja, Organising Secretary of AN-CIPS Delhi and Director, Hope Care India, said that that integration of mental health services into primary healthcare, increased budgetary allocation, expansion of the mental health workforce and sustained nationwide awareness campaigns are urgently needed to reduce stigma and improve access. "AN-CIPS 2026 Delhi will serve as a vital platform for mental health professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders to come together and develop practical, evidence-based solutions to improve access, affordability, and acceptability of mental healthcare. Our collective aim is to ensure that no individual is denied mental health support due to fear, stigma, or lack of resources," Raheja said.

The burden of untreated mental illness is particularly severe among vulnerable groups. Studies indicate that nearly 80 per cent of children and adolescents with diagnosable mental disorders in certain regions

do not receive any form of treatment, affecting their education, emotional well-being, and long-term life outcomes. Similarly, close to 84 per cent of older adults with mental health conditions in India remain untreated, often due to neglect, lack of awareness, social isolation, or the mistaken belief that psychological symptoms are a normal part of ageing.

Delayed treatment has far-reaching consequences not only for individuals and families but also for society and the economy. Untreated mental illness contributes to increased morbidity and mortality, higher rates of substance use disorders, unemployment, family breakdown and suicide, experts said.

While recent initiatives such as the Tele-MANAS national mental health helpline, expansion of the District Mental Health Programme and greater policy focus on mental health are positive steps, IPS experts stressed that these efforts must be scaled up substantially to meet the growing demand.

The IPS emphasised that mental health must be recognised as an integral component of overall health, deserving the same priority, investment and urgency as physical healthcare. (PTI)

Tripura CM urges people to vote for BJP in tribal council elections

AGARTALA, Jan 4: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday urged voters to support the BJP in the upcoming elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) for peace and development.

The 30-member tribal council, currently ruled by the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), is scheduled to go to the polls in March.

Addressing a BJP programme at Barmura in Khowai district, Saha said development and peace had gained momentum in the state after the BJP came to power.

"Tripura has secured the second position in GSDP and per capita income among the northeastern states, while NITI Aayog has declared it a front-runner state. If you want peace and development to continue, vote for the BJP in the TTAADC elections," he said.

Accusing the communists for engineering ethnic riots in 1980, he said around 3,000 tribal and non-tribal people



had become victims of the ethnic flare-up.

"They had created outlawed groups such as National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) to carry out bloodshed (during late 90's) but the BJP has managed to bring them back to the national mainstream by signing peace agree-

ments", he said.

Without naming Tipra Motha Party (TMP), the chief minister lashed out at its ally for attempting to issue a dictat to the BJP on certain issues.

"Those who are now vocal about thansa (unity) were forced to remain mute spectators during the communist regime. We want the alliance to

continue, but the behaviour should be that of a younger brother, not a big brother," he said. The CM said, "The BJP will never allow a force whom it has created to meddle in our domain. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah too will not allow".

Saha said the government would welcome any indigenous script for the mother tongue of most tribal communities.

"I have already stated in the Assembly that the government favours maintaining the status quo on the Kokborok script, meaning students can write in both Bengali and Roman scripts. I have found that only a few students at class 10 and 12 levels opt for the Roman script," he said.

Recently, TMP supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma strongly advocated that Roman script should be introduced for Kokborok language respecting the sentiment of indigenous people. (PTI)

Tripura opposition leader demands job for family member of Dehradun murder victim

'Money is not the price of Anjel Chakma'



AGARTALA, Jan 4: Leader of the opposition in Tripura Assembly, Jitendra Chaudhury, on Sunday demanded a government job for one of the family members of Anjel Chakma, who was murdered in Dehradun in December.

Chaudhury visited the victim's house and criticised the handling of the case by Uttarakhand police.

"The way Uttarakhand police handled Anjel Chakma's murder is a serious matter. The cops had initially lodged a case under

a relatively less stringent section despite the fact that he was grievously stabbed," he told reporters.

Anjel, a resident of Machmara in Tripura's Unakoti district, was stabbed after he allegedly objected to racial slur at Dehradun on December 9 and later he succumbed to his injuries on December 26.

He also cited claims by Tarun Prasad Chakma, Anjel's father, that the young man might have survived had proper treatment been provided at the hospital.

Chaudhury urged the Tripura government to request Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to arrange a government job for Anjel's family.

"Money is not the price of Anjel Chakma who was studying MBA in Dehradun. I urge the Tripura government to request the Uttarakhand CM for a government job to a member of Anjel's family because his father, who is a serving BSF jawan, is scheduled to retire next year", he said.

The Uttarakhand government has paid ₹ 4.12 lakh while Tripura government extended a financial assistance of ₹ 5 lakh and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) handed over a cheque of Rs 3 lakh to Anjel's family. (PTI)

Conrad Sangma underscores importance of CM-Connect programme

SHILLONG, Jan 4: In the first CM-Connect programme of 2026, aimed at strengthening direct interaction between the government and the people, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, interacted with the villagers of Memillam village, under Adokgre C&RD Block, located on the outskirts of North Garo Hills district, on Saturday.

Expressing satisfaction at beginning the year by engaging directly with citizens at the grassroots level, the Chief Minister said that the CM-Connect platform provides an important opportunity to understand the aspirations, challenges and developmental needs of rural communities.

He emphasised that such interactions help the government frame people-centric policies and ensure timely delivery of public services.

During the interaction, villagers raised concerns related to road connectivity, electricity, drinking water supply, school infrastructure and agri-horticulture activities.

After detailed deliberations on each issue, the Chief Minister as-



sured the villagers that all grievances would be addressed through proper follow-up by the concerned departments.

The Chief Minister announced the sanction of ₹ 200 crore for the construction of Adokgre -- Mangsang road connecting Memillam village under the World Bank-assisted project, and assured that the process for initiating the work would commence soon.

He also stated that funds for repair and improvement of school infra-

structure would be provided under the Chief Minister's Special Development Scheme.

Highlighting the purpose of the CM-Connect programme, the Chief Minister stated that the initiative is designed to bridge the gap between the administration and the people by bringing governance directly to villages, enabling citizens to voice their concerns without intermediaries, and ensuring transparency, accountability and swift grievance redressal. (NNN)

Akhand Bharat Sanatan Indigenous Sewa Samiti formed, condemns killing of Tripura student

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Jan 4: The Akhand Bharat Sanatan Indigenous Sewa Samiti (ABSIS) was officially formed in Tezu, Arunachal Pradesh, on Sunday with the objective of promoting national unity, cultural preservation and social service among indigenous communities of the region.

The newly constituted organisation will function under the leadership of advocate Mayur Drai as president, Krishna Mahato as vice president, Akash Ghimirey as joint secretary, Sonup Sonar as treasurer, Rupal Dutta as head of Shiksha and Gyan (Education and Knowledge), Thagnem Tayang as head of Sanskriti Raksha (Cultural Preservation), advocate Krimso Kumar Yadav as patron and Yayin Tayang as organising secretary.

Soon after its formation, the organisation issued a strong statement condemning the recent killing of Angel Chakma, a student



from Tripura who was allegedly murdered in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, in what has been described as a racially motivated attack.

The ABSIS termed the incident "inhuman and against the spirit of

national integrity" and demanded stringent legal action against those responsible for the crime.

The organisation stated that the killing of an innocent student on the basis of racial identity is shock-

ing and unacceptable in a country that prides itself on unity in diversity. It urged the Uttarakhand government as well as the Union Home Ministry to take immediate steps to ensure justice and prevent the recurrence of such incidents in future.

Appealing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the organisation called for the formulation of strong and comprehensive laws to address racially motivated crimes and to ensure the safety and security of citizens from the Northeastern states living in other parts of the country.

The newly formed body also announced that it would initiate awareness campaigns across Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast to promote harmony, equality and social unity.

The Samiti reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the values of Sanatan Dharma, indigenous identity and the constitutional ideal of one nation and one people.

A Muhamed Mustaque takes oath as Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court

GANGTOK, Jan 4: A Muhamed Mustaque on Sunday took oath as the Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court.

Governor Om Prakash Mathur administered the oath of office to Justice Mustaque at a function held at the Lok Bhawan here.

He became the 24th Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, along with his council of ministers and senior officials were present on the occasion.

Chief Justice Mustaque succeeds Biswanath Somadder, who retired recently.

Justice Mustaque was earlier the Acting Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court. (PTI)

Itanagar mourns passing of Bamang Amand

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, Jan 4: Late Bamang Amand, former PRI leader, social worker and youth leader, was laid to rest at his Khumko residence in Chimpu recently, following his passing earlier that morning.

He was 39 years old.

The last rites were attended by hundreds of people from various walks of life, including Itanagar Capital Complex MLA Techhi Kaso, former Home Minister Bamang Felix, Arunachal Pradesh Human Rights Commission Acting Chairman Bamang Tago, former ZPM Bamang Mangha, PRI leaders from Papum Pare and Kurung Kumey, social workers, family members, friends, well-wishers and executive members of Bamang Yorkum Lapang.

Late Bamang Amand was born on January 30, 1986, to late Bamang Taju of Langro Village, Nyobia Circle, Kurung Kumey District.

He moved to Itanagar at an early age and was residing in Chimpu.

He served the public as GPM of Chimpu-III in 2008 and later as ASM, 1-Bat under 11-Ganga-Bat ZP Constituency in 2013.

His untimely demise is considered an immeasurable loss to his family and the community with his dedication, selflessness and commitment widely remembered. Several condolence messages have been received, including from

The Bamang Yerikum Lapang (formerly Murh-Hatey Academic Development Society) and MLA Techhi Kaso.

Ten injured as picnic vehicle overturns in East Kameng

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, Jan 4: Around ten people were reportedly injured on Sunday morning in East Kameng district when a vehicle carrying more than a dozen passengers for a picnic met with an accident.

A case has been registered at Seppa Police Station and investigations are underway.

The Dy SP of Seppa, Mibom Yirang, informed that on January 4, a Bolero pick-up vehicle bearing registration number AS-12-E-2758, driven by Tayu Yano, was carrying approximately 17-18 people and was proceeding towards Naraba, Lumdang for hiking and picnic purposes.

At around 9:30 AM, while en route near Lumdang, the vehicle suffered brake failure.

Upon noticing the problem, the driver attempted to control the vehicle by steering it towards a roadside hill, however, the vehicle subsequently rolled over on the road. As a result of the accident, ten people sustained injuries. Of these, three suffered head injuries and were referred to Tezpur, Assam, for further medical treatment.

The Dy SP confirmed that a case has been registered at Seppa Police Station and the matter is under investigation.

Ganja plants worth ₹ 100 crore destroyed in Tripura



AGARTALA, Jan 4: A total of 19 lakh premature ganja plants worth ₹ 100 crore have been destroyed in various locations in Tripura's Sepahijala district, police said on Sunday.

A joint team comprising state police, BSF and Tripura State Rifles (TSR) carried out the day-long operation on Saturday.

Acting on a tip-off, the joint force of 600 personnel carried out the operation on 650 acres of forest lands in North Kalamchoura, South Kalamchoura,

Anandapur and Ghatigarh areas.

Additional Superintendent of Police of Sepahijala district, Rajib Sutradhar, said police have been using drones to identify ganja plantations in dense forests before launching operations.

"A total of 19 lakh premature ganja plants worth ₹ 100 crore have been destroyed in various locations in Saturday's operation. The anti-cannabis drive will continue," he said.

Sonamura police station officer-in-charge Tapan Das said that locals had grown ganja on 650 acres of forest land, but no arrests have been made so far.

This was the highest quantity of ganja plants destroyed in Tripura in a single-day drive, he added.

Processed ganja is smuggled to states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where it is sold for a higher value, according to police. (PTI)

AAPLU distributes essentials, raises awareness on workers' welfare at Tali

Labour Union urges registration with APB&OCWWB to avail benefits

HT Correspondent
TALI, Jan 4: The All Arunachal Pradesh Labour Union (AAPLU) on Saturday organised a mass awareness campaign on labour and workers' welfare activities and distributed essential items at the Tali ADC circle headquarters in Kra Daadi district.

Led by AAPLU president Dana Tadu, the team interacted with the labourer community, emphasising the importance of their role as nation builders.

He highlighted that the Arunachal Pradesh Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (APB&OCWWB) provides several benefits to registered workers, including financial assistance for school and college students, medical aid, funeral and birth incentives and more.

Dana Tadu urged both organised and unorganised workers to register with the board to avail these benefits.

Thousands of workers from



BRO, construction agencies, the Army and various departments have already registered, but Dana Tadu stressed the need for local labourers engaged in other organisations to also enroll.

"Organising such a mega awareness programme is a challenging task, especially after heavy rainfall last night, but the turnout today has been encouraging. It helps people understand the role of the Labour Board and the benefits provided to the workers' community," he said.

Speaking to reporters, Dana Tadu said that AAPLU annually organises such programmes in remote and far-flung areas and this time Tali was chosen despite cold winter and inclined weather conditions.

Apart from awareness sessions, blankets and kitchen sets provided by APB&OCWWB were distributed to more than 250 workers and labourers.

He added that AAPLU will continue organising similar initiatives for the welfare of the state's labour community across different regions.

AAPLU vice president Tacho Dana Tariong, zonal vice president (West) Tamuk Rarung, Convenor Dana Taruj, Kra Daadi district president Taku Pitro and other executive members of AAPLU, along with officials from APB&OCWWB, were present during the awareness campaign and distribution programme.

North East Integration Rally kicks off from Kolkata



IMPHAL, Jan 4: The North East Integration Rally (NEIR) began its journey from Kolkata on Sunday, marking the start of a month-long initiative aimed at strengthening regional integration and people-to-people ties across the North Eastern states, said Biswadeep Gupta, managing trustee of NEIR.

Gupta informed from Kolkata that the inaugural session saw the participation of public representatives, professionals, cultural figures and civil society members.

Notable attendees included AL Hek MLA and former minister, Lopamudra Dutta Choudhury vice

chairperson of Dumdum Municipal Corporation, Dr Prof Sukumal Deb, Col Shanti Kumar Singh (retd), author RK Maheshwari, engineer Tapash Roy, celebrated artiste K Bobin, Kh Gajendra Singh, Dr Sharmistha Raha of Prasar Bharati, Biplab Das of Kolkata Police and an adventure enthusiast.

The programme was compered by Biswadeep Gupta, head of KRC Foundations.

Speakers at the event praised the initiative as a small but meaningful step toward fostering unity and understanding, with many highlighting their personal and professional

links to the North Eastern states. Gupta added that the next leg of the rally will be held in Malda.

A cultural highlight of the session was a performance by K Bobin, who rendered the official title song of the rally.

During the programme, speakers reiterated the rally's objectives, which include promoting infrastructure development, expanding economic opportunities, encouraging cultural exchange and deepening people-to-people engagement across states.

The rally also received a warm welcome at Panihati in Kolkata, where members of Udayar Pathe greeted the participants and expressed support for the initiative.

The rally's pre-launch ceremony had been held on December 24, 2025, at The Countryside Retreat in Lamshang, Imphal, formally marking the start of preparations for the 2026 edition.

Built around the central theme of peace, progress and prosperity, the North East Integration Rally aims to highlight development, connectivity and social cohesion across the region.

The rally is scheduled to conclude on February 4, 2026, Gupta added. (NNN)

BAD LIGHT STOPS PLAY IN FINAL ASHES TEST

Root and Brook guide England to 211-3



SYDNEY, Jan 4: Joe Root and Harry Brook shared a 154-run partnership to guide England to 211-3 before bad light stopped play on Day 1 of the final Ashes test...

land took control on a pitch that didn't appear to offer too much assistance for Australia's bowlers. Root made his 67th test fifty off 65 balls with seven boundaries...

Mitchell Starc ended their partnership at 35 when he teased an edge from Duckett (27) through to wicketkeeper Alex Carey for his 27th wicket of the series.

VARANASI (UP), Jan 4: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said that in recent years sports in the state and the country have been guided by a new vision, new resources and renewed confidence.

New new vision for sports in state and country: UP CM



The emerging 'new sports culture,' guided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has strengthened discipline, fitness, and team spirit among the youth, he said.

Adityanath said that in the last 8-8.5 years, efforts have been made to promote sports competitions in Uttar Pradesh.

Bangladesh names 15-member squad for T20 WC

DHAKA, Jan 4: Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday announced a 15-member squad with Litton Das as captain for the T20 World Cup next month...

Barcelona goalie Garcia shrugs off hostile homecoming at Espanyol for derby win

BARCELONA, Jan 4: Goalkeeper Joan Garcia shrugged off the jeers and vitriol in his return to Espanyol and Barcelona teammate Fermin Lopez set up two late goals for a 2-0 victory in a heated Catalan derby.

The loss broke a run of five straight victories by Espanyol, its best winning run since the 1998-99 season. 'Today was a day to win and we let it get away from us,' Espanyol's Gonzalez said.

MILAN, Jan 4: Gian Piero Gasperini's return to Bergamo ended in defeat as his Roma lost at Atalanta 1-0 in Serie A. Giorgio Scalvini claimed the only goal in the 12th minute and Atalanta rose to eighth place.

Gasperini's homecoming heartbreak: Roma

Como was three points further back after a Lucas Da Cunha penalty gave it a 1-0 win over Udinese. There was a minute's silence before kickoff in every game in Serie A this weekend for the victims of the fire at a Crans-Montana bar.

Sadio Mané-inspired Senegal and Mali set up Africa Cup quarterfinal

RABAT (MOROCCO), Jan 4: Sadio Mané led Senegal to the quarterfinals of the Africa Cup of Nations after a 3-1 win over Sudan in Tangier.

minutes later. Mali digs even deeper. El Bilal Touré fired Mali into the quarterfinals with the winning penalty in a 3-2 shootout win over Tunisia after they finished 1-1 with extra time.

It was the first and last goal scored by a Sudanese player in the tournament. The Falcons of Jediane defeated Equatorial Guinea in the group stage thanks to an own goal.

Making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics: PM Modi

VARANASI, Jan 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympic Games, and declared his government was committed to providing 'more and more players greater opportunities to compete' by hosting mega sporting events in the country.

the country is making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics, with the aim of giving more and more players greater opportunities to compete,' said Modi.

Recalling the time when the government and society were indifferent towards sports, he said the past decade had brought about a massive change in the mindset of the country.



being one of them,' he said. 'India's progress is not limited to the economic front but is also reflected in the confidence seen on the sports field. India's performance across various sports has con-

sistently improved since 2014,' he added. Elaborating on the reforms his government had undertaken in the sports, the PM said the National Sports Governance Act and the Khelo Bharat Policy 2025 will provide opportunities to the right talent and increase transparency in sports organisations.

1,000 players, representing 58 teams, from across the country. 'Hosting the National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi underscores the growing emphasis on strengthening sports infrastructure and promoting athletic development in the city.'