



- UK's Starmer heads to China seeking a thaw in relations but risking rift with Trump
- North Korea launches ballistic missiles into sea between Korean Peninsula, Japan
- India riding on reforms express: PM Modi
- Govt turns down Oppn demands for discussion on VB-G RAM G Act, SIR during Budget Session

## Ill-fated boat was on its way to Borghul char from Rahampur with 22 people

### Boat sinks in Brahmaputra, six missing



**BARPETA, Jan 27:** At least six people, including four children, went missing after a machine-operated country boat sank in the Brahmaputra river in Barpeta district of Assam on Tuesday, officials said.

The police, civil administration and State Disaster Response Force

(SDRF) personnel have started rescue operations with the help of locals.

According to Barpeta Revenue Circle Field Officer Jyotirmoy Choudhury, the accident took place when the boat was going to Borghul char (riverine vegetative islands) from Rahampur carrying

22 people.

"When the boat was sailing, it reportedly came into contact with a whirlpool and sank. Most of the people were rescued by a nearby boat," he added.

However, six people are still missing and four of them are children, Choudhury said.

"The locals informed us that the boat was sailing without any safety measures. None of the passengers were wearing life jackets," he added.

The official said that the exact reason of the accident will be known after questioning the pilot of the boat, who is undergoing treatment now.

The missing people have been identified as Madhu Mia (60), Sukurjan Nesa (45), Amina Parbin (8), Rahul Amin (7), Aryan Islam (4) and Junufa Yasmin (5), Choudhury said. (PTI)

## Elderly woman trampled to death by wild elephants



**DIPHU, Jan 27:** A 70-year-old woman was trampled to death by a wild elephant in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district on Tuesday, a police officer said.

The woman, identified as Kasang Kropi, was returning from a religious programme along with a group of women when they came across a herd of wild elephants at Hijunglangsang village in Jirikideng police station area, he said.

An elephant trampled her to death while the other women managed to flee from the spot.

The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, the officer added. (PTI)

## 'Names of 4-5 lakh Miya votes to be deleted from poll rolls during SIR' Himanta allays fears of Assamese people

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday asserted that no Assamese people are facing any problems due to the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in Assam, claiming that only 'Miyas'—a term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims—are finding the process difficult.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Digboi, Sarma said the current SR exercise was only a preliminary step and that when the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is carried out in the state, four to five lakh 'Miya' votes would be removed from the electoral rolls.

He maintained that those who do not belong to the state should not be allowed to vote in Assam.

"There is no problem for Assamese people because of the Special Revision. If Miyas are facing difficulties, why should we be concerned?" Sarma said, reiterating that the exercise was aimed at protecting



the state's identity.

He claimed that arrangements were being made to ensure that such voters do not participate in elections in Assam.

The chief minister further alleged that demographic changes were becoming evident in parts of Upper Assam.

Referring to land transaction data from Tinsukia district, Sarma

claimed that more Hindus were selling land while more 'Miya' Muslims were purchasing it.

"If we are not cautious now, they will spread to places like Duliyaan, Digboi and Tinsukia," he said.

Sarma said the Congress was free to criticise him, but asserted that his responsibility was to take steps that would prevent 'Miyas' from voting in the state.

## 4 arrested, drugs worth ₹ 3 crore seized

**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** Four people have been arrested and drugs valued at around Rs 3 crore seized in Assam's Cachar district, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

"Yaba dealers thought Cachar was a safe hideout but @assam-police ensured it was 'Game Over' for them. 20,000 tablets seized, 4 arrested & ₹ 3 crore 'loss report' for the drug mafia," Sarma said.

"In Assam, the only thing getting 'high' is our commitment to a drug-free future," he added.

Yaba tablets, also called 'crazy drug', contain a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine, and have been banned in India. (PTI)



the European Union.

"This is not just a trade agreement. This is a new blueprint for shared prosperity," Modi said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that it is a deal that gives unprecedented market access for over 99 per cent of India's exports by value.

Goyal said that the pact is a strategic breakthrough in the country's global trade engagement, un-

locking vast opportunities in the USD 20 trillion EU market for 1.4 billion people.

Once the agreement is implemented, except for auto and steel, almost all the Indian goods (over 93 per cent) from India will get zero-duty access in the European Union, and of the remaining over 6 per cent, Indian exporters will get tariff reduction and quota-based duty concessions (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## India-EU FTA to boost various sectors of Assam: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the new free trade agreement between India and the European Union will boost the state's different sectors like tea, spices, handicrafts and minerals.

India and the European Union sealed a landmark free trade agreement -- billed as "mother of all deals" -- with the top leadership of the two regions unveiling a grand agenda to leverage trade and defence to shore up ties and work towards a rules-based world order.

"The Mother of All Trade Deals! The #IndiaEUTradeDeal will open up new opportunities of growth for various sectors and propel development in two of the biggest economies of the world," Sarma said in a post on X. "This FTA will significantly (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Assam-Meghalaya border situation improved: M'laya Dy CM



**SHILLONG, Jan 27:** Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister in-charge Home, Prestone Tynsong said on Tuesday that the situation along the Assam-Meghalaya border, specifically in Maikhuli, has improved significantly.

"Right from that time, we constituted regional committees from both sides of the states, and we could see lots of improvement. In Maikhuli, residents of Assam did not allow the erection of electric poles in that area, but ultimately, we (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

opposed the erection of electric poles in the area, but a peace committee comprising villagers resolved the issue, allowing the project to proceed.

"...right from that time we constituted the regional committees from both sides of the states, we could see lots of improvement. In Maikhuli, residents of Assam did not allow the erection of electric poles in that area, but ultimately, we (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 77th Republic Day celebrated with enthusiasm across Karbi Anglong

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Jan 27:** The 77th Republic Day, commemorating the adoption of the Constitution of India, was celebrated with enthusiasm and patriotic fervour across Karbi Anglong district on Monday, with the main district-level function held at the Diphu Government Boys' Higher Secondary School playground.

Organised by the Karbi Anglong district administration, the celebration witnessed participation from people of all ages and communities, reflecting unity in diversity.

Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, attended the programme as chief guest.

He inspected the guard of honour presented by contingents of paramilitary forces, Assam Police, Home Guards, NCC cadets and students from various schools before unfurling the national flag.

Addressing the gathering, Ronghang said Republic Day marked



the adoption of the Constitution, which laid the foundation of India's democratic republic based on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

He noted that democracy was not merely a system of governance but a collective responsibility sustained through discipline, participation and service, adding that true progress required consistent and dedicated action.

The CEM thanked the Centre

for shortlisting noted Karbi singer Pokhila Lekthepi for the Padma Shri Awards 2026.

Highlighting developmental initiatives undertaken by the KAAC, Ronghang said education remained a key priority.

He referred to the inauguration of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya at Nilip in November 2025, the Model Residential School at Dolamara in October 2025, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Bishu Dima festival begins with colourful celebrations



**HT Correspondent**

**HOWRAGHAT, Jan 27:** The two-day Bishu Dima festival, the traditional agricultural celebration of the Dimasa community, began on Tuesday with colourful programmes at Tularam Senapati Kshetra in East Gazalipar

Howraghat in Karbi Anglong district.

Organised by the Howraghat Regional Bishu Dima Hasom, the celebrations commenced with the ceremonial hoisting of the flag followed by a tribute to martyrs.

A vibrant cultural procession showcasing the rich heritage, customs and traditional attire of the Dimasa community marked the opening day and drew large participation from villagers and visitors.

An open meeting held later in the day was presided over by Greek Langthasa, president of the Howraghat Regional Bishu Dima Committee. Howraghat MLA Darsing Ronghang attended the programme as chief guest and, in his address, stressed the importance of preserving indigenous culture and traditions.

He said agricultural festivals like Bishu Dima play a vital role in strengthening community bonds and passing cultural values to younger generations. Several prominent (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Survey also records 92 species of birds 945 freshwater turtles of seven species recorded in Kaziranga

**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** A total of 945 freshwater turtles belonging to seven species have been recorded during a survey along the River Brahmaputra in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR), a Park official said on Tuesday.

The fifth annual survey of aquatic reptiles, with a special focus on freshwater turtles and tortoises of the landscape, was conducted by the Park authorities in collaboration with the India Turtle Conservation Programme (ITCP) from January 14 to 18.

The Brahmaputra River supports one of the richest biodiversities in the region and is recognised globally as a freshwater biodiversity hotspot and Turtle Priority Area.

The Kaziranga landscape alone harbours 17 species of freshwater



turtles and tortoises out of the 32 species recorded in India.

The rapid boat survey covered a 174 km stretch of the Brahmaputra River flowing through KNPTR, and documented a total of 945 freshwa-

ter turtles -- 876 hardshell and 69 softshell -- belonging to seven species.

There were 55 direct sighting of hard shell turtles and 13 sightings of softshell turtles, including four

Black softshell turtles. The Black Softshell Turtle, a critically endangered species endemic to the Brahmaputra basin, faces severe threats from habitat loss, predation, and overexploitation, but conservation efforts in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Nagshankar Temple in Biswanath district offer hope, the official said.

In addition to turtles, the survey recorded 92 species of birds, along with the smooth-coated otter, Gangetic river dolphin, and the iconic 'big five' megafauna of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve—the tiger, greater one-horned rhinoceros, elephant, swamp deer, and wild water buffalo.

The study also identified five conservation priority habitats based on species diversity, habitat quality, and levels (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# India-EU deal perfect answer to 'hegemons' using tariffs as leverage: Canadian minister

**BETUL (GOA), Jan 27:** In a veiled attack on US President Donald Trump, Canada's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Tim Hodgson on Tuesday said India's free trade agreement with the European Union is a "perfect" answer to global hegemons that use tariffs and economic integration as tools of coercion.

Stating that Canada is keen to boost energy exports to India in a bid to diversify its customer base and cut dependence on supply to the United States, he said Ottawa will "never use our energy for torture".

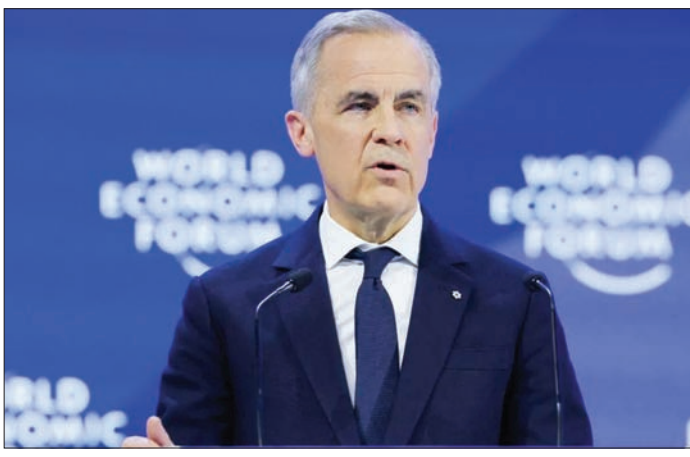
Speaking at India Energy Week 2026, Hodgson said the global economy is undergoing a sharp rupture rather than a gradual transition, as major powers move away from a rules-based, multilateral trading system towards a more mercantilist approach.

"What is happening in the world today is not a gradual economic transition. It is a rupture," Hodgson said. "The hegemons of the world have decided the rules-based order is no longer how the world will work."

Without naming either the US or Trump, he said, "The hegemons of the world have decided that's not the way the world's going to work anymore."

Against this backdrop, he said India's decision to conclude the India-EU trade deal -- described by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the "mother of all deals" -- sends a strong signal in favour of free trade and trusted partnerships.

"What you just did with the EU signing -- the mother of all deals --



was a perfect example of how to say no," he said.

"We're not going to live in a world where the strongest put tariffs on everyone else. We're going to live in a world where we believe in free trade, where we believe in trusted relationships."

Referring to the stern message Canadian Prime Minister sent out from Davos last week, he said, those were some tough words but truth.

"He spoke what is actually happening in the world today. And what is happening in the world today is not a gradual economic transition. It is a rupture. It is a rupture in the way the global trading system works," he said.

"The rules-based order that we all have been building our economies around, one that was based on multilateralism, one that was based on free trade trade."

Without taking any names, he went on to state that "the hegemons of the world have decided that's not

the way the world's going to work anymore. "They've decided the world will work in a much more mercantilist way."

Trump is using tariffs on goods coming into US to drive a hard bargain for trade and other deals. He has threatened tariffs on nations that oppose his plans like the takeover of Greenland.

The Canadian minister said he doesn't need to "tell India what it means when people use their economic integration with your country for coercion".

"I don't need to tell you what it means when hegemons use tariffs as leverage," he said.

"I'm here because, like you, the way to resist that change is to build multilateral relationships and to double down on diversification of supplies."

Hodgson said that exporting 98 per cent of Canada's energy to the United States was a "strategic blunder", and saw an opportunity to work with India.

Energy security, he said, has moved to the centre of global geopolitics, making diversification of supply chains a strategic priority for countries like India and Canada.

And the way to resist the change is to build multilateral relationships and to double down on diversification of supplies, he said.

Highlighting India as the fastest-growing source of global energy demand, Hodgson said Canada is keen to deepen cooperation across LNG, LPG, oil, uranium and critical minerals.

He noted that Canada holds the world's largest uranium reserves and is expanding export infrastructure to its west coast to reduce dependence on a single market.

Drawing lessons from Europe's experience, he said reliance on a single natural gas supplier proved to be a strategic mistake. "That can never happen again," he said.

"What I hear when I visit places like London or Germany, I hear very clearly 'hey, we made a mistake. We relied on one supplier for natural gas. And that was a very strategic blunder. We can never let that happen again. We need to diversify our supply,'" he said.

Stating that Canada used to provide 98 per cent of its energy to one customer, the minister said his country is now committed to diversifying supply and sees an opportunity to work with India.

"We believe the world we want to live in is one where we're going to trade with everyone. We will never use our energy for torture," he said. "We believe middle powers should work together to resist." (PTI)

## Actual economic growth often exceeds Economic Survey's projections

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** India's economic growth has often exceeded the projections made in the Economic Survey, with 2025-26 expecting to record 7.4 per cent growth as against the 6.3-6.8 per cent projection made in the pre-Budget document.

The GDP growth in 2023-24 worked out to be 9.2 per cent as against the Survey's projection of 6-6.8 per cent.

However, in 2024-25, economic growth was 6.5 per cent, in line with the projection of 6.5-7 per cent.

The analysis indicates that the target was missed in 2022-23, when the actual economic growth was 7.6 per cent as against the Economic Survey's projection of 8-8.5 per cent.

In 2021-22, due to COVID, the Economic Survey did not make any projection, but the growth worked out to be 9.7 per cent, mainly because of the base effect.

The growth in 2020-21 was negative at 5.8 per cent, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on February 1. (PTI)

## Maithan Steel marks 25 years of growth at Jashn-E-Maithan 2026

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** Maithan Steel, a leading name in the Indian steel industry, marked 25 years of operations with its dealers' meet, Jashn-E-Maithan 2026, held recently in Dhanbad, celebrating a journey defined by steady growth, reliability and long-standing partnerships.

Founded in 2001 with a sponge iron manufacturing unit of around 60,000 tonnes per annum capacity, Maithan Steel has steadily expanded its operations over the years.

The company diversified into TMT bar manufacturing in 2012 and has since grown into a 5,00,000-tonne integrated steel plant, supported by advanced manufacturing processes and stringent quality control systems.

Today, Maithan Steel has a presence across 25 States and Union Territories, supported by over 250 institutional buyers and a network of more than 2,500 channel partners.

The company serves over 25 lakh individual home builders and consumers and has generated direct and indirect employment for more than 25,000 people.

Alongside commemorating the milestone, the company outlined its future expansion plans, including ongoing projects across sponge iron, ferro alloys and allied segments aimed at strengthening manufacturing capabilities.

Maithan Steel has also received environmental clearance for a 9,00,000-tonne steel plant, with construction expected to begin during 2027-28, underscoring its long-term growth strategy and focus on meeting India's rising infrastructure needs.

The Jashn-E-Maithan 2026 celebrations brought to-



gether over 1,000 stakeholders from across the country and featured a mix of entertainment, brand engagements and key announcements reflecting the company's journey.

Brand ambassador The Great Khali played a prominent role at the event, reinforcing the brand message, "Strong Matlab Maithan Steel," and symbolising values of strength, resilience and reliability.

Reflecting on the milestone, Director Madhur Agarwalla said completing 25 years was a moment of pride built on the trust of dealers, partners, vendors and customers, adding that the company remains committed to strengthening its capabilities and contributing to India's growth with stronger steel.

Director Kaushal Agarwalla said the milestone reflected enduring partnerships that have helped the company grow consistently, noting that the celebrations were a tribute to those who have stood by the brand over the years.

## India needs USD 145 bn annual energy investment to align growth with climate goals: Wood Mackenzie

**BETUL (SOUTH GOA), Jan 27:** India will need to mobilise average annual investments of about USD 145 billion in its energy sector to bridge the gap between sustained economic growth and its net-zero ambitions, Wood Mackenzie said on Tuesday, outlining a critical pathway to maintain around 6 per cent GDP growth through 2035 while advancing the energy transition.

Speaking at India Energy Week 2026, Joshua Ngu, Vice Chairman, Asia Pacific at Wood Mackenzie, said capital deployment must be strategically focused on power generation, energy storage and urgent grid modernisation to support India's expanding economy and decarbonisation goals. "India's next decade is decisive," Ngu said. "The challenge is a dual mandate: India must de-risk its immediate energy security while simultaneously building the low-carbon architecture required to support a top-tier global economy. Today's investment choices will determine whether the country locks in carbon-intensive infrastructure or leads the world in low-carbon industrialisation."

Wood Mackenzie said the power sector, while remaining India's largest source of emissions, is also the primary engine of the energy transition. The sector has already undergone a structural shift, with non-fossil installed capacity now exceeding fossil capacity.

Going forward, the transition will be driven by the scale-up of renewable energy, grid flexibility and storage, while coal additions are expected to be largely limited to reliability and peak-balancing needs rather than energy growth.

However, the pace of decarbonisation is creating system integration challenges. Wood Mackenzie estimates USD 1.5 trillion in energy transition investment between 2026 and 2035, with a significant portion required for transmission and distribution infrastructure. "The USD 1.5 trillion investment between 2026 and 2035 for energy transition is not just about adding megawatts; it is about the wires,"



said Rashika Gupta, Vice President, Power and Renewables Research at Wood Mackenzie. "Success hinges on the pace of market reforms, specifically the Electricity Amendment Bill to improve distribution competition and provide the transparent investment signals needed to unlock private capital for grid modernisation."

Despite the acceleration of renewable energy, Wood Mackenzie said hydrocarbon fuels remain essential for near-term energy security. India is on track to meet its 1.5-billion-tonne coal production target by 2030, with growing emphasis on coal gasification to diversify the energy mix.

At the same time, dependence on crude oil imports is expected to rise, with import reliance projected to reach 87 per cent by 2035.

"To mitigate this, India must revitalise its upstream sector," Ngu said. "Attracting international oil companies (IOCs) back to Indian exploration and production (E&P) is no longer optional. It is a security imperative."

Natural gas presents both a challenge and an opportunity. National gas demand is projected to double from 72 billion cubic metres (bcm) in 2024 to more than 140 bcm by 2050, driven largely by industrial consumption. Industry is expected to account for over two-thirds of gas demand through 2030, remaining above 55 per cent until 2050.

Wood Mackenzie said India's LNG imports are

Contd. from Page 1...

## India, EU conclude

(for goods like automobiles). The pact is expected to be signed later this year and is likely to be implemented in early 2027. The average tariffs of the EU on Indian goods are already low at around 3.8 per cent and will be reduced to 0.1 per cent under the deal.

But in some sectors, the duties are high. These are marine (0-26 per cent); chemicals (up to 12.8 per cent); plastics and rubber (up to 6.5 per cent); leather and footwear (up to 17 per cent); textiles, apparel and clothing (up to 12 per cent); gems and jewellery (up to 4 per cent); railway, aircraft, ships, boats (up to 7.7 per cent); furniture and light consumer goods (up to 10.5 per cent); toys (up to 4.7 per cent); and sports goods (up to 4.7 per cent).

On all these, the EU will eliminate the duties for India.

On the other hand, the EU will get duty-free access for over 90 per cent of its goods over a ten-year period in India. India will remove duties on only 30 per cent of European goods on the first day of implementation of the pact.

The main EU goods that will get duty concessions include automobiles, wines, spirits, beer, olive oil, kiwis and pears, fruit juices, processed foods like breads, pastries, biscuits, pasta, chocolate, pet food, sheep meat, sausages and other meat preparations.

These goods, at present, attract duties in the range of 33 per cent to 150 per cent. Premium luxury European cars, such as BMW, Mercedes, Lamborghini, Porsche, and Audi, are likely to become less expensive in the Indian market once the bilateral free trade agreement comes into force, as India will offer quota-based import duty concessions under the pact, an official said.

The EU will eliminate duty in a phased manner for Indian automobiles, whereas India will reduce the levies for EU cars to 10 per cent, subject to a quota of 2.5 lakhs per year.

Under the pact, the EU goods such as machinery and electrical equipment, aircraft and spacecraft, optical, medical and surgical equipment, plastics, chemicals, iron and steel, and pharma will enjoy duty-free access in the Indian markets.

"On automobiles, calibrated and carefully crafted quota-based auto liberalisation packages will not only allow EU auto makers to introduce their models in India in higher price bands but also open the possibilities for Make in India and exports from India in future," the commerce ministry said.

India will not give any duty concessions in the dairy (including cheese), soya meal and cereals sectors. The EU is also protecting its sugar, beef, meat and poultry sectors.

On the services front, the EU has made one of its best offers to India, opening 144 sub-sectors out of 155, and India is opening 102 sub-sectors to them.

In addition to that, there are commitments around students' mobility, the official said, adding, "We do have some commitments on post-study work visas also from the EU," a commerce ministry official said.

It said the pact secures expanded and commercially significant commitments from the EU across key sectors of Indian strength, including IT and ITeS, professional services, education, financial services, tourism, and construction. On mobility, the India-EU FTA provides a facilitative and predictable framework for business mobility covering short-term, temporary and business travel in both directions.

"These enable professionals to travel between the two economies to provide services under different scenarios," it added.

On the contentious issue of Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or carbon tax, the pact has not provided any specific concessions to India, but has agreed that any relaxations granted by the 27-nation bloc to other countries under the CBAM provisions will automatically extend to Indian exporters.

"Through CBAM provisions, commitments have been secured, including a forward-looking most-favoured-nation assurance extending flexibilities if any granted to third countries under the regulation," the ministry said.

The commitments also include enhanced technical cooperation on recognition of carbon prices, recognition of verifiers, as well as financial assistance and targeted support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and comply with emerging carbon requirements, it added.

The agreement was announced at a time when India is facing steep 50 per cent tariffs by the US. The EU is also facing a threat of fresh tariffs by the Donald Trump-administration on the Greenland issue.

EU becomes India's 22nd FTA partner.

The NDA government, since 2014, has signed trade deals with Mauritius, the UAE, the UK, EFTA, Oman and Australia, and announced trade deals with New Zealand. In 2025, India signed a trade deal with Oman and the UK and announced the conclusion of a trade deal with New Zealand. (PTI)

## India-EU FTA to

boost Assam's sectors from tea to spices & handicrafts to minerals," he added.

The two regions also inked two crucial pacts -- one on security and defence collaboration, and another on the mobility of Indian talent to Europe.

India and the 27-nation bloc rolled out a joint comprehensive strategic agenda for the next five years and firmed up a total of 13 pacts, including one on the conclusion of negotiations for the FTA. (PTI)

## Assam-Meghalaya border

instructed our DC to meet his counterpart and formed a peace committee of the villages. Now everything is resolved and even the erection of the electric poles is allowed by Assam," Tynsong added.

Regarding Rajabala, the deputy chief minister stated that the situation is currently calm and peaceful.

"We instructed the deputy commissioner to have a peace committee over there, and right now, nothing has happened," he added. (NNN)

## Himanta allays fears

Census with projections for the 2027 Census, Sarma claimed that the population share of people of East Bengal origin could rise to 40 per cent, adding that Hindus have already become a minority in 12 districts of the state.

Meanwhile, opposition parties have alleged that the SR exercise is being misused to harass genuine citizens, particularly religious minorities, through the use of Form 7, which allows for objections and deletion of names from electoral rolls.

The Election Commission has maintained that the Special Revision is being conducted to prepare an error-free electoral roll.

The Integrated Draft Roll for Assam was published on December 27, while the filing of claims and objections continued till January 22.

The final electoral roll is scheduled to be published on February 10.

The SR is being carried out under the direction of the Election Commission as part of a Supreme Court-supervised process to verify citizenship, which is yet to be concluded. (With inputs from PTI)

## 77th Republic Day

and the commencement of academic activities at the Ekalavya Model Residential School at Donghap in November 2025.

He also mentioned the inauguration of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Avasiya Vidyalaya at Khatkhathi in January 2026.

In the healthcare sector, Ronghang said access to quality medical services had improved with the inauguration of the 100-bedded district hospital at Hamren by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in September 2025.

Referring to infrastructure development, he said projects such as the RCC bridge over Amreng and road improvement from Kheroni to Rongpangbong to Zirikingend had been inaugurated, while works including the Diphu flyover, Langhonjar Chingthong-Amri College road, Assam Mala Road from Tumpreng to Dongkumkam, and RCC bridges at Bhelapara and over the Kopili river at Tumpreng were at various stages of completion. On skill development and livelihoods, the CEM said new ITI and polytechnic institutes at Kaliabor under Borjan constituency were inaugurated in August 2025.

Under PMKVY 4.0, skill training is being provided to 7,200 youth across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong in various trades. He added that an MoU had been signed with Bengaluru-based 'Better Place' to facilitate placement of trained candidates.

Ronghang also highlighted social security initiatives under the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita scheme, under which beneficiaries in Diphu, Howraghat and Rongkhang legislative assembly constituencies had received financial assistance.

Referring to the long-standing demand for autonomous statehood, he said a significant milestone had been achieved with the introduction of the Assam Reorganisation (Karbi Dimanchal) Bill, 2025, in the Lok Sabha by MP Amarsing Tisso.

He urged people to reaffirm their commitment to unity, constitutional values and inclusive development.

Meanwhile, the 77th Republic Day was also celebrated at Bokajan with a grand programme organised by the Bokajan sub-divisional administration at the Bokajan Sports Association playground.

The event began at 8.45 am with SDO (Civil) Kakumoni Saikia unfurling the national flag and receiving the guard of honour.

In her address, Saikia paid tribute to the freedom fighters and underlined the significance of Republic Day. The programme included a floral tribute and lighting of the ceremonial lamp in memory of the martyrs.

A march past by contingents of 2nd ASRF Karagaon, CRPF, Home Guards and local college students was the highlight of the event, drawing applause from spectators and concluding the celebrations on a note of renewed patriotism.

## BCI Moot Court

the competition, he added.

Advocate Rakhee Sirauthia Chowdhury said the inauguration ceremony will be graced by Law Commission of India Chairperson and former SC Judge, Justice Dinesh Maheshwari, as the Chief Guest.

The Chief Guest at the Valedictory Ceremony will be Justice Ujjal Bhuyan of the Supreme Court. The programme will also include an address by BCI Chairman Manan Kumar Mishra, she added. (PTI)

## Bishu Dima festival

local personalities were present on the occasion, including Howraghat College professor Dr Madan Daolagajau, social activist Rajen Bora, vice-chairman of Howraghat Municipal Board Ramesh Kemprai, 'Mission Cheng' NGO president Jyotirmoy Kharikapsha, chairman of Howraghat VDC Buddheswar Teron and Gautam Ingh, chairman of the Citizens' Security Committee, Howraghat police station.

The programme was also attended by government officials, gaonburhas and local leaders, who joined the community in celebrating the harvest season.

The festivities will continue on Tuesday with cultural performances, traditional rituals and community feasts, organisers said.

## 945 freshwater turtles

of disturbance. The official pointed out that sustained efforts, led by the KNPTA authorities with technical inputs and support from ITCF, will help in safeguarding the river's ecological integrity and ensuring that conservation actions remain responsive to the changing riverine landscape. (PTI)

Governors, ministers, officials and citizens join grand celebrations across districts

# 77<sup>th</sup> Republic Day celebrated with patriotic fervour across Assam

## HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 27:** On the 77th Republic Day, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya unfurled the National Flag at the central programme held at Khanapara on Monday. Addressing the gathering, he paid tribute to freedom fighters, Mahatma Gandhi and state icons including Lachit Barphukan, Kanaklata Baruah and Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

The Governor lauded the Armed Forces and security personnel for safeguarding the nation and urged citizens to contribute to Assam's peace, harmony and sustainable development. Highlighting Assam's achievements, he noted 45% growth in Gross State Domestic Product between FY 2019-20 and FY 2024-25, doubling of medical colleges and MBBS seats, progress in education under NEP 2020, expansion of AYUSH facilities, rural development initiatives, women empowerment schemes, industrial growth, biodiversity conservation and innovative ecological projects like artificial canopy bridges.

Concluding his address, Acharya called for unity, pride in Assam's heritage and collective dedication toward making Assam a front-ranking state rooted in peace, progress and resilience.

**Our Demow Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated with patriotic enthusiasm at the Demow Public Ground on January 26, under the patronage of the Demow Co-District Commissioner Office and in association with the people of Demow. Earlier in the day, the national flag was hoisted at residences, educational institutions and private and semi-government offices across the region.

The celebrations at the playground began with the lighting of an earthen lamp in front of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi by Lukumoni Borah, Co-District Commissioner of Demow Co-District, followed by swahid tarpan. The national flag was then unfurled centrally by Lukumoni Borah, who also delivered the Re-

public Day address.

The programme featured a parade by the Battalion, Civil Defence, retired army personnel, students from local schools and NCC cadets from Demow College, followed by a cultural programme. Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of Demow Constituency, attended as the chief guest. Felicitation was given to freedom fighter Lila Barua, senior citizens and officials demonstrating exemplary performance in their respective professions.

**Our Margherita Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated with due solemnity and patriotic fervour at the Central Field, Margherita Co-District. Rahul Doley, Co-District Commissioner, hoisted the National Flag and took the salute of the parade, accompanied by Dinesh Pratap Singh Rathore, IPS, Co-District Superintendent of Police, Margherita.

The parade was commanded by ABSI Prakash Thapa of 19th APBN, with ABSI Uday Kutum of 6th CDO serving as Second-in-Command. Contingents from schools and colleges participated in the march past, showcasing discipline and patriotic spirit.

Members of the Indian Red Cross Society, Margherita, were felicitated for their dedicated service. Four media personnel—Sanjib Deori (Margherita Press Club), Pranjal Pratim Bhuyan (Jagun Press Club), Khilanath Sharma (Margherita Journalists Association) and Hemanta Gogoi (Assam Press Correspondent Union) were honoured for their contributions.

The celebrations also included a cultural programme, felicitation of winners of participants in the march past and cultural competitions. Officials from various departments and citizens joined the event, reflecting unity, pride and national spirit.

As part of the festivities, Margherita Bazaar Committee president Santosh Chetry (Munna), general secretary Bappa



Paul and committee members distributed fruits to patients at Margherita Civil Hospital/FRU and Central Hospital, Margherita.

**Our Tezpur Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated at Church Field, Tezpur, with State Cabinet Minister Ashok Singhal unfurling the national flag and receiving a guard of honour from Assam Police, paramilitary forces, NCC and students.

Singhal paid tribute to the nation's freedom fighters and highlighted regional welfare initiatives including 'Nijut Moira', 'Mahila Udyamita' and 'Mukhyamantrir Eti Koli-Duti Pat'. The event featured a march past competition with DUF (Assam Police), Sonitpur, winning the professional category, 5th Assam Battalion NCC, Darrang College, winning at the college level and Government Girls' HS School securing first place

among schools.

Thirteen district departments presented tableaux, with Public Health Engineering Department winning first prize. Cultural performances included Bagurumba, Jhumur, Bihu, folk orchestra and patriotic dances. Dignitaries present included Tezpur MP Ranjit Dutta, MLA Prithiraj Rava, DC and SSP Ananda Kumar Das, among others.

In addition, a blood donation drive was organised by the Red Cross Society, followed by a friendly cricket match and programmes by DRL Tezpur, LOKD College Dhekiajuli, Assam Rifles and Lokra to honour martyrs.

**Our Hojai Correspondent adds:** Hojai district celebrated the 77th Republic Day with patriotic fervour at Kachari Maidan, Srimanta Sankardev Nagar. District Commissioner Bidyut Bikash Bhagawati, the chief guest, unfurled the

national flag and took the parade salute.

In his address, the DC lauded the state government's developmental initiatives under Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma and extended warm Republic Day greetings to the public.

The celebration featured vibrant cultural performances, including Bagurumba, Jhumur, Bhortal dances and patriotic songs. Outstanding contributions in journalism were recognized with awards presented to Litumoni Nath, Sanjiv Saikia and Ismail Ali. Prizes were also given to the best parade teams.

The event was attended by Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, MP (Kaziranga), Ramkrishna Ghosh, MLA (Hojai), SP VV Rakesh Reddy and other dignitaries, along with local residents, schools, colleges, government offices, NGOs, the District Judiciary, Hojai District Bar Association, Rabindranath Thakur Viswavidyalaya, Hojai Girls' College and other institutions across the district also celebrated the day with zeal.

**Our Nagaon Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Nagaon district. Minister Nandita Garlosa unfurled the tri-colour at a ceremony held at Nagaon Sports Association's playground, Nurul Amin Stadium.

The event was attended by dignitaries, including local MLA Rupak Sarma, District Commissioner Debashish Sarma and Superintendent of Police Swapnil Dekha.

During the event, the minister paid floral tributes to national leaders and freedom fighters, including Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Gopinath Bordoloi.

The celebrations featured cultural performances, including Bihu and Bagurumba dances and a parade by school students, police and other security forces.

Minister Garlosa also announced various development initiatives for the district and honoured outstanding individuals and groups for their contribu-

tions to art, culture and sports.

**Our Jorhat Correspondent adds:** Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Excise, Border Areas Development and Assam Accord Implementation, Atul Bora, unfurled the National Flag at the 77th Republic Day celebrations at the Jorhat District Sports Association Field on Monday.

Bora, the chief guest was presented with a guard of honour by Assam Police and paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, other freedom fighters and Dr BR Ambedkar along with members of the Constitution Drafting Committee. He spoke about the State's journey of progress under the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Government and highlighted welfare and developmental initiatives through State and Central schemes.

The programme featured a march past by Assam Police, CRPF, CISF, Home Guards, Civil Defence, NCC, Scouts and Guides, followed by a cultural presentation. Aishi Prisha Borah, a class IX student of Kendriya Vidyalaya No 3, RRL Jorhat and recipient of the 'Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2025', was felicitated. Jorhat MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami, senior district officials, police personnel and citizens attended the function.

**Our Kokrajhar Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated at Kokrajhar Govt HS & MP School parade ground with patriotic fervour. BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary hoisted the national flag, inspected parade contingents of Assam Police, NCC and students and received a guard of honour.

The celebrations included a multicultural programme representing various communities. Earlier, Mohilary paid floral tributes to martyrs at the Martyr Tomb and Gandhi Park. He reaffirmed the BTC government's commitment to the all-round development and welfare of the region and highlighted initiatives undertaken to address the aspirations and well-being of the people.

## Sixth BTR Accord Day celebrated across Bodoland

Various programmes mark six years of peace and development under the historic Bodo Accord

### HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 27:** Marking the sixth anniversary of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Peace Accord, celebrations were held across the Bodoland region on Tuesday.

In Kokrajhar, the BTR Accord Day was observed at Bodofa Nwgrw to commemorate the historic Bodo Peace Accord, also known as the third Bodo Accord, signed on Tuesday, through tripartite talks between the Government of India, Government of Assam and leaders from ABSU, all factions of the NDFB and UBPO. The event was organised under the aegis of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Assam Cabinet Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary, MLA Lawrence Islary, MP Rwingwra Narzary, BKWA CEM Mihineswar Basumatary, along with leaders of ABSU and NDFB, paid floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and Bodoland martyrs. A



public meeting followed at the BTC Legislative Assembly Auditorium, Bodofa Nwgrw.

BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary said discussions would be held with the government for the implementation of the remaining clauses of the Sixth BTR Accord. He also stated that talks would be held to grant Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status to Bodos residing in Karbi An-

glong and Dima Hasao, as outlined in both the BTC and BTR accords. Mohilary expressed confidence that developmental works included in the accord would be fully implemented.

Former CEM of BTR and UPPL president Pramod Boro extended greetings on BTR Accord Day, noting that the accord has ushered in development and peace in the

region and described it as a torch-bearer of peacebuilding in Bodoland.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) celebrated the day in Sonitpur with a day-long programme. ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the union flag and paid floral tributes to martyrs, emphasising the proper implementation of all BTR Accord clauses. The union launched a campaign to demand the early execution of the remaining clauses, sending 10,000 postcards and 5,000 emails to Prime Minister Narendra Modi from January 27 to February 2. The Kokrajhar District Committee of ABSU alone sent over 2,500 postcards and emails urging swift action.

Several ABSU district committees, including Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur, also marked the day in their respective areas, calling on the government to take strong initiatives for the full implementation of the Bodo Accord.

## Wild elephant kills woman in Karbi Anglong

### HT Correspondent

**KHERONI, Jan 27:** A wave of panic has gripped residents of Hijong-Langso village in West Karbi Anglong district following a fatal wild elephant attack on Monday evening within the jurisdiction of the Kheroni Range Forest Office.

The victim was identified as Kasang Kropi, who was killed after a wild elephant reportedly charged at her. The tragic incident occurred in the remote and hilly terrain of Hijong-Langso, an area where incidents of human-wildlife conflict have been on the rise in recent years.

The frequent presence of wild elephants near residential areas has left the local community living in constant fear. Villagers have expressed serious concern over the safety of their families, pointing out that the rugged geography and dense forest cover make it extremely difficult to track elephant movement or escape swiftly during sudden encounters.

Local authorities have been informed about the incident, while residents have urged the Forest Department to intensify patrolling and implement effective measures to prevent further human-elephant conflict in these vulnerable hilly regions.

## Bakulban Award conferred on folk artist Dili Terang

### HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Jan 27:** The Bakulban Trust, Assam, conferred the prestigious Bakulban Award on eminent folk artist Dili Terang of Karbi Anglong for her outstanding contribution to the preservation and promotion of Assam's folk culture. The award ceremony was held at the Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva Kala-Kristi and Research Centre, Jorhat.

The award, presented by Dr Soumitra Pujari, president of Bakulban Trust, included a gamosa, cheleng, citation, memento, ceremonial attire and a cash prize. Speaking at the event, Dr Pujari highlighted the life and philosophy of poet Anand Chandra Barua in whose memory the award is given. Dili Terang expressed her gratitude, recalling her early inspiration from hill folk songs and the works of Dr Bhupen Hazarika. She urged communities to preserve their cultural heritage. The ceremony featured soulful folk performances by the awardee and felicitations from various organisations, drawing enthusiastic response from the audience.

## Asom Sahitya Sabha vp denies alleged comments against govt

### HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, Jan 27:** Asom Sahitya Sabha vice president Padum Rajkhowa held a press conference at the Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha office, denying claims in a web news report that he had criticised the Chief Minister or the government.

Rajkhowa stated that his speech at Garoimari was misrepresented, leading to widespread reactions. He emphasised that he is not a politician and that the Sabha is not a political platform. He appealed for peace and harmony, urging everyone to work together for societal development.

He clarified that he encouraged people of the char areas to embrace Assamese language and culture and did not use the term "Miya," contrary to reports. Rajkhowa condemned the false reporting as unfortunate and regrettable.

## Gwthar Bathou Saan observed with religious fervour in Kokrajhar

### HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Jan 27:** The Gwthar Bathou Saan (Sacred Bathou Divosh) was observed on Tuesday at various Thanshalis across the state. Large numbers of followers of the Bathou religion through the Bathou Thanshalis from morning, offering prayers and worship to Bwrai Bathou (Lord Shiva) on the occasion. The sacred Gwthar Bathou Saan is observed every year on the second Tuesday of the month of Magh.

In Kokrajhar, the celebration took place at the Bathou Thanshali, Baganshali. Traditional musical instruments such as kham, sifung, serja and jotha were played as collective prayers were offered before Bathou by the Afaboura, seeking welfare, prosperity and peace for families, society, the nation and humanity.

Bathou Douri said devotees of Bwrai Afa Bathou observed Gwthar Bathou Saan across Assam, West Bengal, Nepal and other parts of India. He added that the programme began in the morning with the hoisting of the Bathou flag and Bathou Aroj prayers for peace, love and brotherhood.

Former BTC Deputy Chief and present MCLA Kampa Borgoyary highlighted that the Bathou religion is the oldest religion of the Bodo community and has recently been recognised by the Government of India. Deputy Speaker of the BTCLA, Bijitgwa Narzary, said he attended the Gwthar Bathou Saan to seek blessings from Bwrai Bathou.

## Scooter rider killed in NH-39 accident

### HT Correspondent

**BOKAJAN, Jan 27:** A fatal road accident on National Highway 39 near Raj Palace Hotel, Khatkhati, claimed the life of 45-year-old Bipul Kharia and left Jani Bagwar critically injured on Tuesday.

The incident occurred when the scooter they were riding lost balance while attempting to overtake a Hydra crane, causing a violent collision. Kharia died on the spot, while Bagwar was rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment.

Khatkhati Police have launched an investigation, examining factors including speed and road conditions, as the busy stretch of NH-39 continues to pose safety concerns.

## 1 killed, 1 injured in Jagiroad road accident

### HT Correspondent

**JAGIROAD, Jan 27:** A young man was killed and another seriously injured in a road accident on NH-27 at Nellie Makaria under Jagiroad police station on Monday morning.

The deceased was identified as Gazibur Rahman, 20, of Chakumako village, Jagiroad. Another youth, Asadul Islam, sustained serious injuries and was rushed to Guwahati Medical College Hospital in critical condition. Both were reportedly hit by a dumper coming from the wrong direction. Police are investigating the incident.

## Bank strike disrupts services in Sivasagar

### HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 27:** Normal banking services were affected on Tuesday in Sivasagar due to a nationwide strike called by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU). Officers and employees of nationalised banks staged a demonstration in front of the State Bank main branch.

The forum's key demand to declare all Saturdays as holidays, agreed in March 2024 during bipartite talks with the Indian Banks' Association is still awaiting government notification.



**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Jan 27:** Women weavers turned entrepreneurs from Agchamua and Borchapori weavers' centres in Jorhat and Golaghat districts showcased and sold a diverse range of traditional handwoven products at India Energy

Week 2026, which opened in Goa on Tuesday.

While the event brings together global policymakers, industry leaders, innovators and investors to shape the future of energy, Cairn Oil & Gas spotlighted a powerful role of inclusion and grassroots

transformation in Assam. Through its initiative 'Threads of Assam - Woven by Baidews', Cairn has supported nearly 5,000 women artisans in Jorhat and Golaghat districts, enabling financial independence while showcasing their craft at India's flagship energy exhibition and conference.

The Borchapori Handloom Centre at Hazarigaon, Borapathar in Golaghat, a CSR initiative of Cairn, empowers about 3,000 rural women artisans by providing training, equipment and market access in partnership with the Assam Rural Livelihood Mission. With these efforts being extended to Agchamua in Jorhat, the initiative has resulted in a reported 25 per cent rise in average monthly income for the artisans.

Representatives from the Jorhat and Golaghat district weavers' centres presented traditional handwoven textiles at the event, including gamosas, mekhela sadors, jackets, saris, scarves, handcrafted bags, pillow covers and other indigenous creations crafted from traditional silks such as muga and eri, reflecting generations of craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

An official of GreyMatters Communications, partnering with Cairn, said the weavers are household entrepreneurs who have received structured training and livelihood support through Cairn's

CSR initiatives, helping them transform traditional skills into sustainable income opportunities.

"Now in its fourth edition, India Energy Week is being held from January 27 to 30 under the patronage of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. As the event positions India at the centre of the global energy transition, Cairn's initiative brings a deeply human and local dimension to the global stage," the official added.

"As discussions at India Energy Week 2026 focus on building a secure, sustainable and affordable energy future, the presence of these indigenous artisans underscores that India's growth story is strongest when local traditions, women-led enterprises and global opportunities are woven together—truly taking the journey from Local to Global," the official further said.

Cairn Oil & Gas, part of Vedanta Limited, is India's largest private oil and gas exploration and production company, contributing about a quarter of India's domestic crude production. The company is committed to achieving Net Zero by 2030 while driving transformative social impact at scale. Cairn became the first Indian company to attain 'Gold Standard Pathway' recognition by the United Nations' Environment Programme under OGP 2.0.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*May you live all the days of your life.*  
—Jonathan Swift

## Trump's shifting stand at Davos

When President Donald Trump stood before the assembled worthies of global capitalism in Davos recently to discuss his designs on Greenland, he offered a masterclass in the very behaviour America has spent decades condemning. The irony was apparently lost on no one but the speaker himself. For the better part of a century, the United States has positioned itself as the guardian of a rules-based international order—one founded on sovereignty, self-determination, and the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes. It has invaded countries, toppled governments, and imposed sanctions in service of these principles, or so the official story goes. Yet here was an American president openly pursuing the acquisition of another nation's territory through a combination of economic threats, diplomatic pressure, and barely veiled coercion. That he ruled out military force—after weeks of studied ambiguity on precisely that question—hardly merits applause. A bank robber who decides against shooting the teller still intends to leave with the money. The Greenland affair would be remarkable enough on its own terms. But it forms part of a broader pattern that reveals something unsettling about contemporary American statecraft: the growing gap between the democratic principles Washington preaches and the authoritarian methods it increasingly practices.

Consider the toolkit Trump deployed in Davos. First came the threat: 10% tariffs on European Union nations that dared support Denmark's sovereignty over its own territory. Then the diplomatic squeeze: pressuring NATO allies to acquiesce to what amounts to territorial revision by fiat. Finally, the gracious retreat: withdrawing the most extreme threats while maintaining the underlying demand, a classic negotiating ploy that leaves the victim grateful for reduced coercion rather than outraged by its presence. The Greenland episode becomes more troubling still when viewed alongside Washington's recent actions elsewhere. In Venezuela, the United States has spent years attempting to engineer regime change through sanctions that have devastated the civilian population, recognition of opposition figures as legitimate leaders regardless of electoral outcomes, and open discussion of military options. The stated goal—restoring democracy—rings hollow when the methods employed undermine the very principle of sovereign people choosing their own governments.

Iran offers another case study in selective principle. Washington withdrew from a multilateral nuclear agreement, reimposed crushing sanctions, and has repeatedly threatened military action—all while portraying itself as the aggrieved party. European allies who sought to maintain the deal found themselves facing American secondary sanctions, a form of economic warfare that punishes third parties for the crime of respecting international agreements. The message was unmistakable: American preferences supersede international consensus. What seems clear is that the gap between American rhetoric and American behaviour has grown too wide to be ignored or explained away. A country that threatens allies for defending their sovereignty, that uses economic coercion as a routine diplomatic tool, and that treats international law as binding on others but optional for itself has lost the moral authority to lead a democratic coalition.

# Data protection in the digital age

Data Protection Day is observed every year on 28 January across many parts of the world. The day is dedicated to creating awareness about the importance of protecting personal data and respecting privacy in an age where digital technology has become a central part of daily life. Today, people share more information online than ever before, often without realising how valuable and vulnerable that data can be. From school students to senior citizens, almost everyone uses smartphones, social media, online banking, digital classrooms, and e-commerce platforms. In such a situation, data protection is no longer a technical issue limited to experts. It has become a basic necessity for individuals, organisations, and governments.

The idea behind Data Protection Day began with the growing concern that personal information was being collected, stored, and used without enough safeguards. Every online activity leaves a digital footprint. When someone signs up for a website, posts a photo, shops online, or even uses a fitness app, data is generated. This data can include names, phone numbers, locations, browsing habits, financial details, health records, and personal preferences. While this information helps services function smoothly and provide better user experiences, it can also be misused if it falls into the wrong hands. Data Protection Day reminds people that privacy is a fundamental right and that personal information deserves respect and care.

In earlier times, personal information was mostly stored on paper files kept in locked cabinets. Today, data is stored digitally on servers, cloud platforms, and interconnected networks. This shift has brought speed, convenience, and efficiency, but it has also increased the risk of data theft, hacking, identity fraud, and surveillance. Cybercriminals constantly look for weaknesses in systems to steal sensitive information. Once data is leaked or stolen, it can be difficult or even impossible to undo the damage. Victims may suffer financial loss, emotional stress, loss of reputation, or long term insecurity. This makes data protection extremely important in modern society.

One of the main reasons Data Protection Day is so relevant today is the rapid growth of social media. Platforms encourage users to share personal moments, opinions, and life updates. Many people, especially young users, do not fully understand how much information they are revealing or how it can be tracked and analysed. Photos can reveal locations, habits, and relationships. Likes and comments can show interests, beliefs, and emotions. Companies use this data for targeted advertising, while malicious actors may use it for scams or manipulation. Data Protection Day encourages users to think before sharing and to understand privacy settings and digital boundaries.

Another important area where data protection matters is education. Schools and colleges increasingly rely on digital platforms for learning, assessments, attendance, and communication. Students' personal details, academic records, and even behavioural data are stored online. If this information is not protected properly, it can be misused or exposed. Children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable because they may not fully understand the consequences of data misuse. Data Protection Day highlights the responsibility of educational institutions to safeguard student data and to teach digital literacy and online safety as essential life skills.

Healthcare is another sector where data protection is critical. Medical records contain highly sensitive information about a person's health, medical history, and treatments. With the rise of digital health systems, telemedicine, and health apps, vast amounts of health data are collected and stored electronically. While this improves healthcare delivery, it also raises serious privacy concerns. A data breach in healthcare can lead to discrimination, social stigma, or emotional harm. Data Protection Day draws attention to the need for strong security measures and ethical handling of health data to maintain trust between patients and healthcare providers.

The workplace has also changed due to digitalisation. Employers collect data about employees for

recruitment, payroll, performance tracking, and security purposes. Remote work tools monitor attendance, productivity, and communication. While some data collection is necessary, excessive or unclear monitoring can invade privacy. Employees have the right to know what data is being collected, why it is collected, and how it is used. Data Protection Day promotes transparency, fairness, and accountability in workplace data practices.

Governments play a major role in data protection. Many public services now operate online, including identity documents, tax systems, welfare schemes, and voting related services. Governments hold massive databases of citizens' personal information. Protecting this data is essential for national security and public trust. At the same time, governments must balance security needs with individual privacy rights. Laws and regulations related to data protection help define clear rules about data collection, storage, sharing, and consent. Data Protection Day encourages citizens to be aware of their rights and encourages authorities to strengthen data protection frameworks.

In recent years, artificial intelligence and big data analytics have added new dimensions to data protection concerns. Advanced algorithms can analyse large datasets to predict behaviour, preferences, and even future actions. While this can be useful in areas like traffic management, healthcare research, and disaster planning, it can also be used for surveillance and profiling. Decisions made by automated systems can affect people's opportunities, such as loan approvals or job applications. If data used in these systems is biased, inaccurate, or obtained without consent, it can lead to unfair outcomes. Data Protection Day serves as a reminder that technological progress must be guided by ethical principles and respect for human dignity.

Another reason data protection is important nowadays is the increase in online financial transactions. Digital payments, online banking, and investment apps have made financial services more accessible. However, they also at-

tract cyber fraudsters. Phishing attacks, fake websites, and malicious apps are designed to steal login details and financial information. A single careless click can result in major losses. Data Protection Day encourages individuals to follow safe digital practices, such as using strong passwords, enabling two factor authentication, and being cautious with suspicious messages.

Children's data protection deserves special attention. Many apps, games, and platforms collect data from children, sometimes without proper consent or understanding. Children may share personal information without realising the risks. Protecting children's data is essential for their safety and future well being. Data Protection Day raises awareness among parents, teachers, and policymakers about the need to create safer digital environments for young users and to enforce strict rules regarding children's data.

Data protection is not only about preventing harm but also about building trust. When people trust that their data is handled responsibly, they are more likely to use digital services confidently. Trust is essential for the growth of the digital economy and for innovation. Businesses that respect data privacy and security gain customer loyalty and credibility. On the other hand, companies involved in data breaches or unethical data practices often suffer legal penalties and loss of reputation. Data Protection Day highlights that responsible data handling is not a burden but a long term benefit.

Individuals also have a role to play in data protection. Awareness is the first step. People should understand what personal data is and why it matters. Reading privacy policies, adjusting app permissions, updating software, and being cautious online are simple but effective steps. Data Protection Day encourages people to take control of their digital lives instead of assuming that data protection is someone else's responsibility.

In today's interconnected world, data often crosses national borders. A person's data may be stored or processed in another country with different laws and standards. This makes interna-

tional cooperation on data protection very important. Data Protection Day promotes global dialogue and shared responsibility to protect privacy in a digital world that has no physical boundaries.

The importance of Data Protection Day has increased even more after several high profile data breaches reported worldwide. These incidents show that no system is completely immune and that continuous effort is required to improve security. They also show that the impact of data breaches can affect millions of people at once. Learning from such incidents helps organisations strengthen their systems and policies.

Data protection is closely linked to freedom and dignity. When people know they are constantly monitored or their data is misused, it can limit free expression and personal choices. Protecting data helps protect individual autonomy. Data Protection Day reminds society that privacy is not about hiding something wrong but about having the right to control one's personal information.

As technology continues to evolve, new challenges to data protection will emerge. The Internet of Things, smart homes, wearable devices, and connected vehicles collect continuous streams of data. Each new technology brings convenience but also new risks. Preparing for these challenges requires education, strong laws, responsible innovation, and public awareness. Data Protection Day provides an opportunity to reflect on these issues and to prepare for the future.

Data Protection Day is not just a symbolic event. It is a reminder of the growing importance of privacy and security in a digital age. Data is one of the most valuable resources today, and protecting it is essential for personal safety, social trust, and democratic values. As individuals, organisations, and governments become more aware of their responsibilities, data protection can become a shared culture rather than a technical afterthought. Observing Data Protection Day encourages everyone to pause, reflect, and take action to ensure that technology serves humanity without compromising fundamental rights.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

## Beyond celebration: Why Pravasi Bharatiya Divas still matters

By: Prabir Kumar Talukdar

In January 2015, I was on an assignment in Mumbai. One evening, while walking around the Gateway of India, I noticed workers carefully dressing up the walls around the massive yellow basalt and concrete arch that was built to welcome King George V for his coronation as the Emperor of India at the Delhi Durbar of 1911. The interesting part here is when the royal guests landed in the then Bombay, only a cardboard model of the structure was there to welcome them. Construction only began in full swing in 1915. However, a different set of guests, a couple that was to bring in a new set of ideals and fervour in India's fight for independence, arrived in 1915 at this very location. I guessed it to be that particular spot because the authorities started putting garlands over a flight of stairs from the dock to the upper level of the harbour. They put up a board that read: 'Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi landed here on January 9, 1915, from South Africa.' Since 2003, the Indian Government has decided to mark January 9 as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to celebrate the monumental impact it has on Indian politics as well as on the Indian diaspora.

If one looks closely, January 9 does not command the same emotional attention as India's other national dates. This date arrives without parades or mass remembrance. Had it not been for that evening walk, the significance of the moment would have passed me by. For most Indians, it is known primarily as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, a day to acknowledge the achievements of Indians living and working abroad. What is less remembered is why this date was chosen in the first place.

On January 9, 1915, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, along with his wife Kasturba Gandhi, returned to India from South Africa after spending more than two decades in abroad. The Gandhi who returned in 1915 was very different from the Gandhi shaped later by the Rowlatt Act and the violence at Jallianwala Bagh. For exactly one year, Gandhi decided to be on probation as advised by his political mentor, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He spent months travelling across the country, observing its social realities, and holding back judgment. That period of restraint proved decisive. The ideas that would later reshape Indian politics had been shaped elsewhere, but they found meaning only after being tested against Indian conditions. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was intended to mark this act of return. Over time, however, its emphasis has shifted. What was once about the significance of coming back has increasingly become a celebration of departure and success abroad. This shift reflects a deeper change in how India understands migration, ambition, and responsibility.

**Return migration and the making of modern**

India Modern India was shaped in significant measure by individuals — Mahatma

Gandhi, Dr BR Ambedkar, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bhikaji Cama, to name a few — whose intellectual and political formation took place outside its borders. Migration, particularly during the late colonial period, functioned as a form of political education. Distance offered unique perspectives. Exposure to other legal systems, social arrangements, and political norms sharpened critiques of colonial rule and social hierarchy at home.

What distinguished this generation was not mobility alone, but the decision to return. Return was rarely comfortable. It involved professional uncertainty, lower material security, and often personal risk. Yet it was widely understood as necessary. Institution-building in an emerging nation required individuals who had seen alternatives and were willing to adapt them, imperfectly, to Indian realities. In this sense, return migration was not about the circulation of skills in a narrow economic sense. It was about the creation of public institutions, norms, and practices that could sustain a democratic state.

### From return to recognition

Contemporary observance of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas tells a different story. The focus today is on recognition rather than return. The diaspora is celebrated for its economic success, cultural influence, and contribution to India's global standing. These achievements are real and deserve acknowledgement. Yet the emphasis on success abroad has come at the cost of asking more difficult questions. Leaving India is widely accepted as a rational, even aspirational choice. Most build their dreams around it. Staying back, however, is often framed as a compromise. Return, meanwhile, is treated as a matter of personal preference rather than public concern. This matters because it shifts attention away from institutional conditions within India. When departure is normalised without scrutiny, structural weaknesses are often left unaddressed. Pride replaces policy, and celebration substitutes for reform. India has benefited substantially from migration. Remittances support households and regional economies. Diaspora networks facilitate trade, technology transfer, and most importantly, in today's context, diplomacy. Exposure to global standards has also raised expectations within India itself. At the same time, these benefits remain largely external to the country's institutional core. They do not strengthen public universities, reform governance structures, or create sustainable research ecosystems. Migration mitigates the effects of institutional weakness without correcting it. In this sense, India benefits from its people abroad while postponing the harder task of making domestic institutions competitive, credible, and trusted.

### The cost of non-return

The more serious challenge today is not emigration, but the absence of return. Across higher education, research, healthcare, and public administration, the lack of sustained

return migration has long-term consequences. Universities struggle to retain intellectual communities. Research ecosystems remain fragmented. Public institutions become inward-looking. The hardest hit in here is how innovation slows down, not for lack of talent, but for lack of conditions that allow talent to bloom and function effectively. There is also a cumulative institutional cost. When capable individuals exit systems that resist reform, those systems adapt to survival rather than improvement. Over time, conformity is rewarded over competence, and stability over experimentation. This is by no means a moral judgment on those who leave. It is an observation about incentives. Individuals respond rationally to environments that undervalue expertise and penalise freedom.

Calls to bring talent back often rely on appeals to patriotism or nostalgia. While sentiment towards one's own country and society matters, it cannot substitute for structural reform. Return migration depends on predictable rules, transparent recruitment, institutional autonomy, and respect for professional integrity. A state that seeks expertise must also accept disagreement. A society that values talent must be willing to trust it. Without these conditions, return will remain exceptional and fragile. One of the best examples of it can be seen in the movie 'Swades' by Ashutosh Gowariker, starring Shah Rukh Khan as NASA's program manager Mohan Bhargava. India, at first, makes him restless. Everything felt slow, clogged, faintly decaying. Yet, with time, he becomes a part of that process and lends his hand in reforming it.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas offers an opportunity to move beyond symbolism. Rather than functioning solely as a celebration, it could become a moment of institutional reflection. For this to materialise, certain questions need to be analysed: Why do people leave? What prevents their return? Which structures discourage participation rather than invite it? Listening to returnees, including their frustrations, would be a fine starting point. Linking recognition to policy reform would be another. Return should not require silence, nor should it demand the sacrifice of professional dignity. Gandhi's return in 1915 was not marked by acclaim. It was marked by patience and listening. He returned to understand India before attempting to change it, much like Mohan Bhargava of 'Swades'.

### A question worth asking

India does not suffer from a shortage of talent. It suffers from uncertainty about how to accommodate it. As long as success is measured primarily by distance from home, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will remain incomplete. Its deeper significance lies in whether India can once again become a place where return is not an act of idealism, but a viable choice. On January 9, the real question is not how proud India feels about those who left, but how ready it is for those who want to return.

## From charisma to continuity: Why the BJP is preparing for life beyond Modi

By: MR Lalu

A video from Narendra Modi's sear years in politics comes to mind. In the footage, Atal Bihari Vajpayee can be seen embracing the young Modi with genuine fatherly affection. That footage, marked by close personal warmth between the two leaders, clearly conveyed multiple messages. It suggested that the man whom the veteran leader was holding within his protective embrace was still young and a promising party worker. In Vajpayee's eyes, Modi was capable of assuming the reins of the party in future at any organizational level, with his functional acumen. Vajpayee's stature within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was unquestionably commanding, and there was not even the slightest hint of dissent that anyone in the party dared to express openly against him. His statesmanship was strong enough to bind leaders in the BJP and beyond, spanning generations, from his own age to that of Modi. This rare intergenerational blend has consistently shaped leadership dynamics in the saffron party, a distinction that hardly any political party in India can truly parallel. Modi was a party worker from the grassroots, and the warmth and care that Vajpayee had transmitted in the footage were self-revealing for a viewer. It undoubtedly told us that, beyond the personal bond, the relationship between the leaders was fundamentally rooted in an ideological upbringing, a selfless affinity, and a legacy that the BJP is seen to be characteristically passing on through generations.

Youth means the age of ascent, the spring season of life. That comes with energy, aspirations, and commitment. Any organization, for that matter, should meticulously learn the art of tapping this ideological inheritance carried across generations. This can happen through an institutional memory that clearly asserts the need to protect a political lineage, not one cemented by dynastic affiliations, but by ideological moorings. A system to ensure its functional continuum, especially in politics, requires camaraderie that steps beyond individual interests and avoids disrupting its cordial functional synthesis.

This ideological inevitability was reflected in the elevation of Nitin Nabin. It was not a mere ascendancy, but one executed with careful calculation. A generational shift is a pragmatic strategy, adopted only by parties and institutions that look beyond the immediate. Without such foresight, access to success remains peripheral and shallow, as the organizational machine deteriorates in the absence of effective maintenance. Its renewability depends on the timing and innovation with which the maintenance is carried out. For a political party, the objective is not merely winning elections; its strategy must extend beyond the immediate horizon. The Bharatiya Janata Party, so far, has been able to build a galaxy of young leaders across states. It believes that the mantle of political legacy must pass on; this is how continuity is ensured.

The Prime Minister, through his unequivocal gesture of deference to the party system, referred to the BJP's new president as his "boss." While it is common knowledge that within the BJP it is Narendra Modi who holds the reins, this deliberate display of cordiality and discipline set a powerful organizational precedent. It signaled strict disapproval of resistance, if any, and reaffirmed the supremacy of

institutional order over individual authority within the party. A generational shift is a new chapter, destined to turn fresh pages of success through coalitions in the present political scenario. It needs to strategize new tactics and equations, wherever the party can emerge as a power contender through the ballot. A transition does not essentially reflect a mere change of face; it signals a deeper tactical realignment as well. With a new generation comes new tactics, and with them, a new political facelift.

Nitin Nabin represents a generation born after the birth of the BJP. From 1980, when the party remained a political pariah, to its present colossal form, the legacy of leadership-making has been meticulously chiseled out of its ideological framework. A five-term legislator, the young boss of the BJP brings with him a substantial reservoir of organizational expertise. How does this shift in leadership of the ruling party impact the current political scenario? It is a message deeply intended to address the youth population of India, which comprises nearly 40 percent of the eligible electorate. I firmly believe that, irrespective of its present monumental success across the country, the BJP is conscious of the equally monumental disillusionment its ruling regimes can generate among voters over time. Even its most popular face, Narendra Modi's effulgence as a force-multiplier, could eventually fade into insignificance. An ornamental hallucination built around a single personality would not be able to satisfy the aspirations of upcoming generations for a long period. Much like Bollywood stars of yesteryears who have lost their sheen, while a newer generation, with its sculpted physiques and contemporary romantic idioms, began sending waves of excitement across the silver screens; time inevitably draws its Lakshman Rekha around everyone. Modi understands this. Elevation of Nitin Nabin is the outcome of a plan that underscores a phase for BJP beyond Modi.

The shift is again an evolution shaped by society's evolving requirements. This does not necessarily imply that the entire power structure or administrative priority will be decided by the youth alone. The BJP, in particular, has evolved through frequent intergenerational transitions, with its founding generation striving relentlessly for expansion. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L. K. Advani, and Murali Manohar Joshi represented this profound founding succession of the BJP, shaped by its Jan Sangh legacy. The trio unwaveringly built a second rung of leadership, bringing to the forefront figures such as Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan, Narendra Modi, and Amit Shah. From this lineage emerged the next generation, a galaxy of leaders including Yogi Adityanath, Rekha Gupta, Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Devendra Fadnavis. This institutional alignment, achieved through the systematic cultivation of successive generations of leadership, gives the saffron camp considerable confidence. Nitin Nabin, yet again, is younger than many of these third-generation leaders. The constellation of party leaders orbiting the phenomenal personality of the Prime Minister is extensive. What unequivocally signals the arrival of a younger version of the BJP, capable of navigating new coalition equations while simultaneously building the futuristic prospects as a party, is this very agenda of calibrated transition, which now stands at the centre of political discourse.

# The Beatles, Star Wars and Conspiracy Theories

By: Rohit Kumar

It's slightly embarrassing to admit, but as a teenager I genuinely believed that the Beatles were warlocks (male witches) and that Star Wars was part of a sinister global conspiracy to spread Satanism and witchcraft. I was also convinced that "May the Force be with you" was a coded greeting used by a shadowy cabal called the Illuminati.

I believed this largely for two reasons: first, the idea came from a book given to me by someone I respected and trusted; and second, I was highly impressionable at the time.

The only problem was that I loved the Beatles' songs and the Star Wars films, and I didn't quite know how to reconcile that with the beliefs that told me they were dangerous. (Psychologists call this 'cognitive dissonance' – the mental discomfort that arises when deeply held beliefs collide with lived experience.)

This same person who had given me the aforementioned book had also given me one called The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, supposedly secret minutes from a meeting of Jewish leaders plotting to control the governments, media, finance and culture of the world.

The truth, I grew up to discover, was that The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion was a forged document, produced in Tsarist Russia in the early 1900s, most likely created by members of the Russian secret police (the Okhrana) to scapegoat Jews and divert public anger away from the failing Tsarist regime. (Large

sections of it, in fact, were plagiarised almost word-for-word from an 1864 French political satire, Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, that had nothing to do with Jews.)

Despite being exposed early on, the Protocols have been widely circulated, including in Nazi Germany, where Hitler cited them as "evidence", justifying persecution and genocide. To this day, the Protocols circulate in conspiracy spaces, often repackaged with modern targets (media, "global elites," bankers), even when Jews are not explicitly named.

But the Protocols are not unique in that they follow the same pattern as other conspiracy theories.

During periods of great social anxiety (such as the one we are living through), a fake document or story offers "secret knowledge," reducing a complex world with multiple problems to a single hidden enemy. This feeds the existing fear and anxiety, creates a sense of "moral panic" and ultimately leads to a group of people becoming dehumanised.

We assume that only dull people fall for conspiracy theories, but this is not the case. A surprising number of people who would normally be considered 'intelligent' subscribe to them in large numbers.

**Why is this? Here are five reasons:**

o Authority short-circuits healthy skepticism: If a claim comes from a respected elder, teacher, religious figure, a book, or appears "documented" and se-



rious, the brain outsources judgment. (Intelligent people do this more than they realise, because they are trained to respect 'sources'.)

o Intelligence is good at defending beliefs, not just forming them: Once a belief is adopted, intelligence doesn't necessarily dismantle it, it often rationalises it. Then, of course, there is confirmation bias. We find evidence for what we believe is true, and end up "spotting" confirming details, explaining away contradictions and building elegant arguments for patently false ideas.

o Secret knowledge feels empowering: Conspiracy theories like the Protocols appeal to our desire to what could be called the "Neo-in-the-Matrix" complex. "You see what others don't" and "You are awake, while others are

asleep". It feeds the age-old need to feel superior to our fellow humans. For adolescents who are going through a naturally confusing stage of life, conspiracy theories can feel intoxicating. They offer identity, clarity, and moral 'certainty' in a confusing world.

o Emotional truth beats factual truth: Conspiracy theories don't persuade with facts; they persuade with emotions like fear, disgust, moral outrage and the comfort of having located "the enemy". If something feels true, the mind will recruit logic later and force-fit it to the emotion.

o Humans are meaning-makers: We connect dots. Conspiracy texts turn chaos into intention, coincidence into design, and complexity into a grand theory that explains... well, everything. The brain prefers a bad explanation to no explanation at all.

Teenagers, in particular, can be idealistic, absolutist, and hungry for moral frameworks. Add a bit of charisma to the person who is "exposing" the conspiracy and a narrative of good versus evil – and belief in the theory will become almost inevitable.

What helped the conspiracy scales to finally fall from my eyes about the Beatles and George Lucas' Star Wars was reading the facts about them from multiple sources, and understanding their stories better.

Far from "standing in four corners of a burning pentagram and being blessed with international stardom by Satan" as the book on the Illuminati claimed, the secret to the Beatles' success was a combination of far more human factors.

From the late 1950s, they played countless gigs in Liver-

pool and endured gruelling residencies in Hamburg, performing for hours every night in tough, often hostile club environments. These years were physically exhausting and poorly paid, but they forged the band's tight musicianship, confidence, and stage presence.

They also faced repeated rejection from record labels and industry insiders who doubted both their sound and their commercial potential. ("Guitar groups are on their way out".) Even after finally being signed, success did not come easy; it was driven by constant touring, an extraordinary work ethic, and an ever-growing catalogue of original songs. Beatlemania eventually swept across Britain and then the world in 1963-64, but their "overnight" success had its roots in a decade of hard work, persistence, and resilience. Their cheeky humour and unusual haircuts also helped.

As far as Star Wars, George Lucas's eventual success came after years of struggle. He spent nearly ten years writing the story, tearing his hair out (literally) in the process and spending much of the early 1970s trying to convince studios to back a story that many executives found confusing, childish, or commercially risky. The filmmaking process was beset by technical failures, budget pressures, and widespread scepticism, leaving Lucas exhausted and doubtful.

Early cuts of the film were so bad that even Lucas feared it might fail. Only after extensive editing, the addition of John Williams' now-iconic score, and

innovative (and experimental) special effects did the film finally come together.

One could argue that conspiracy theories and misinformation are close cousins – both serve as cheap substitutes for genuine knowledge. It is not surprising that authoritarian regimes work hard to promote superstition while suppressing books, universities, and open intellectual debate: an informed, questioning public is far harder to control.

The medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wisely noted, "Timeo hominem unius libri" – "I fear the man of one book." A book is a dangerous thing if it is the only one you have read.

Perhaps one way out of the great morass of misinformation, half-truths, outright lies, and conspiracy theories is to read – not just more, but more widely. Easier said than done, of course. Yet if the crowds at the recently concluded World Book Fair in Delhi were any indication, reading is far from being a thing of the past, especially among the young. Yes, many are pulled into the attention-fragmenting world of social media, but many still also read.

Despite the fair being festooned with gigantic hoardings of Modi, military displays, and well-funded stalls run by Hindutva organisations, it was the "normal" bookstalls that did brisk business.

Thousands of young people thronged these stalls, lingering, browsing, buying. One of the books they reportedly bought the most was George Orwell's 1984. (Courtesy: The Wire)

## 2026 fitness rules that actually work

By: Rishika Shah

Have you ever started the year promising yourself that this will finally be the year you get fit, then finding yourself quitting sugar, overdoing workouts and quietly giving up by February? Well, you're not alone.

According to Dietician and Nutritionist Riya Jain, most fitness resolutions don't fail because people lack discipline but because they start with extremes that are impossible to sustain.

Riya holds a BSc in beauty and wellness with a specialisation in nutrition science and dietetics from Symbiosis University, Pune.

She is also the founder of Ri-eat, a nutrition brand that focuses on eating smart rather than cutting off, helping people build sustainable habits even as they continue to eat the foods they love.

In a candid conversation with Rediff's Rishika Shah, Riya Jain breaks down why most fitness goals collapse early in the year, how to build habits that last beyond January and why learning to eat smartly matters far more than avoiding eating your favourite foods altogether.

**Say no to extreme diets**  
According to Riya, extreme diet and workout plans rely heavily on willpower rather than habits, and biology always wins.

"They fail because they rely on willpower and not habit building," she says. "Your body is smart. Biology eventually overrides your motivation."

She explains that extreme restriction leads to hormonal and metabolic issues.

"It increases your hunger hormone, causes blood sugar instabilities; all of this eventually makes a person give in to cravings. And the whole regime comes down crashing."

**Don't give up on your favourite foods**

One of the biggest mistakes people make, Riya says, is believing that fitness requires cutting out your favourite foods completely.

"The moment I forbid you to eat something, you want to eat it even more," she explains. "This puts you in the cycle of craving, eating guilt, then compensation, and eventually you quit." She also warns that restriction makes the body fragile.

"When you restrict yourself too much, your body doesn't become resilient. Your weight shoots up the moment you reintroduce forbidden items."

That's why she encourages planned indulgence. "Once in a while, you should be eating junk, sugar, fried food. Once a week, I tell my clients to have a cheat meal. Your body remains used to crap food and so your weight won't shoot up when you consume it."

**Eat smart is better than eat clean**

Riya's approach focuses on smart eating, not rigid food rules.

"You have to understand how to eat smart over clean," she says. "Follow food priority, portion sizes and order of eating. That's what smart eating is about so you don't have to give up your favourite foods."

She points out that weight loss isn't about cuisine or calories alone.

"We add recipes of burgers, pasta, dumplings and fries in the diet and clients still lose weight. It's not about calories or cuisine; it's about recipe style, portions and smart eating."

**Make your favourite foods healthy**

Riya emphasises food priority – deciding what goes into your stomach first.

"Before each meal, fill half the volume of your stomach with protein or fibre," she says. "Then you need lesser carbs to feel full."

**Using pav bhaji as an example, she explains:**

"I'll drink a glass or two of thick buttermilk with jeera first. It gives protein, fills volume, keeps the stomach cool. Then I add raw salad like cucumber or onion to the bhaji. At home, I'll even grate 40-50 grams of tofu inside the bhaji."

The result? "I don't even taste the tofu but the protein increases and I need less pav to feel full."

She also recommends a simple plate rule: "Follow a 2:1:1 proportion – two portions of veggies, one portion of protein, one portion of carbs."

**Choose portion control over cutting foods out**

According to Riya, portion control is far more effective than food elimination.

"Portion sizing wins every time," she says. "You can overeat healthy food and put on weight."

She explains that the body processes excess food the same way.

"If I overeat makhana (foxnuts), the end product is still glucose surplus."

Her key message: "Quantity matters more than food labels, even for healthy foods."

**Healthy vs unhealthy**  
Riya believes nutrition quality matters but context is important.

"An apple and a biscuit may have similar calories but an apple will help you lose weight because nutrition works at a cellular level," she says.

However, she adds perspective. "From a bird's eye view of weight loss, a biscuit alone is never the problem. Eating it mindlessly and not having physical activity is."

**Small habits, big results**  
Riya stresses that fitness is built through small, consistent habits:

Start your day with a healthy fat or metabolic enhancer like methi seeds, cinnamon, nuts, ghee in water, chia seeds or apple cider vinegar.

Have at least one fruit every day with a fat like nuts or seeds.

Prioritise fibre and protein before lunch and dinner so you rely less on carbs.

Track hydration through urine colour -- it should be transparent or lemon yellow.

Walk for 10 minutes after meals to control sugar spikes. She also highlights walking as a powerful weight loss tool.

"Walking increases NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogenesis). The more you walk, the more calories you burn even at rest."

**Slow eating is a game changer**  
One habit she strongly advocates is slowing down while eating.

"Become a slow eater. Take smaller bites and chew till liquid consistency," she says. "This improves nutrient absorption and controls appetite."

She adds, "Fast eaters always need more servings. Slow eating gives mental satisfaction; even small portions feel filling."

**How to balance work, social life and fitness**  
Riya believes people burn out chasing perfect routines. "People try one-and-a-half hours of gymming and on-point diets. They burn themselves out," she says.

Her solution? "Build flexible but non-negotiable practices. Thirty minutes of movement daily is non-negotiable. Five days of mindful eating is non-negotiable. Which five days -- that can be flexible."

**Consistency over intensity**  
When it comes to results, Riya is clear: Consistency always wins.

"Six months of moderate, consistent exercise will always outdo six weeks of intense effort," she says.

"Consistency makes your body resilient. Intensity gives temporary results."

**How to handle slip-ups**  
Slip-ups are inevitable, quitting isn't.

"One or two days of overeating is not proof of failure," she says. "Not resuming your routine the next day is abandoning it."

Her rule is simple: "Reset at the very next meal, not next Monday."

**Motivation is overrated**  
Riya believes motivation is unreliable. "Motivation and excitement are superficial. Build habits and identity instead," she says. "Work on exercising and eating well, not obsessively checking the scale."

**The one rule that works**  
**If there's one rule Riya insists on, it's this:**  
"Never do anything to lose weight that you cannot continue for life."  
She explains, "Eat what you truly enjoy but eat smartly, in moderation, in a balanced way. Be flexible but be certain about non-negotiables."  
"When you're not deprived, you're likely to stay on routine for the rest of the year and your resolutions don't fade." (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

By: Nargis Natarajan

Recently the Mozart of Madras, the one who created a musical storm with 2 Oscars, 2 Grammys, 1 Bafta and 1 Golden Globe was in the news for all the wrong reasons. But before I spell out his melodious and harmonious achievements, I have a word for the trolls. Please guys, at least have the decency to spell his name right. It is AR Rahman and not Rehman.

Even if both names stem from the Arabic roots of 'r-h-m; even if the vowels and phonetics don't matter; even if both represent the same attributes of 'Mercy' and 'Compassion', sometimes spellings do matter.

I'll tell you why. The other day, when I wanted to exit a program, the AI asked me if I wanted to 'exist'. I was not sure whether I should click on 'Yes' or 'No'. So yes! Spelling matters especially when you face an 'existential crisis :-).

Back to Rahman- the musician whose catchy composition of 'Jai Ho' became the toast of every Indian town across the globe. With an urgent, atmospheric and magical feel, the song was played on every victorious event, with the drums of the past mingling with the blasting horns of the present.

Rahman- the mystic who made even the staunchest of atheists a believer with his spiritual symphony of 'Kun Faya Kun', as the Sufi saints swirled around dancing to its tune in every spiritual event. Rahman- the Son of India, who to commemorate the occasion of our Golden Jubilee, composed his album 'Vande Mataram' by singing 'Maa Tujhe Salaam' - a modern patriotic anthem that was a musical celebration of our cultural Unity, Diversity and National Pride.

It was a 'Salaam' like no other, a blend of heartfelt reverence with powerful vocals, symbolizing Love and Gratitude. A masterpiece that defined an expression of devotion towards one's motherland, giving all her children goose bumps every time we heard it.

## How AI is flipping University classrooms

By: D P Singh

Artificial intelligence today is exposing how outdated lecture-based teaching in universities has become. The traditional classroom lecture, where a teacher stands at the podium working through notes and delivering a uniform explanation to every batch, is fast losing its centrality.

With the coming of the internet, the learning practices among students have drastically changed. Students increasingly depend on AI-driven tools now.

Walk into any university campus, and the change is immediately visible. Students sit in clusters across libraries, corridors, hostels, and canteens, their eyes fixed on screens rather than printed pages.

Headphones, laptops, tablets, and iPads are now a familiar sight. What once took place in group discussions now happens over messages, shared documents, screenshots, and online platforms.

Late into the night, in hostel rooms and reading halls, the scene is the same. Backpacks carry fewer textbooks. Print has quietly turned into PDFs.

The libraries reflect this flip just as clearly. They are no longer defined primarily by the number of books and shelves, but by internet access, Wi-Fi strength, and the availability of computers and charging points.

They now function less as spaces

for housing printed books and more as hubs for accessing, storing, and working with digital material. Instead of getting books issued, students download files, search online, and use libraries to organize digital notes.

Learning no longer follows a fixed place or schedule but spills across spaces and hours. It is shaped by screens rather than timetables.

The contrast comes into sharp focus the moment one steps into a classroom. While the teacher shuffles through notes, many students can be seen scrolling through material they downloaded an hour earlier. The lecture proceeds, but the information is already with the students—just a click away and often more up to date.

Even as information reaches students before the class begins, the classroom often continues to function as before. Learning has already moved elsewhere but the teacher largely remains unaware.

Today, learning increasingly takes place across hostels, cafes, corridors, and beyond the campus, in ways unseen earlier. Countless learning communities, online libraries, knowledge repositories, and even tutors are readily available online.

Students connect across continents, discuss, collaborate, and even get certified without ever setting foot in a classroom. The teacher is no longer the only voice,

and the lecture is no longer the only way in the teaching-learning process.

Artificial intelligence has fundamentally altered the ways of teaching and learning. Students are no longer passive recipients of information but active collaborators in the process.

Knowledge is now abundant rather than scarce, explanation has moved beyond monopoly towards democratization, and understanding extends beyond classroom hours. The role of the teacher is shifting from that of the primary knower to that of a facilitator.

In this setting, teaching ceases to be an exclusive privilege exercised through authority, but a shared intellectual process shaped by dialogue, inquiry, and engagement.

Equally significant is the emotional freedom that AI-based learning offers. AI-based learning tools are commonly used by students during periods of independent study.

These tools allow them to revisit material and examine questions as needed within the time available to them. This supports steadier engagement, marked by flexibility and consistency, which is otherwise not possible through a single classroom lecture.

Unlike a classroom lecture that moves at a fixed pace, these tools allow students to pause, rewind, return to an explanation, and think it through again, without the discom-

fort of asking repeatedly or the fear of being judged.

What is missed once in a lecture often stays missed, but with AI the same idea can be revisited through different explanations, examples, and perspectives, matched to a student's pace and level of understanding.

In this sense, AI has changed not just what students learn, but how they learn. Recorded lectures, AI-generated explanations, and interactive tools now give students access to material that is current and frequently updated, drawing on large pools of global knowledge.

In the era of AI, education in general is fast moving from transmission to navigation. The task is not to pass information from teacher to student but to help them find their way through an expanding landscape of ideas, facts, and interpretations. It is also shifting from the possession of knowledge to orientation within knowledge.

This transformation marks a deeper change from obedience to inquiry. The National Education Policy reflects an awareness of this changing learning environment, though the extent to which it reshapes everyday teaching practices remains an open question.

In this emerging environment, the universities that survive will be those that recognize this flip early and redesign themselves with honesty and purpose. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

'China is no longer just the world's factory; it is also becoming a global market'

## UK's Starmer heads to China seeking a thaw in relations but risking rift with Trump

**LONDON, Jan 27:** UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is heading to China, seeking a thaw in relations with Beijing at a time of strained ties with the United States.

He's hoping for an economic boost to Britain, but risks the wrath of China hawks at home — and of US President Donald Trump, who's already heaping tariffs and criticism on America's closest allies.

Starmer is due to meet China's President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang during the visit to Beijing and Shanghai that starts Wednesday, the first by a UK leader since 2018. He is expected to be accompanied by Business Secretary Peter Kyle and dozens of corporate chiefs as Britain seeks Chinese technology and investment, alongside greater access to the world's second-largest economy for UK financial services, cars and Scotch whisky.

"China is no longer just the world's factory; it is also becoming a global market," said Zhao Minghao, a professor in the Institute of International Studies at Shanghai's Fudan University.

The key word stressed by both sides is "pragmatic." As Trump roils the world order, both London and Beijing are looking for a more

stable relationship.

China's government said it sees the visit as an opportunity to enhance political trust and deepen "pragmatic cooperation."

"In the current complex and volatile international situation, it is in the common interest of both peoples of China and the UK, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, to maintain communication and strengthen cooperation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said Tuesday at a daily briefing in Beijing.

**From golden era to big chill**  
Kerry Brown, director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London, said the trip comes as dramatic shifts in geopolitics create new opportunities for UK-China relations.

But he said "Starmer is going to be talking to a very skeptical audience."

"Britain has not been very consistent in its relations with China. We have been very hot and cold," Brown said.

The relationship has soured since the short-lived "golden era" proclaimed in 2015 by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, who took Xi to a traditional English pub during a state

visit. Beijing's crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and growing concern about espionage and economic interference have widened the gap between London and Beijing.

Cameron's Conservative successors barred Chinese investment in sensitive telecoms infrastructure and squeezed China out of investment in new UK nuclear power plants.

Starmer's center-left Labour Party government carried out a review of relations with Beijing after it was elected 18 months ago. It says its approach is one of hard-headed pragmatism — protecting national security from Chinese espionage and interference while keeping up diplomatic dialogue and economic cooperation with the Asian superpower.

Both Britain's economy — the world's sixth largest — and Starmer's popularity could use a boost.

His government has struggled to deliver the economic growth it promised and ease a cost-of-living crisis for millions of households. Labour lags behind hard-right Reform UK in opinion polls, and nervous Labour lawmakers openly mull whether it would be better to



ditch Starmer for a more charismatic leader, such as Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham.

**America's allies look to China**  
Starmer's visit to China comes as cracks are starting to appear in his attempt to strike up a warm relationship with Trump — efforts rewarded with a trade deal that reduced U.S. tariffs on Britain's key auto and aerospace industries.

For months Starmer refrained from public criticism as Trump attacked the mayor of London, slammed British immigration policy and sued the BBC for \$10 billion.

But in recent days, Starmer has spoken out against Trump's desire

to take over Greenland — calling it "completely wrong" — and condemned Trump's disparaging comments about the role of UK and other NATO troops in Afghanistan, which Starmer called "insulting" and "appalling."

Starmer says Britain does not need to choose between the U.S. and China. But he travels to Beijing days after Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. Next month it's the turn of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, as some of America's strongest allies hedge their bets against the unpredictable Trump.

Zhao said growing unease among U.S. allies over Washing-

ton's recent policy moves, including on tariffs, Greenland and the war in Ukraine, "have triggered a wave among allies to recalibrate their policies to de-risk" from the United States."

But rapprochement with Beijing brings the risk of a rift with Washington. Trump has threatened to slap a 100% tariff on all Canadian goods after Carney struck a trade deal with China on his trip this month.

**Espionage and human rights concerns**

Starmer's critics say the government is being naive about China's threat to Britain's security and weak in the face of pressure from Beijing.

The trip follows UK approval of a 20,000 square-meter (around 215,000 square-foot) Chinese Embassy near the Tower of London despite strong opposition from critics who say the "mega-embassy" will make it easier for China to conduct espionage and intimidate dissidents.

Starmer also faces criticism over an agreement to hand over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean to Mauritius. The government says the move will secure the future of a key UK-U.S. military base against legal challenge, but critics

argue it opens the door to Chinese influence. Last week Trump spoke out against the deal, reversing his previous support.

Human rights are another tricky area. Chris Patten, who was governor of Hong Kong from 1992 until the British colony was handed back to China in 1997, said Starmer should be firm in raising disagreements over issues including the treatment of China's Uyghur minority and the imprisonment of Jimmy Lai, a Hong Kong pro-democracy campaigner and British citizen.

"You have to say with them, without being impolite, exactly what you think," Patten said. "They know we're different, but they want to have a reasonable relationship with us and, particularly given the state of the world with Trump, we should want to have a reasonable relationship with them."

Brown, from King's College, said Starmer will likely consider his trip a success if it secures significant investment and avoids major political pitfalls.

"What they're going to do is basically commit to consistency, a bit more predictability," he said. "Friends where we can be friends, otherwise agree to disagree." (AP)

## North Korea launches ballistic missiles into sea between Korean Peninsula, Japan

'S Korean govt denied operating any drones during the times specified by N Korea'



**SEOUL, Jan 27:** North Korea launched short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters on Tuesday, according to its neighbours, as the North heightens animosities with rival South Korea ahead of a major political meeting.

South Korea's military said it detected liftoffs of several ballistic missiles from an area northeast of the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, before the missiles each flew about 350 kilometres (217 miles).

Japan's Defence Ministry said two ballistic missiles launched from North Korea landed off the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. The ministry condemned the launches as a threat to the peace of Japan, the region and the international community.

South Korea's military said it maintains a firm readiness to repel any provocations by North Korea.

The launches were the first time North Korea fired weapons since testing what it called hypersonic missiles in early January. In December, the country test-fired what it called long-range, strategic cruise missiles and new anti-air missiles and released photos showing the apparent construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine.

North Korea has engaged in a run of weapons launches to enlarge its nuclear and missile arsenals since talks with the U.S. and South Korea stalled in 2019. Experts say the North's leader, Kim Jong Un, believes a bigger weapons arsenal would give him greater leverage to win concessions from the U.S.

North Korea's recent displays were likely meant to demonstrate or review its weapons development achievements ahead of the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress, analysts said.

The congress, expected to start in February, would be the first of its kind in five years and is one of North Korea's biggest propaganda spectacles used to set up new political and economic priorities.

North Korea recently threatened retaliation over what it called South Korean surveillance drone flights across the border, one earlier in January and another in September.

The South Korean government denied operating any drones during the times specified by North Korea and began probing whether civilians sent them.

The accusations likely were driven by the North's efforts to dial up anti-South Korea sentiments ahead of the congress, when Kim's previous declaration of a hostile "two-state" system on the Korean Peninsula could be added to the party constitution, analysts said. (AP)

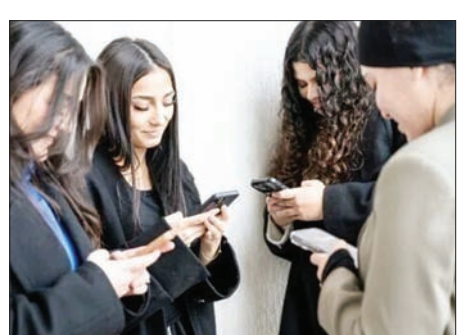
## French lawmakers approve bill banning social media for children under 15

**PARIS, Jan 27:** French lawmakers approved a bill banning social media for children under 15, paving the way for the measure to enter into force at the start of the next school year in September, as the idea of setting a minimum age for use of the platforms gains momentum across Europe.

The bill, which also bans the use of mobile phones in high schools, was adopted by a 130-21 vote late Monday. French President Emmanuel Macron has requested that the legislation be fast-tracked and it will now be discussed by the Senate in the coming weeks.

"Banning social media for those under 15: this is what scientists recommend, and this is what the French people are overwhelmingly calling for," Macron said after the vote. "Because our children's brains are not for sale — neither to American platforms nor to Chinese networks. Because their dreams must not be dictated by algorithms."

The issue is one of the very few in a divided National Assembly to attract such broad support, despite critics from the hard left denouncing provisions of the bill as infringement on civil liberties. Weakened domestically since his decision to dissolve parliament plunged France into a prolonged political crisis, Macron has strongly supported the ban, which could be



come one of the final major measures adopted under his leadership before he leaves office next year. The French government had previously passed a law banning phone use in all primary and middle schools.

The vote in the assembly came just days after the British government said it will consider banning young teenagers from social media as it tightens laws designed to protect children from harmful content and excessive screen time.

The French bill has been devised to be compliant with the European Union's Digital Services Act, which imposes a set of strict requirements designed to keep internet users safe online. In November, European lawmakers called for action at EU level to protect minors

online, including a bloc-wide minimum age of 16 and bans on the most harmful practices.

According to France's health watchdog, one in two teenagers spends between two and five hours a day on a smartphone. In a report published in December, it said that some 90 per cent of children aged between 12 and 17 use smartphones daily to access the internet, with 58 per cent of them using their devices for social networks. The report highlighted a range of harmful effects stemming from the use of social networks, including reduced self-esteem and increased exposure to content associated with risky behaviours such as self-harm, drug use and suicide. Several families in France have sued TikTok over teen suicides they say are linked to harmful content. The French ban won't cover online encyclopedias, educational or scientific directories, or platforms for the development and sharing of open-source software, behaviours.

In Australia, social media companies have revoked access to about 4.7 million accounts identified as belonging to children since the country banned use of the platforms by those under 16, officials said. The law provoked fraught debates in Australia about technology use, privacy, child safety and mental health and has prompted other countries to consider similar measures. (AP)

## Iran's currency falls to record low after nationwide protests sparked by economic woes

**DUBAI, Jan 27:** Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests killed at least 6,126 people while many others still are feared dead, activists said Tuesday, as a US aircraft carrier group arrived in the Middle East to lead any American military response to the crisis.

Iran's currency, the rial, meanwhile fell to a record low of 1.5 million to USD 1.

The arrival of the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and guided missile destroyers accompanying it provide the US the ability to strike Iran, particularly as Gulf Arab states have signalled they want to stay out of any attack despite hosting American military personnel.

Two Iranian-backed militias in the Mideast have signalled their willingness to launch new attacks, likely trying to back Iran after US President Donald Trump threatened military action over the killing of peaceful protesters or Tehran launching mass executions in the wake of the demonstrations.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to drag the entire Mideast into a war, though its air defences and military are still reeling after the June war launched by Israel against the country. But the pressure on its economy may spark new unrest as everyday goods slowly go out of reach of its people.

Activists offer new death toll  
The new figures Tuesday came from the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which has been accurate in multiple rounds of unrest in Iran. The group verifies each death with a network of activists on the ground in Iran.

It identified the dead as including at least 5,777 protesters, 214 government-affiliated forces, 86 children and 49 civilians who weren't demonstrating. The crackdown has seen over 41,800 arrests, it added.

The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll given authorities cutting off the internet and disrupting calls into the Islamic Republic.

Iran's government has put the death toll at a far lower 3,117, say-



ing 2,427 were civilians and security forces, and labelled the rest "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest there in decades, and recalls the chaos surrounding Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The protests in Iran began on December 28, sparked by the fall of the Iranian currency, the rial, and quickly spread across the country. They were met by a violent crackdown by Iran's theocracy, the scale of which is only starting to become clear as the country has faced more than two weeks of internet blackout — the most comprehensive in its history.

Iran's UN ambassador told a UN Security Council meeting late Monday that Trump's repeated threats to use military force against the country "are neither ambiguous nor misinterpreted." Amir Saeid Iravani also repeated allegations that the US leader incited violence by "armed terrorist groups" supported by the United States and Israel, but gave no evidence to support his claims. Iranian state media has tried to accuse forces abroad for the protests as the theocracy remains broadly unable to address the country's ailing economy, which is still squeezed by international sanctions, particularly over its nuclear program.

On Tuesday, exchange shops offered the record-low rial-to-dollar rate in Tehran.

Already, Iran has vastly limited its subsidized currency rates to cut down on corruption. It also has offered the equivalent of USD 7 a month to most people in the country to cover rising costs. However, Iran's people have seen the rial fall from 32,000 to USD 1 just a decade ago — which has devalued the value of their savings.

Some Iranian-backed militias suggest willingness to fight  
Iran projected its power across the Mideast through the "Axis of Resistance," a network of proxy militant groups in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and other places. It was also seen as a defensive buffer, intended to keep conflict away from Iranian borders. But it has collapsed after Israel targeted Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon and others during the Gaza war. Meanwhile, rebels in 2024 overthrew Syria's Bashar Assad after a yearslong, bloody war in which Iran backed his rule.

Yemen's Houthi rebels, backed by Iran, have repeatedly warned they could resume fire if needed on shipping in the Red Sea, releasing old footage of a previous attack Monday. Ahmad "Abu Hussein" al-Hamidawi, the leader of Iraq's Kataib Hezbollah militia, warned "the enemies that the war on the (Islamic) Republic will not be a picnic; rather, you will taste the bitterest forms of death, and nothing will remain of you in our region." (AP)

## World pauses to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day

**WARSAW, Jan 27:** Candles flickered at dawn on Tuesday at the vast Holocaust memorial in Berlin as people across Europe and beyond paused to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, reflecting on Nazi Germany's murder of millions of people and its attempt to completely wipe out Jewish life on the continent.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed across the world on January 27, the anniversary of the liberation by Soviet forces of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most notorious of the Nazi German death camps. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2005 establishing the day as an annual commemoration.

At the memorial site of Auschwitz, in an area which was under German occupation during World War II, former prisoners laid flowers and wreaths at the Execution Wall, where German forces murdered thousands of people, most of them Poles. Later in the day, Poland's President Karol Nawrocki will join survivors for a remembrance ceremony at Birkenau, the vast site nearby where Jews were transported from across Europe to be exterminated in gas chambers.

Nazi German forces murdered some 1.1 million people at Auschwitz, most of them Jews, but also Poles, Roma and others.

Commemorations on the anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation by the Red Army on Jan. 27, 1945, were also taking place across Europe on Tuesday, as well as at the United Nations. Germany, the nation that inflicted war and genocide on its neighbours, is holding a commemoration in the Bundestag, the parliament, on Wednesday.

Candles burned, and white roses were placed at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a field of 2,700 grey concrete slabs near the Brandenburg Gate in the heart of Berlin, which honours the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust. The vast site in the heart of the capital underlines Germany's remorse.



Israel marks its Holocaust Remembrance Day on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, which stresses Jewish resistance to the Nazi terror.

There are an estimated 196,600 Jewish Holocaust survivors still alive globally, down from the 220,000 survivors estimated to be alive a year earlier, according to new information released by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Nearly all of them — some 97 per cent — are "child survivors" who were born in 1928 and later, the group said.

Though the world's community of survivors shrinks with time, some are still telling their stories for the first time after all these years.

On Sunday, the Netherlands marked its National Holocaust Memorial Day with a silent march through Amsterdam's historic Jewish quarter to a memorial to Auschwitz victims. Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema spoke to hundreds of people who attended the sombre event.

"Bergen-Belsen. Sobibor. Auschwitz — they are unprecedented and still incomprehensible examples of what intolerance, hatred, and racism can lead to. Unparalleled in history," she said. The Dutch commemoration happens each year on the last Sunday in January at the Wertheim Park in Amsterdam. (AP)

## Carney calls Trump's tariff threats bluster ahead of US-Canada free trade talks

**TORONTO, Jan 26:** Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Monday some of US President Donald Trump's threats should be viewed as prepositioning ahead of negotiations to renew the free trade pact between the two large trading partners.

Carney noted they are entering a review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement this year and said he expects a "robust review".

"The president is a strong negotiator, and some of these comments and positioning should be viewed in the broader context of that," Carney said.

Trump threatened this past weekend to impose a 100% tariff on goods imported from Canada if America's northern neighbour went ahead with a trade deal with Beijing, something Carney said Canada has no interest in. Carney has said his recent agreement with China merely cuts tariffs on a few sectors that were recently hit with tariffs.

In 2024, Canada mirrored the United States by putting a 100% tariff on electric vehicles from Beijing and a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum. China had responded by imposing 100% import taxes on Canadian canola oil and meal and 25% on pork and seafood.

Breaking with the United States this month during a visit to Beijing, Carney cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on those Canadian products.

"Last week's new strategic partnership with China will make available tens of thousands affordable electric vehicles in Canada," Carney said Monday.

Carney has said there would be an initial annual cap



of 49,000 vehicles on Chinese EV exports coming into Canada at a tariff rate of 6.1%, growing to about 70,000 over five years. He also has said the initial cap on Chinese EV imports was about 3% of the 1.8 million vehicles sold in Canada annually and that, in exchange, China is expected to begin investing in the Canadian auto industry within three years.

Trump's tariff threat came amid an escalating war of words with Carney as the Republican president's push to acquire Greenland strained the NATO alliance.

Carney has emerged as a spokesman for a movement for countries to find ways to link up and counter the US under Trump. Speaking in Davos before Trump, Carney said, "Middle powers must act together because if you are not at the table, you are on the menu." The prime minister received widespread praise and attention for his remarks, upstaging Trump at the World Economic Forum. (AP)

## Districts unfurls Tricolour; cultural programmes and march-past mark celebrations

# 77<sup>th</sup> Republic Day celebrated with patriotic fervour

**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, Jan 27:** The 186th Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Jaipur Road, Namsai, organised a series of patriotic events under the banner of the 'Vande Mataram' programme from January 19 to 26, culminating in the celebration of the 77th Republic Day.

The Republic Day celebrations began with the Flag Hoisting at the Quarter Guard, performed by the Commandant of CRPF 186 Battalion, who extended greetings and congratulations to all officers and personnel, motivating them to continue serving the nation with dedication and discipline.

As part of the celebrations, F/186 Company showcased a Weapon Display at Bordumsa ground before PS Bordumsa, highlighting the arms and equipment used by CRPF personnel. A Yoga Programme was also organised at APPI Ground, Namsai, emphasising physical fitness, mental well-being and a healthy lifestyle among the force.

During the 'Vande Mataram' programme, the Commandant and personnel visited nearby schools, distributed the National Flag (Tiranga) to students and collectively sang Vande Mataram, instilling a spirit of patriotism and national pride. The events featured a band performance playing patriotic tunes, further energising the celebrations.

On January 26, marking the grand finale, Deputy Commandant K. N. Haldhar visited Sagar Vidya Mandir School, Jona III, Lathao, hoisted the National Flag and conveyed Republic Day greetings to students and staff.

Through these activities, CRPF 186 Battalion reaffirmed its commitment to nation-building, unity and strengthening civil-force relations, while inspiring patriotism, discipline and community engagement among residents.

**Our Yupia Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day of India was celebrated with great enthusiasm and patriotic spirit at Yupia on Sunday under the aegis of the District Administration, Papum Pare.

The celebrations began with the unfurling of the National Flag by Deputy Commissioner, Papum Pare, Vishakha Yadav, followed by the National Anthem and a ceremonial salute. In her Republic Day address, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted the major developmental achievements and progress made by various departments in the district over the past year and expressed hope that the momentum would continue in the years ahead.

As part of the programme, winners of the extempore speech and essay writing competitions organised during Samvidhan Hatya Diwas were awarded cash prizes.

The District Administration also conferred Commendation Certificates on officials and staff from various departments in recognition of their



exemplary dedication, sincerity and outstanding service, particularly for their role in the successful conduct of elections and effective implementation of government programmes.

Outstanding academic achievers were also felicitated on the occasion. Leyu Liza Sikom, daughter of Tali Sikom from VKV Balijan, who secured first position in the Class X CBSE Examination 2024-25 with 95.6 per cent marks and Nabam Renu, daughter of Nabam Tahri from JNV Doimukh, who secured first position in Class XII (Humanities) CBSE Examination 2024-25 with 88.8 per cent marks, were honoured.

Other highlights of the programme included exhibition stalls set up by various departments and Self-Help Groups showcasing government initiatives and local entrepreneurship. The audience also witnessed an impressive taekwondo demonstration by the Arunachal Pradesh Taekwondo Association, a band performance by Don Bosco School, Nonpu and colourful cultural performances that added vibrancy to the celebrations.

The event was attended by Zilla Parishad Chairperson Bamang Yayu, Superintendent of Police Taru Gusar, Additional Deputy Commissioner Tame Yajum, heads of offices, government officials, Gaon Burahs, students and members of the public.

**Our Yingkiang Correspondent adds:** The 77th Republic Day was celebrated in a befitting manner at the General Ground, Yingkiang, on Sunday with enthusiasm and patriotic fervour. The Deputy Commissioner of Upper Siang, Talo Jerang, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest and unfurled the National Flag, taking the Rastriya Salami in the presence of a large gathering com-

prising government officials, PRI members, Gaon Burahs, police personnel, students and members of the public.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Guest highlighted the significance of Republic Day and paid rich tributes to the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country's independence and sovereignty. He spoke about ongoing developmental projects in the district and various central flagship schemes being implemented by different departments for the welfare of the people. Emphasising the government's initiative to deliver services at the doorstep of citizens, Jerang urged the public to actively avail themselves of these benefits for overall socio-economic development.

On the occasion, Commendation Certificates were awarded to officials and individuals in recognition of their dedication and sincerity in government service. The awardees included Kenbang Jongkey, Circle Officer; Dr Etuk Jopir, SMO, District Hospital, Yingkiang; Bamen Nyodo, Weaving Instructress, Textile and Handloom Department, Yingkiang; Shivji Thakur, Electrician, Electrical Department, Yingkiang; John Jijong, Booth Level Officer, 31-Palling (Best Booth Level Officer); Orik Osik, Booth Level Officer, 41-Gobuk and Ajok Dameng, Progressive Woman Farmer from New Millang Village.

The celebrations were further enriched by colourful cultural performances presented by Donyi Polo Yelam Kenbang, Peedong Nane Public School, SFS School, Simong, Simong Ane Dance Party, Tagin Dance Troupe, Youth Development Union with an awareness programme on drug abuse and Gorkha and Assamese dance groups.



Other highlights of the programme included a march-past by the District Police, NCC, Scouts and Guides, a band display by VKV Yingkiang, yoga demonstrations and exhibition stalls set up by various government departments. The celebrations concluded with a friendly football match played between SP XI and DMO XI.

Meanwhile, at Mariyang, the SDO Yingkiang, Toni Mitkong, unfurled the National Flag at the General Ground in the presence of officers, Gaon Burahs, PRI members, students and members of the public. The day-long programme featured displays by the Agriculture, Horticulture, ArSLM and Industry departments, along with exhibitions of local products, cultural events and sports activities.

At Tuting, the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Pandov Perme, unfurled the National Flag at the General Ground in the presence of government officers, Indian Army personnel, PRI leaders, Gaon Burahs, members of the public and school children. Highlights of the programme included a march-past, band display by the Indian Army and cultural performances by school children and Army personnel.

**Our Keyi Panyor Correspondent adds:** Keyi Panyor district celebrated the 77th Republic Day with great enthusiasm and patriotic spirit. The Deputy Commissioner of Keyi Panyor district, Shweta Nagarkoti, IAS, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest and extended warm Republic Day greetings to all present.

In her address, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted the true meaning of democracy, emphasising collective responsibility, equality and active participation in state-building. She said that she

considers Arunachal Pradesh as her own state, taking pride in its achievements while also expressing concern over its shortcomings. Describing Arunachal Pradesh as a fast-developing state, she termed it a positive sign but stressed that development should never come at the cost of the environment and must always remain sustainable.

Appealing to the public to act responsibly towards development, she urged citizens to maintain civic sense, particularly with regard to cleanliness and sanitation in public spaces. The Deputy Commissioner also informed the gathering about KP Suvidha, a WhatsApp-based service platform that enables people to access district administration services without the need for physical visits, making governance more accessible and citizen-friendly.

The celebrations featured a vibrant lineup of activities, including cultural programmes, parade contingents, exhibition stalls and a free medical camp, which added colour and encouraged community participation.

During the programme, the Chief Guest also formally launched the annual calendar of the 27-Keji Panyor Zilla Parishad Constituency.

The event was attended by Angad Mehta, IPS, Superintendent of Police, Keyi Panyor; Likha Teji, ADC; Nabam Piju, Zilla Parishad Chairperson, all Zilla Parishad Members, Heads of Departments, PRI members, HGBs, GBs, government officials, senior citizens, students and members of the general public.

The programme concluded on a high note, reflecting unity, patriotism and a shared commitment towards sustainable development and responsible citizenship.

## AI Explorer Programme 2026 inaugurated in Tawang

**HT Correspondent**

**TAWANG, Jan 27:** A three-day AI Explorer Programme was inaugurated on Tuesday at the Computer Laboratory of Government Higher Secondary School, Tawang, marking a significant step towards strengthening digital and artificial intelligence education among students of the district. The programme is being conducted by expert resource persons from Delhi-based RanchoLabs, who will provide hands-on training in Artificial Intelligence to 40 selected students from Government Town Secondary School and Government Higher Secondary School, Tawang.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Assistant Commissioner Sange Norbu, Deputy Director of School Education, Tawang, Hridar Phuntsok, District Information Technology Officer Tenzin Phuntsok and Principal of GHSS Tawang, Aseng Modi.

During an interaction session with the students, Deputy Commissioner Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS, highlighted the growing importance of Artificial Intelligence in everyday life. She said that AI has made day-to-day work easier and stressed the need for students to understand the best and responsible use of AI applications.

Acknowledging the proximity of the upcoming board examinations, the Deputy Commissioner appreciated the students' enthusiasm and not wanting them to miss the learning opportunity, requested the resource persons to provide the best possible training within the three-day programme. She encouraged the students to make maximum use of the exposure and extended her best wishes for both the training and their forthcoming examinations.

Speaking on the occasion, DDSE Tawang Hridar Phuntsok emphasised the importance of AI training for both students and educators. However, considering the academic calendar and board examinations, he observed that the current timing was not ideal and suggested that similar programmes be organised during the July-August months in future to enable participation of a larger number of students from across the district.

The inaugural function began with an expression of gratitude and concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by District Information Technology Officer Tenzin Phuntsok.

Following the formal inauguration, students attended their first technical session, where they were introduced to 3D painting using AI technology, generating enthusiasm and curiosity among the young learners.

## DC interacts with newly elected ZPMs in Papum Pare

*Coordination, transparency and collective functioning stressed at meeting in Yupia*

**HT Correspondent**

**YUPIA, Jan 27:** The Deputy Commissioner of Papum Pare district, Vishakha Yadav, on Tuesday held an interaction meeting with the newly elected Zilla Parishad Members and the Zilla Parishad Chairperson of Papum Pare district at the DC Conference Hall, Yupia.

The meeting aimed to familiarise the newly elected representatives with the district administration and to provide a platform for discussing pressing issues concerning their respective Zilla Parishad segments. All newly elected Zilla Parishad Members along with the Zilla Parishad Chairperson participated in the interaction.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner congratulated the elected members and assured them of her full support and guidance whenever required. She emphasised the importance of creating awareness on all Panchayat subjects and stated that necessary directions would be issued to all concerned departments implementing schemes and programmes under the 29 subjects mandated to Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Stressing the need for collective responsibility, the Deputy Commissioner said that irrespective of political affiliations, all elected members must work together as "Team Papum Pare" for the overall development and welfare of the district. She also underlined the importance of transparent and rightful selection of beneficiaries under flagship schemes and other government programmes.

Taking note of concerns regarding the lack of mobile network connectivity in certain areas under Sangdupota Circle, the Deputy Commis-



sioner directed the concerned Zilla Parishad Member to submit a detailed list of such areas and assured that the matter would be taken up with the appropriate authorities.

Responding to demands for sports facilities across Zilla segments, she stated that efforts would be made to tap available opportunities to provide sports infrastructure wherever feasible. She further informed that directives would be issued to ensure regular coordination meetings with Zilla Parishad Members.

The Deputy Commissioner also directed all officers and officials to remain at their respective places of posting and to mandatorily attend national and state celebrations such as Republic Day, Independence Day and Statehood Day to facilitate public participation and foster a sense of patriotism among villagers.

Zilla Parishad Chairperson, Bamang Yayu, assured that under her leadership there would be no partiality or party politics and appealed to all members to avoid groupism and work collectively. She also requested the Deputy Commissioner to arrange a joint meeting with departmental officers, particularly from agrarian and allied sectors dealing with Panchayat subjects, to provide greater clarity on schemes and their implementation.

All elected Zilla Parishad Members also shared their views and unanimously stressed the need for regular meetings, collective functioning beyond party lines and working as one cohesive team post-elections. The Zilla Parishad Member from Bhat Ganga raised the issue of clear demarcation of jurisdictional boundaries and sought necessary clarification.

## Indian Army conducts 'Know Your Army' campaign at Pasighat

**HT Correspondent**

**PASIGHAT, Jan 27:** The Spearhead Division of Spear Corps of the Indian Army celebrated the 77th Republic Day with patriotic fervour at Pasighat Outdoor Stadium by organising a "Know Your Army" awareness campaign, providing the civilian populace a unique opportunity to familiarise themselves with the ethos, role and capabilities of the Indian Army.

The campaign featured a comprehensive exhibition that was visited by Pasighat MLA Tapi Darang, Deputy Commissioner Sonalika Jiwani, Padma Shri awardee Yanung Jamoh Lego, Superintendent of Police Pankaj Lamba and other dignitaries. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from the local populace with a large number of students from schools in and around Pasighat, including Sainik School East Siang, as well as NCC cadets, adding youthful energy and vibrancy to the programme.

## Arunachal Study Circle, Nriyangan Academy launch new branch

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Jan 27:** The Arunachal Study Circle and Nriyangan Dance & Music Academy officially inaugurated their newest branch on Tuesday at Nyokum Lapang, Itanagar, aiming to strengthen the educational and cultural landscape of the capital complex.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by several distinguished guests, including Chief Guest Nagbia Sangnu, Corporator of Ward No 12, IMC and Sister Sheeba, Principal of Holy Cross School, Itanagar.

Speaking at the event, the founder of the institutions, Amit Kumar Mukherjee, described the new branch as a "one-stop hub" for both academic excellence and creative expression. The centre will offer a wide range of courses, including performing arts such as dance, music, guitar, keyboard and Zumba; creative arts including painting and fine arts and comprehensive tuition classes for students from Nursery to Class 12 under the Arunachal Study Circle.

Rup Jyoti Mukherjee, Principal of Arunachal Study Circle, highlighted the strategic location of the branch, noting its accessibility for students from Nyokum Lapang, Zero Point, Bank Tinali and Mob-2.

## Vande Mataram commemorative celebrations conclude at Tawang War Memorial

*Tawang Brigade marks 150 years of iconic national song with cultural and military fusion*

**HT Correspondent**

**TAWANG, Jan 27:** The Vande Mataram commemorative celebrations, organised by the Tawang Brigade at the historic Tawang War Memorial, concluded successfully on Jan 26, marking 150 years since the composition of the iconic national song. Held from January 15 to January 26, 2026, the event stood as a powerful tribute to India's freedom struggle, rich cultural heritage and enduring spirit of patriotism.

Throughout the celebrations, the War Memorial echoed with national pride as the Military Marching Band rendered stirring martial tunes, reflecting the discipline, valour and proud traditions of the Indian Armed Forces. A major highlight of the event was the unique fusion performances by the Military Band in collaboration with the Monpa Institute of Performing Arts, where military



music blended seamlessly with indigenous cultural rhythms, creating an evocative symphony that deeply moved the audience.

The cultural presentations by the Monpa Institute of Performing Arts showcased the vibrant traditions and heritage of the region, underscoring the harmony between

national and local identities. This artistic fusion symbolised unity in diversity and reinforced the spirit of military-civil cooperation, a cornerstone of nation-building in remote and strategically important border areas.

The celebrations witnessed enthusiastic participation from mili-

tary personnel, civil dignitaries, representatives of the local administration, students, youth, residents and tourists. The presence of civil dignitaries alongside the Armed Forces highlighted the deep-rooted bond between the Indian Army and the people, reflecting the Army's enduring role not only as the guardian of the nation's frontiers but also as a committed contributor to nation-building, social integration and cultural preservation.

The successful culmination of the commemorative event left a lasting impression on all attendees, reaffirming Vande Mataram as a timeless source of inspiration, unity and national pride. Through music, culture and collective participation, the Indian Army once again demonstrated its unwavering commitment to strengthening national values while fostering social and cultural integration in border regions.

## 186 Battalion CRPF organises Cycle Expedition on 20<sup>th</sup> Raising Day

**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, Jan 27:** On the occasion of its 20th Foundation Day, 186 Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) organised a cycle expedition from Pasighat to Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. The programme was flagged off from PM Kendriya Vidyalaya, Gumin Nagar, by Pankaj Lamba, IPS, Superintendent of Police, Pasighat in the presence of Ariche Anthony Maheo, 2-IC, 186 Battalion, Amarnath Jha, GM (Head of Project), NHPC, Rinkoo Upadhyay, Principal of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and officers and personnel of the battalion.

The event saw active participation from CRPF personnel and students of PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, who will cycle across the picturesque yet challenging terrain over the coming days. The programme aimed to promote physical fitness, discipline, unity, team spirit and public awareness, while also strengthen-



ing the bond between the security forces and the local community.

Traversing the scenic route, the expedition symbolises endurance, resilience and determination, values deeply ingrained in the ethos of the CRPF. The journey is scheduled to culminate at Jaipur Road, Namsai, the headquarters of 186 Battalion, on January 31, 2026, where participants will be warmly received. The cycle expedition forms a key part of the 20th Raising Day celebrations of 186 Battalion, which also include social, cultural and fitness-oriented activities. The programme was widely appreciated by officers, jawans and local residents for its positive message and successful execution.

## 'USD 500 bn investment opportunity in energy sector'

## India riding on reforms express: PM Modi

**BETUL (GOA), Jan 27:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said India's energy sector offers investment opportunities worth USD 500 billion, as the country accelerates reforms and moves from energy security towards energy independence.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of India Energy Week 2026 via video conferencing, he said USD 100 billion investment is being targeted by the end of the decade in the upstream sector after landmark reforms and opening 1 million square kilometres of area for finding and producing oil and gas, while in the downstream, the nation is targeting to become the world's largest oil refining hub.

The ambitious target of more than doubling the share of natural gas in the energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 will create opportunities in LNG and pipelines, while a growing economy will fuel demand for petrochemical products, he said. "Today, India is a land of immense opportunities for the energy sector," the Prime Minister said, noting that as the world's

fastest-growing major economy, India's demand for energy products is rising steadily while also creating opportunities to meet global demand. He highlighted that India ranks among the top five exporters of petroleum products globally, supplying to more than 150 countries, and said this capacity would benefit international partners.

Emphasising India's focus on global partnerships, Modi said the energy sector alone offers vast investment opportunities across multiple segments. He said India has significantly opened up its oil and gas exploration sector, citing the Samudra Manthan Mission for deep-sea exploration.

India aims to attract USD 100 billion in oil and gas investments by the end of the decade, with plans to expand exploration to one million square kilometres, he said. More than 170 blocks have already been awarded for exploration, while the Andaman and Nicobar basin is emerging as the next hydrocarbon frontier.

He added that reforms such as reducing No-Go areas and incorpo-



rating industry feedback into laws and regulations would improve profitability for investors.

Stating that India's large and expanding refining capacity is a key advantage, he said the country currently ranks second globally and is poised to become the world leader. India's refining capacity stands at around 260 million tonnes per annum, and plans are underway to scale it beyond 300 million tonnes

per annum.

Highlighting rising LNG demand, Modi said India aims to meet 15 per cent of its total energy demand through gas. He pointed to opportunities across the LNG value chain, including transportation, terminals and regasification.

India is building LNG carriers domestically under a Rs 70,000 crore shipbuilding programme, he said, while investments are also

being made in pipeline networks and city gas distribution, which is expanding rapidly across urban centres. He added that growing demand for petrochemical products, driven by India's large population and expanding economy, would require extensive energy infrastructure and create significant downstream investment opportunities.

"Today's India is riding on the Reforms Express," Modi said, highlighting rapid reforms to strengthen domestic hydrocarbons and create a transparent, investor-friendly environment.

He said India is "now moving beyond energy security towards the mission of energy independence," with an ecosystem capable of meeting domestic demand and offering globally competitive exports through affordable refining and transport solutions. "Our energy sector is at the heart of our aspirations. It holds USD 500 billion in investment opportunities," Modi said, concluding with a call to the global community: "Make in India, Innovate in India, Scale with India, Invest in India." (PTI)

## Govt turns down Oppn demands for discussion on VB-G RAM G Act, SIR during Budget Session

## All-party meet



**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** The government on Tuesday rejected the opposition's demands for discussions on the VB-G RAM G Act as well as on the SIR in the Budget session of Parliament beginning Wednesday, with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju saying the two issues had already been debated by both Houses and "we cannot reverse the gear".

Rijiju made these remarks after an all-party meeting convened by the government on the eve of the Budget Session of Parliament.

During the meeting, opposition members, including the Congress' Jairam Ramesh and John Brittas of the CPI(M), also objected to the non-circulation of government business for the session, which the minister said would be done in due course.

Opposition members wanted a discussion on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, VB-G RAM G law on employment guarantee that replaced the MGNREGA scheme, the tariffs imposed by the US on India, foreign policy matters, the issue of air pollution, state of the economy, ban on social media for early teens, among other issues, sources said.

On the opposition's contentions on the VB-G RAM G Act, which was passed by Parliament during the Winter Session, the minister said, "Once a law is before the nation, we have to follow it. We cannot reverse the gear and go back."

He said opposition MPs put forth several issues, and these can be raised during debate on the

President's address and the Budget. "This is the first session of the year. Normally, the list of government business is shared after the President's address. However, I am prepared to share the list; I have told officers to do it," Rijiju said after some opposition leaders complained that government business for the session had not been shared.

He added that this is not an important issue, and running the House smoothly remains the focus.

Replying to a query on the demand for a discussion on the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal, he said, "Both Houses of Parliament had extensive discussions on electoral reforms in the last session, where this issue was also raised by the opposition. This is uncalled for if another debate is demanded."

Rijiju appealed that members should raise their issues but there should not be any ruckus.

"My sincere appeal on behalf of the government to all honourable members is that in our Parliamentary democracy, we have been elected to represent the people and to speak for the people. While exercising our right to speak, we must also have the duty to listen to the members of other political parties," he said.

He said "marathon discussions" were held on the SIR issue during the last session, when Parliament had debated electoral reforms. "All members were given ample time, and parties exhausted their energy," Rijiju said. (PTI)

## Mamata warns of attempts to create unrest ahead of Bengal polls



**KOLKATA, Jan 27:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday warned that attempts were being made to create unrest in the state ahead of the upcoming elections and urged people to maintain peace and not to fall prey to provocation.

Without naming anyone, Banerjee claimed that some forces were trying to incite disturbances in the state for electoral gains.

The assembly elections are due in a few months in West Bengal.

She was addressing a meeting in the state secretariat after virtually inaugurating the renovated crematorium at Siriti in south Kolkata, and laying the foundation stone of a new crematorium at Doi Ghat in Watanj, also in the southern part of the city.

"Some people are trying to incite riots for electoral gains. But we have to live together for 365 days. This Bengal belongs to everyone," the chief minister said.

If any untoward incident happens to certain communities, roads and train tracks get blocked, the Trinamool Congress supremo said, adding that she does not want such situations to arise.

"I want everyone to live together in harmony," she said.

Banerjee also raised concerns over the alleged harassment of migrant workers from West Bengal in other states.

"About 1.5 crore people from other states work in Bengal, but no one here troubles them. But when our workers go to work outside the state, they are subjected to severe atrocities," she said.

In view of the situation, Banerjee urged migrant workers to return to West Bengal and assured them that employment opportunities would be created in the state. (PTI)

## Must move forward keeping in mind 'survival of the fastest' in tech, not just 'fittest': Rajnath

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said Operation Sindoor demonstrated that indigenous systems are "strengthening" India's operational readiness, commending the crucial role DRDO is playing in achieving self-reliance which has become a "national mindset" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a gathering at a Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) event here, he also underlined that in today's times when technology is changing rapidly especially on the battlefield, "we must move forward keeping in mind the theory of 'survival of the fastest' and not just 'survival of the fittest'".

"The country that thinks, decides and deploys technology quickly stays ahead," Singh asserted. He also underlined the "need to reduce time" between research and arriving at a prototype, from prototype to testing and from testing to deployment, asserting that "timely induction in the armed forces should be the biggest parameter". Singh urged the DRDO to move beyond the sectors where the private sector has already developed its capabilities, and suggested the creation of a "separate wing" within the organisation that "takes risks in sectors where the chances of success may seem low". However, if success is achieved, it will be historic, he said.

DRDO's 'Best Performing Scientists and



Technical Persons' who were among the 'Special Guests' at the Republic Day parade on Monday attended the event.

The defence minister said, "Operation Sindoor demonstrated that indigenous systems are strengthening India's operational readiness."

Singh commended the crucial role of the DRDO in achieving self-reliance, which he said has become a "national mindset" under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

He said that DRDO's technology was "effectively used on the battlefield during Operation Sindoor" and the research and development (R&D) organisation is playing a "key role in the rapid transformation of the defence sector" driven by the pursuit of indigenisation. DRDO-made platforms were used by the Indian forces during the decisive military action in May 2025.

In response to the Pahalgam terror attack,

India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, carrying out air strikes on terrorist infrastructure in territories controlled by Pakistan. The strikes triggered four days of intense clashes that ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions on May 10.

Singh urged the defence organisation to stay "ahead of the curve" in the present technology-driven world to focus on R&D and exhorted DRDO scientists to "think innovatively and quickly, while not being afraid to take risks".

"Technology is changing rapidly. Any tech that is new today may become irrelevant in four to five years. Therefore, in today's times, especially on the battlefield, we must move forward keeping in mind the theory of 'survival of the fastest' and not just 'survival of the fittest'". The country that thinks, decides and deploys technology quickly stays ahead," he said.

Singh pointed out that the DRDO usually focuses on design and prototyping, and production is the role of industries, emphasising that it is "necessary to bridge this gap".

He said a "co-development approach" akin to international models can be adopted, where the industry is involved from the early stages, "from design to production".

Calling upon the DRDO to "collaborate extensively" with public sector undertakings and the private sector, Singh said the time has come to move beyond conventional areas. (PTI)

## Inequality on rise, welfare in retreat: Cong slams govt on state of economy

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** Ahead of the release of the Economic Survey and the presentation of the Union Budget, the Congress on Tuesday questioned the numbers the government has been presenting and claimed that "inequality is on the rise" with welfare in "retreat".

The opposition party's Research Department released a report on the state of the economy a day before the budget session of Parliament and said it was important to lay bare "facts" before the people as the government would roll out its "propaganda" through the President's address to both Houses, Economic Survey and the Union Budget.

All India Congress Committee (AICC) Research Department chairman Rajeev Gowda along with party colleague Amitabh Dubey released the party's flagship annual report, "Inequality on the rise, Welfare in Retreat - Real State of the Economy 2026".

Addressing a press conference with Dubey, Gowda wondered whether the Modi government's numbers can be believed.

"The IMF gave India's statistics a C grade. 0.5 per cent inflation rate is not the reality of people's lives. Former Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian calculates that GDP figures are at least 2.5 per cent higher than actual reality," he said.

In 2024, the government's production metric for GDP showed 9.2 per cent GDP growth, 47 per cent higher than GDP by expenditure metric of 4.9 per

cent, Gowda said.

"In the first half of 2025-26, manufacturing reportedly grew at 8.4 per cent. But the Index of Eight Core Industries showed only 2.9 per cent growth," he said.

Gowda slammed the government over the falling value of the rupee, saying the rupee has been Asia's worst performing currency in 2025.

"In 4 of 10 months of 2025, net FDI was negative. More investors withdrew money and more Indian money was invested abroad compared to foreign investments into India," he said.

Between 2017-18 and 2023-24, share of workers in manufacturing fell from 12.1 per cent to 11.4 per cent, he said.

"What happened to Make in India? Agriculture's share rose from 44.1 per cent to 46.1 per cent... Job growth is concentrated in low value, informal, and gig economy," Gowda said.

Flagging the issue of "rising inequality", Gowda said the top 10 per cent capture 58 per cent of national income; the bottom half gets only 15 per cent.

"Top 10 per cent own 65 per cent of India's wealth; bottom half own 6.4 per cent; top 1 per cent own 40 per cent," he said. Gowda said 4 of 5 Indians subsist on less than ₹ 200 per day. One third survives on less than ₹ 100/day. Net household financial savings are at a five-decade low of 5.2 per cent, household debt is sharply up to 41 per cent from 35 per cent in 2019," Gowda said. (PTI)

## BJP, JD(S) protest against alleged insult to K'taka Guv, demand resignation of Excise Minister

**BENGALURU, Jan 27:** Opposition BJP and JD(S) staged a protest in front of Mahatma Gandhi statue at Vidhana Soudha here on Tuesday, demanding the suspension of some Congress legislators for allegedly "insulting and disrespecting" Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot during the joint sitting of the state legislature. Raising anti-Congress government slogans, the protesters demanded justice.

They also demanded the removal of Excise Minister R B Timmapur over the alleged Excise Department scam, law and order failures and inadequate security for women in the state. Leaders of the Opposition both in the Assembly and Council -- R Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, state BJP chief B Y Vijayendra, BJP MLC C T Ravi, JD(S) leaders Suresh Babu and S L Bhojgowda, along with MLAs and MLCs of both parties were part of the protest.

Speaking to media here, BJP State President Vijayendra demanded that a thorough investigation must be conducted into the excise scam involving more than ₹ 6,000 crore. The probe should be carried out either by a sitting High Court judge or by the CBI, he added. Vijayendra alleged that the entire country has witnessed Congress "goons" behaving in a hooligan-like manner towards the Governor inside the House.

Condemning the insult and alleged misconduct shown towards the Governor during the joint session, he said, "The (Congress) government is now trying to justify those actions."

In a high drama in the Karnataka Assembly, the Governor on January 22 refused to read the state-prepared address to a joint session of the state legislature and concluded his customary speech in just three lines, evoking a sharp reaction from the Congress government in the state. As the Governor proceeded towards the exit door after concluding his three line speech, some ruling party legislators, including MLC Hariprasad, tried to gherao him by shouting slogans. They were removed by the security staff.

Vijayendra claimed that Timmapur's name has surfaced in the excise scam and that even members of the minister's family are being mentioned. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is not allowing a discussion on the issue in the Assembly, he said. Ashoka claimed that under the Congress government, there is widespread corruption in the Excise Department.

"Every single license requires bribes running into crores. Since the chief minister is also benefiting from this racket, even complaints made to him have received no response. The CM must immediately ensure the resignation of the corrupt Excise Minister; otherwise, our protest will be directed against the chief minister himself," he added.

Narayanaswamy too attacked the Congress government in the state over the excise scam and alleged, "If ₹ 6,000 crore has been looted, the Congress must answer what share Siddaramaiah, D K Shivakumar, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Kharge have in it." (PTI)

## 1,500 migratory, resident birds spotted at Mathura's Jodhpur Jhal wetland during survey

**MATHURA (UP), Jan 27:** Close to 1,500 migratory and resident birds -- from 72 wetland-dependent species and 11 endangered species -- were spotted at the Jodhpur Jhal wetland in Mathura district during a recent survey, experts said.

According to ecologist Dr K P Singh of Agra-based Biodiversity Research and Development Society, a non-governmental organisation, the Jodhpur Jhal wetland receives thousands of migratory birds belonging to more than 50 species every year.

"The birds fly to wetland and other areas of Mathura after clocking a distance of up to 9,000 kilometres on the Central Asian Flyway, which covers nearly 30 countries across Europe and Asia. Bluethroat from Alaska, Common Pochard from Siberia, Bar-headed Goose from Mongolia, and Grey-headed Lapwing from Northern China are among the birds already



arrived at the wetland," Singh told PTI. The birds take 30-50 days to travel from different parts of the Central Asian Flyway to the city, he said.

"Migration is an important part of their life cycle. The interesting fact is that the primary consumers

(herbivores) are followed by the secondary consumers (birds that feed on small animals) during migration," he added.

Citing the Wetland International's Asian Waterbird Census 2026 conducted at Jodhpur Jhal on January 18 jointly by the Biodiver-

sity Research and Development Society, Uttar Pradesh Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad, and Social Forestry Division, Singh said that a total of 1,493 individual birds from 72 wetland-dependent species and 11 endangered species were identified.

It took more than three hours for a team of eight experts led by Singh and Forest SI Amit Diwakar to cover an area of 80 hectares, including the adjoining canals, to conduct the survey.

Among the wetland-dependent birds, 32 were identified as migratory species, while 40 were resident species.

As many as 184 Common Teal, 387 Bar-headed Goose and 249 Northern Pintail (the highest in numbers) were found along with Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Pied Avocet, Little Stint, Tamarin Stint, Sandpiper, Wagtail, Black-winged Stilt, Pur-

ple Swamp Hen and Common Snipe, Singh said.

Endangered species such as Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, Painted Stork, Oriental Darter, Common Pochard, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-tailed Godwit, Greater Spotted Eagle, River Tern, Ferruginous Pochard, and the Black-headed Ibis, were also identified in the survey, he said.

Singh said the habitat area at Jodhpur Jhal wetland has been expanded by developing new micro habitats of different water depths within aquatic vegetation. As a result, the number of wetland-dependent species coming to the area has increased.

Anil Patel, Chief Conservator of Forests, Agra Circle, said that due to the forest department's constant monitoring and protection, the threat to migratory birds has decreased, leading to an increase in their arrival. (PTI)

## Process on to impeach Justice Varma, govt awaiting probe panel report: Rijiju

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** The process to impeach Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma is underway and the government is awaiting the report of a three-member committee set up by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to probe charges against him, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said on Tuesday.

Birla set up the committee on August 12 last year to probe corruption charges against Justice Varma after admitting a multi-party notice for his removal. Justice Varma was repatriated from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court after burnt waves of currency notes were found at his official residence here on March 14.

Asked whether the matter will be taken up before the upcoming Budget session of Parliament beginning Wednesday, Rijiju refused to comment further on the issue. "As per the procedure, the matter has been referred to the committee constituted by the Speaker with the consent of the House and the process is on," he told reporters.

"While the committee is discharging its duty, we are waiting for the report to come. Before that, I cannot pass any comment," Rijiju said.

The inquiry committee comprises Supreme Court judge Justice Arvind Kumar, Madras High Court Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and senior Karnataka High Court advocate B V Acharya.

After referring to relevant laws and judgements of the Supreme Court, the Delhi High Court chief justice found that the charges against Justice Varma were of serious nature and followed it up with the "in-house procedure". Officials aware of the procedure to appoint and remove Supreme Court and high court judges pointed out that while defending his case before lawmakers in any House of Parliament, Justice Varma can announce that he is quitting and his verbal statement will be considered as his resignation. (PTI)

# 'If the people belonging to the Chakma tribe can develop their own script' Govt will not allow Roman script for Kokborok language: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, Jan 27: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday rejected the demand for introducing Roman script for the Kokborok language, spoken by nearly 19 tribes of the state.

His comment comes in the backdrop of the demand by the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the ruling BJP, ahead of the elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

Kokborok is the mother language of most of the 19 tribes of the northeastern state, which account for approximately 14 lakh population.

Addressing a party programme at Jolaibari in South Tripura, the CM said, "We will never allow Roman script for Kokborok language because it poses a threat to the indigenous traditional and culture. The young generation will completely forget their culture if Roman script is adopted for their language", he said.

Exhorting the tribal intellectuals to discover their own script for the Kokborok language and its proper development, he said the government has not been insisting on Bengali or any other script for the indigenous language.

"If the people belonging to the Chakma tribe can develop their own script, why will the Kokborok-speaking people remain laggards? The young generation is being confused by raising the script issue," he said.

Claiming that only the BJP can develop the lives of indigenous people and their culture and tradition, the chief minister said his government has started paying respect to the Manikya Kingdom for building the north-eastern state.



"The successors of the Manikya dynasty were confined to their palace during the Communist rule in the state. It was the BJP which started giving respect to the Manikya dynasty. We have nothing to do if someone fails to receive the respect in a proper way", he said. The chief minister said the BJP fought 11 seats in the 28-member tribal council and won nine in the last polls. The present council's tenure is set to be completed on April 18. In the 2021 elections, the TMP bagged 18 seats and constituted the council. The tribal council covers two-thirds of the geographical area of Tripura. "Our organisation is very strong in tribal areas. The BJP doesn't infuse 'force' in the electoral process, rather tries to win the hearts of the voters by performance," he said. (PTI)

# NSCN-IM presses concern over factional fights between NSCN-YA and NSCN-AM

DIMAPUR, Jan 27: While expressing its concern over the factional fights between the NSCN-YA and the NSCN-AM, the NSCN-IM said that "the inherent policy of India and Myanmar is to create as many as factions in the name of Naga political movement and make them vulnerable to be used to prevent them from mounting a serious challenge to the government forces".

In a statement issued today, the NSCN-IM said factionalism in essence serves as a "perverse incentive" to the "Naga political groups" for fighting among themselves.

"What is the painful reality is that the sensationalism out of factional fighting created a shift of Naga public focus away from the main issue", the statement said, adding, "This way, India and Myanmar's favorite divisive strategy found strength as they were able to create internal fissure among the Naga political groups".

The statement then said this is nothing new to the "Naga political groups" but lessons are never learnt from this killing policy of India and Myanmar.

The NSCN-IM also said India and Myanmar will go to any extent to prevent the Naga from presenting a united front against India and Myanmar and therefore eroding their unity and collective strength.

"Time to wake up lest the Naga history questions us", it added.

The NSCN-IM then reminded that it is time for the "Naga political groups" to stop the politics of factional fight and vendetta. It also stated that this kind of miserable politics "which is deeply unethical, corrupt and violent methods give us nothing good in return".

This type of conflict often prioritizes personal gain over the public good, the NSCN-IM also said.

"It is all about assassination of political rivals and bloody clashes, betrayal and smear campaigns to out-do each other", it added.

The statement of the NSCN-IM then said, "Let us listen to the voice of the people as NSCN groups irrespective of affiliation represent the truth of Naga political movement".

It added by saying, "We should not prove ourselves wrong lest we are condemned by history".

The statement also said the Naga political movement is a people's based movement.

"This is the reason why we have sustained our movement for all these years, getting the people's support and encouragement in defence of our God given Naga nation whose dignity and honour has been violated by the aggressor", it stated.

According to the NSCN-IM, the Naga Army made the supreme sacrifice to save the honour of the

Naga nation keeping the political movement alive without surrendering to the pressure of the government of India and Myanmar. "We are proud of our Naga Army's history of supreme sacrifice".

Ironically, the voice of the Naga people is getting lost in the melee of factional fighting, it said.

The NSCN-IM then warned that this is a dangerous symptom of people's exasperating problem in dealing with the Naga political movement where the voice of the Nagas are getting lost in the wilderness of fragmented national political groups under the "obsessive" nomenclature of NSCN.

In this critical scenario of factional clashes least connected with the principles of Naga political aspirations, it is heartening to note the assertive statement emanating from the Lahe-based Naga Student's Organization (NSO) expressing their concern and desperation over the unforgiving attack and counter-attacks between the NSCN-YA and NSCN-AM, said the NSCN-IM statement.

"Such initiative is what we called 'urgent voice' of the Naga people to save the situation that is only going in the interest of the aggressor governments who are going through sleepless nights trying to plant seeds of division among the Naga political groups", it added. (NNN)

# Bandh affects life in Manipur valley



IMPHAL, Jan 27: Normal activities in the Manipur valley were affected on Monday as various underground organisations called bandh against the Republic Day celebrations in Manipur.

Shops and other commercial activities did not function due to the shutdowns. However, there was no report of any untoward incident due to the bandh.

Alliance for Socialist Unity, Kangleipak (ASUK) called a 10-hour shut down in Manipur on Republic Day, while the Coordination Committee (CorCom), a conglomerate of various underground organisations, boycotted the event.

Socialist Revolution Party Kangleipak (SOREPA) called a 12-hour bandh on Monday.

ASUK had stated earlier that the historical events of the "princely state" (Manipur), particularly the political status before the Merger Agreement, the establishment of Manipur state constitution Act, 1947 on July 26, and the establishment of the "democratic government" of Manipur (Kangleipak) on October 18, 1948.

ASUK then criticised the colonial-style administration of India. It then emphasized the need for freedom of the Manipuris (Kangleipak).

ASUK then accused India that the latter has been driving a wedge between various communities in Manipur.

CorCOM also said that there was no reason to celebrate India's Republic Day in Manipur.

According to CorCom, the Indian Republic was founded by a dominant cultural class comprising Brahmins and Banias, perpetuating cultural hegemony and establishing itself as a Hindu nation.

"The supremacy of Hinduism led the Indian Republic as a Hindu nation", said CorCom.

It also said the process of forming the Indian Republic violated the rights of many states.

"India forcibly annexed Manipur," it claimed.

The Indian nationalist movement was nothing but expansionism right from the very beginning, CorCom also said.

CorCom added that the Republic Day of India marks 76 years of Indian colonialism, oppression and subjugation in Manipur.

In the same vein, Socialist Revolution Party Kangleipak (SOREPA) called the 12-hour shutdown.

SOREPA alleged that India dominated Manipur after gaining freedom from colonial rule. (NNN)

# Cong demands Manipur be declared as 'special crisis-affected' state in Union Budget

IMPHAL, Jan 27: The Congress on Tuesday demanded that ethnic strife-hit Manipur be declared as a "special crisis-affected" state in the upcoming Union Budget, and sought a financial package as the state economy "collapsed due to prolonged violence".

State Congress president Keisham Meghachandra called for a high-level political dialogue mechanism under the Union government and parliamentary oversight committee to review the Manipur situation quarterly.

In a post on X, Meghachandra urged the Centre to "declare Manipur as a special crisis-affected state" and "announce a dedicated relief and reconstruction package which is separate from normal plan funds".

The Wangkhem legislator also said that the funds should cover "rehabilitation of displaced families, reconstruction of destroyed houses, schools, churches/temples, health centres and livelihood restoration (MSMEs, SHGs, farmers, daily wage earners)".

Meghachandra also called for direct central assistance to local bodies and immediate release of pending 15th Finance Commission



grants to gram panchayats, urban local bodies and autonomous district councils.

He said, "Local governance has been paralysed, and funds are needed at the grassroots."

The Congress leader also called for a Union budget head for relief camps as well as funds for the modernisation of police and intelligence with community-sensitive policing.

Asserting that peace cannot be restored without humanitarian stability, he called for fast-track completion of NH-102A, NH-37 and NH-2 and demanded that key Manipur roads be declared as "National Strategic Corridors".

Meghachandra also urged the Centre to "constitute a high-level political dialogue mechanism under the Union government and parliamentary oversight committee to review the Manipur situation quarterly".

Alleging that the "administrative silence" has deepened the crisis, the state Congress chief demanded the creation of the Manipur peace and reconciliation fund.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

# Nagaland a peaceful state: Nagaland CM

KOHIMA, Jan 27: Nagaland Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio claimed that for the past many years Nagaland has remained one of the most peaceful states of the country with good law and order situation and no major security concerns whatsoever.

He said this while delivering the Republic Day address at Nagaland Civil Secretariat Plaza in Kohima on Monday.

Rio stated that the latest Crime in India 2023 report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) places Nagaland among the safest states in the country with a cognisable crime rate of 84.9 per lakh population, the second lowest in India.

Rio also stated that the Nagaland Police has been taking further steps for sustaining the good situation prevailing in the state and for enhancing its enforcement capabilities it has strengthened its response to new-age crimes by developing a robust cybercrime architecture, actively using national cyber platforms, and intensifying action against financial and online offences. Rio then said that Nagaland Police has also been carrying out a vigorous campaign against narcotics, targeting trafficking networks.

In the past one year, Nagaland Police seized 230 kg of NDPS drugs and around 1 lakh units of synthetic drugs. A total of 135 NDPS cases were registered, leading to the arrest of 218 persons, reflecting strong action against drug trafficking and protecting communities from drug-related harm, in line with broader security and social objectives. (NNN)

# Sikkim MP demands special discussion on climate change in Parliament

GANGTOK, Jan 27: Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) MP Indra Hang Subba on Tuesday demanded a special discussion in Parliament on climate change at the all-party meeting held at New Delhi.

Subba is the lone Lok Sabha MP from Sikkim.

A statement from the MP's office said Subba strongly demanded a special discussion on climate change on the floor of Parliament.

The MP also raised the critical issue of climate change and its severe impact on the Himalayan and glacial ecosystem, including drinking water scarcity and the

increasing incidence of flash floods.

"I also proposed the constitution of a standing committee comprising Members of Parliament from Himalayan regions to deliberate on region-specific challenges and to recommend necessary changes in policies and schemes," said the statement.

He also highlighted the state government's demand for the inclusion of 12 left-out communities in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list, stating that their exclusion is a historical mistake and requires urgent resolution to ensure equity and justice in Sikkim. (PTI)

# Mizoram to revert to Jan-Dec academic calendar from 2027-28: Minister

AIZAWL, Jan 27: Mizoram has decided to revert to the January-December school academic calendar from the existing April-March cycle from the 2027-28 academic year considering the state's climate, topography and people's lifestyle, Education Minister Vanlalhlana said on Tuesday.

He said that the January-December academic year will be followed for students in the primary and high school classes, while pupils in classes 11 and 12 will continue to use the existing April-March cycle.

The class 10 board examinations will continue to be held in February-March, the minister said.

The state's academic calendar was shifted to the April-March cycle more than five years ago to align it with the national academic calendar, according to School Education Department Director Angela Zothanpuui.

Vanlalhlana said the decision to change the academic calendar again was made following a thorough assessment and consultation with various organisations, teachers and parents.

"We received opinions from 231 organisations, and teachers and parents, with 92.2 per cent of them having opted for the January-December cycle, while 6.5 per cent wanted to continue with the existing calendar, and 1.3 per cent were in favour of a separate calendar for the elementary section," Vanlalhlana told reporters here.

He said the government is of the opinion that the January-December cycle is most suited to Mizoram, considering people's lifestyle, and climate and topography of the state. He said the government is



also mulling an option to have school vacation during the rainy season to ensure the safety of students, as landslides and rockfalls are frequent during the monsoon.

The minister said the government will also discontinue the use of common school dresses for all government schools from the next academic session. It was introduced under the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government.

"The move is not politically motivated but due to requests from several schools and teachers' organisations that pointed out several lapses," he said.

School uniforms will be at the discretion of respective schools, he said.

Vanlalhlana said the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) will, from this year onwards, follow the policy of declaring results of classes 10 and 12 without awarding distinction, division or ranks to students in the result book to ensure there is quality education and the pupils don't compete only for rank or higher percentage.

MBSE chairman J H Zoremthanga, who accompanied the minister at the press conference, said the move was taken with

an objective to do away with the traditional practice of rote learning and to ensure quality education through competency-based learning.

He said students from the state lack quality and understanding of their subjects due to the learn-by-heart system, which makes them lag behind others at national competitive exams.

Vanlalhlana also announced that the government will continue to follow the existing school timetable of commencement at 9 am based on a majority decision during a public consultation held in July last year. (PTI)

# PM extends birthday greetings to Meghalaya CM



SHILLONG, Jan 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday extended birthday greetings to Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, praising his efforts to fulfill the aspirations of the people of the state.

In his message, the prime minister said Sangma's efforts to meet the expectations of Meghalaya's people are "noteworthy" and prayed for his long life and good health. "Birthday wishes to Meghalaya Chief Minister Shri Conrad Sangma Ji. His efforts to fulfill the aspirations of Meghalaya's people are noteworthy. I pray for his long life and good health," Modi said in an X post.

Responding to the prime minister's greetings, Sangma expressed gratitude and sought his blessings.

"Thank you Hon'ble Prime Minister, @narendramodiji, for your blessings. May God bless you," the chief minister said in a post on X.

Sangma also received birthday wishes from several political leaders, party colleagues and well-wishers from across the state, with many lauding his leadership and contributions to Meghalaya's development. (PTI)

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# Cinema makes you dream, TV gives you sense of belonging: Akshay Kumar on 'Wheel of Fortune'



It feels like homecoming to the family audience, says superstar Akshay Kumar as he returns to television as the host of the Indian version of the celebrated game show "Wheel of Fortune".

Akshay, who earlier served as the host of stunt-based show "Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi" (2008-2011) and judged "MasterChef India" (2010), said TV can unite family audiences and he is hoping his new show will foster this connection.

"Over the years, iconic television formats and their hosts haven't just entertained, they have built trust, brought generations together, and created moments where families sit together, play along and celebrate wins as one. For me, 'Wheel of Fortune' feels like coming home to that family audience, the kind that gathers after a long day to unwind together," he told PTI.

"Wheel of Fortune", which started on American television in 1975, challenges contestants to uncover hidden words or phrases by guessing letters. A large spinning wheel determines

the value of each correct letter and players take turns to reveal the puzzles. The contestant who successfully solves the puzzle and amasses the highest score walks away with a cash prize.

According to Kumar, both cinema and TV are different mediums entertaining audiences in distinct ways.

"Cinema is larger than life, played out on a big canvas where you play a certain character for a few hours, creating a significant impact on the audiences beyond those few hours.

"Television, however, creates a different kind of bond. While cinema makes you dream, television gives you a sense of belonging. It walks into homes every single day and becomes part of people's routines and conversations," the actor said.

Kumar said he instantly jumped at the idea of hosting "Wheel of Fortune" as it gave him the chance to di-

rectly interact with people.

"As a host, the role is very different from cinema. Hosting gives me the chance to be myself, interact directly with contestants, share their excitement, and be part of their journey in real time. On television, you are not just telling a story, you are having a conversation with the entire country. That is the magic of TV," he said.

Kumar, described "Wheel of Fortune" as an "energetic, positive, and inclusive" show.

"It's a show that can end the day with laughter, conversation, and a sense of togetherness, then it's doing something right. That's exactly what excites me about being back on television."

The Indian edition of "Wheel of Fortune" premieres on Sony Entertainment Television and Sony LIV on Tuesday. (PTI)

**'BORDER 2'  
RECORDS ₹  
63.59 CRORE ON  
REPUBLIC DAY;  
FOUR-DAY TOTAL  
AT ₹ 193.48  
CRORE**



Sunny Deol-starrer "Border 2" continued its strong box office run, registering the biggest-ever Republic Day collection for a Hindi film with earnings of ₹ 63.59 crore net on Day 4, the makers said on Tuesday.

A sequel to Deol's 1997 blockbuster "Border", the movie released in theatres on January 23. It is backed by T-Series and J P Films.

In a press note, the makers said the movie's four-day domestic net box office collection (NBOC) stands at ₹ 193.48 crore.

"Marching ahead with unshakable momentum, 'Border 2' delivered a historic Day 4 performance on Republic Day, scripting a new benchmark for patriotic cinema at the box office. The film recorded a massive ₹ 63.59 CR NBOC, marking the biggest Republic Day box office collection, earning a total of ₹ 193.48 CR NBOC within just four days," read the note.

According to the makers, "Border 2" collected ₹ 32.10 crore on its opening day, followed by ₹ 40.59 crore on Day 2 and ₹ 57.20 crore on Day 3.

"Border 2" also stars Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh and Ahan Shetty.

While the 1997 film was based on the events of the Battle of Longewala during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, "Border 2" is also set against the backdrop of the same conflict.

The movie reportedly didn't find a release in six Gulf nations -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) -- due to alleged anti-Pakistan narrative. A response from the makers is awaited.

It is the second Indian film in recent times to be denied clearance for theatrical release in the Gulf countries after director Aditya Dhar's spy action movie "Dhurandhar".

"Border 2" is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Dutta and Nidhi Dutta. It also features Mona Singh, Sonam Bajwa, Anya Singh, and Medha Rana in pivotal roles. (PTI)

## Not surprised everyone enjoying it globally: team 'Taskaree' as show tops Netflix's non-English chart

Actor Emraan Hashmi says he is not surprised that his "pulpy" thriller "Taskaree: The Smuggler's Web" has become the first Indian series to debut at the number one spot on Netflix's global top-10 non-English TV list in the first week of its release.

Created by filmmaker Neeraj Pandey and co-directed by Raghav Jairath, the show focuses on the high-stakes world of airport customs and how its officers serve the nation while staying out of the spotlight. Hashmi plays one such officer pitted against a seasoned smuggler.

"You just hope for everyone to like your show. The intention was for it to kind of work in a big way in India... I got a call from my manager and he's like 'It's gone global and it's reached the number one spot so fast. So, I asked him, 'Can you say this again'. I'm still processing it."

"But it's great... It's very pulpy, thrilling and a fast watch. It's everything that a show should be. I'm not very surprised that everyone's enjoying the show across the globe. I know after this show, people are going to see airports in a very different light," Hashmi told PTI.

"Taskaree", which premiered on the streaming platform on January 14, is among Netflix's growing slate of Indian breakouts globally, following the success of Sanjay

Leela Bhansali's "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar", Aryan Khan's "The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood" and "IC-814: The Kandahar Hijack", created by Anubhav Sinha.

According to Pandey, the idea was to tell a unique story with "Taskaree".

"It should be about something that the viewers have not seen. It should be a new world. That newness, I believe, is the thing that all storytellers look out for. And that's exactly what we chased with this," he said.

Tanya Bami, Series Head, Netflix India, said their team was "cautiously optimistic" about the show's potential to travel beyond India through the platform, which has over 300 million paid subscribers in over 190 countries.

"We all knew the intensity of the idea and the scope that it had. It's a never-seen-before world and thriller. Neeraj brings these things alive like nobody else can with the flair and simplicity of a narrative that everyone across borders can watch. And when you add Emraan as a nice 'tadka' (extra flavour), then it really lands. We knew that there is something special in here and just needed the audience verification which we got with a lot of love from all over the world," Bhami said.

For Hashmi, whose debut streaming show was Netflix's "Bard of Blood" in 2019, it was a dream come true collaboration.

"There's never been a piece made on a story that revolves around our custom officers. I think that was a novelty that kind of drew me in. Obviously, I am also working with Neeraj and Netflix again. It was like a dream team. And you'd be a fool to say no to something like this."

"There is a saying, 'You had me at hello'. Neeraj called me and said there's a show but he had me on that show already. It was just the icing on the cake when he sent me the entire four episodes. I was like blown away. I finished reading it in one go. Very rarely you get something that's so engrossing through and through. And that just translates. When you see the show, there's not a dull moment. And that's exactly what I saw on paper."

For Pandey, known for movies such as "A Wednesday", "Special 26" and show "Special Ops", Hashmi was the one and only choice for the role of Arjun Meena, a customs officer at the Mumbai airport.

"We didn't even have a second option. Both belonged to Emraan. It was for him to just go through the material and respond. He was our first and only choice. And I'm glad that we could do this together."

Bami said Indian content has been doing consistently better on the platform and

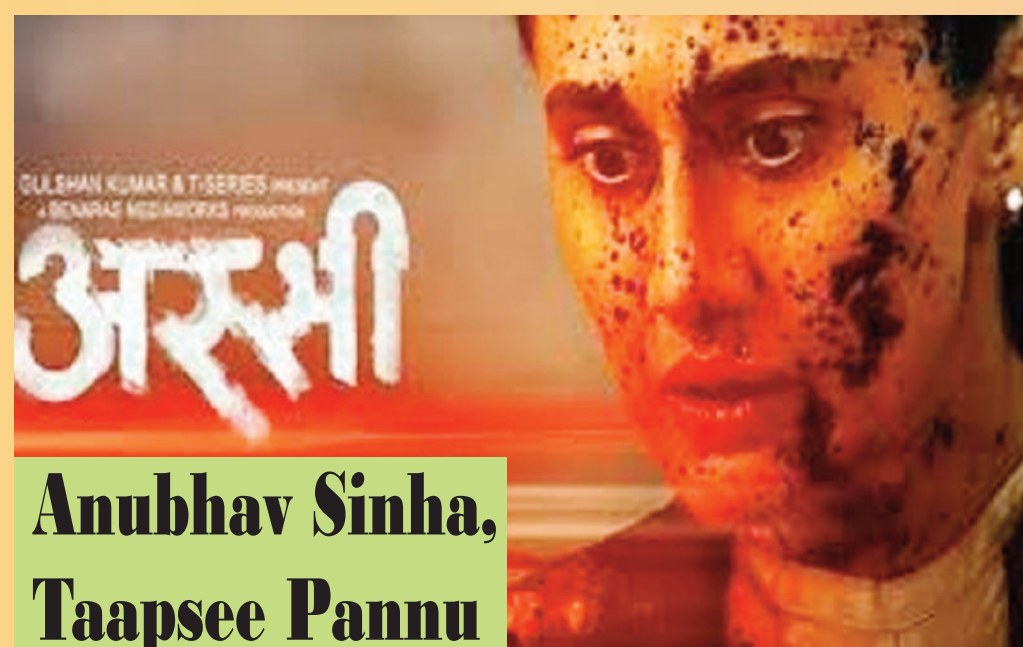


"Taskaree" just tops it by being at number one on Netflix's non-English chart.

"Last year, literally every single week, we had an Indian film or series in the global top ten. So, it's heartening for me that we're able to take our stories to the world. We're able to take our storytellers to the world... The fact that it's number one in 10 countries and in the top ten of 23 plus countries, it is amazing for us to have this kind of a value to a story which is mounted with such ambition."

When asked whether Indian content had the potential to go globally viral the way Korean shows and movies like "Squid Game" and "K-pop Demon Hunters", Bami said India has such diversity that there will be many more stories that are uniquely local but global in appeal.

"I would say with all humility, and we love the Korean content, but why must we try to be like someone else? We are best when we are ourselves. Why shouldn't we aim higher? Why wouldn't we dip into all of that and actually enrich the ecosystem, build newer voices, and have great mentors like



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

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

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

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

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

Instagram page.

"It's been long... Long since we normalised this... See you in court... I mean the theatres... #Assi - an urgent watch, only in cinemas from 20th Feb," she wrote. The movie marks a reunion between Pannu and Sinha after they collaborated on critically-acclaimed movies "Mulk" (2018) and 2020's "Thappad".

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

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

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

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

## HINDI FILMS HAVE LOST THEIR ROOTS, ARE FAKE AND MONEY-DRIVEN: PRAKASH RAJ



Unlike Malayalam and Tamil cinema, which he hailed for their strong, content-driven storytelling, actor Prakash Raj said mainstream Hindi cinema has lost its roots, becoming increasingly "fake" and "money-oriented".

Speaking at the ongoing ninth edition of the Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) on Saturday, the award-winning actor criticised Hindi films for their artificiality, saying they have become like a "Madame Tussauds museum" where everything seems beautiful with no substance.

"In the present context, I feel Malayalam

and Tamil cinema are making very strong films... Hindi cinema, on the other hand, has lost its roots. Everything looks beautiful, wonderful, like plastic, as you see in the Madame Tussauds museum.

"We (the South) still have stories to tell, the new young directors of Tamil are talking about Dalit issues. And that gives so much of hope," said Raj, renowned for his work across Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, and Malayalam cinema, in a session titled "The Artist I Became".

The 60-year-old filmmaker-actor further analysed what ails Hindi cinema, tracing its

decline to the post-multiplex era, when it began catering primarily to urban audiences.

Raj, known for his performances in hit films such as "Singham" and "Wanted", argued that the industry's focus on glamour and surface-level aesthetics has weakened its emotional connection with viewers.

"After multiplexes, the Bombay film industry started making films only for multiplexes. Very cute films and things like that. Because they were running well. They went into that Page 3 culture, and with that lost the touch with rural Rajasthan and Bihar," he explained. This shift, he argued, also led to the decline of the nation-building narratives that once defined post-independence Hindi cinema.

To buttress his point, Raj cited the 1977 blockbuster "Amar Akbar Anthony", and its famous scene of three men from different religions donating blood to save one person, reflecting shared values, social harmony and collective aspirations.

"Now, it's not like that anymore. Today, it's all about money and appearances -- reels, page 3 coverage, and loud self-promotion. In the process, I feel the industry has lost its connection with the audience," he concluded.

The four-day literary extravaganza is hosting over 400 speakers, including Nobel Laureates Abdulrazak Gurnah and Abhijit Banerjee, astronaut Sunita Williams, author Kiran Desai, essayist Pico Iyer, Jnanpith winner Pratibha Ray, sports icons Rohan Bopanna and Ben Johnson, and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales.

KLF 2026, now in its ninth edition, will come to a close on January 25. (PTI)

# Dominant India eye sparkling outing from spinners in 4<sup>th</sup> T20I against NZ

**VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 27:** With the series already sealed, India will be hoping for a positive turn in their spinners' performance while attempting to extend the total domination over New Zealand to the fourth T20I here on Wednesday.

The batting storm kicked up by Abhishek Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan and the resultant 3-0 series lead has so far masked the underwhelming outings of two premier spinners -- Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthi.

Kuldeep has picked up two wickets in as many matches, but looked a distant shadow of his bewitching self, conceding 9.5 runs an over.

The left-arm wrist spinner had three expensive overs, that leaked 32 runs, even when India limited the Kiwis to 153 for 9 riding on brilliant spells by Jasprit Bumrah, Ravi Bishnoi and Hardik Pandya.

In fact, the modest effort was a continuation from the preceding ODI series in which he took three wickets across three matches and gave away 7.28 runs an over. Chakravarthi, who was rested for the third T20I, is a slightly different case as he has played in two high-scoring matches when the visitors scored 190 and 208.

But the usual zip has not been there in his bowling. The little time away might have been useful in replenishing him.

**Kuldeep or Bishnoi?**

In that context, India will ponder

whether to persist with Bishnoi (4-0-18-2 at Guwahati) in the fourth match, and bring back Chakravarthi in place of Kuldeep to allow the latter some breathing space.

India will also keep a close eye on the fitness of all-rounder Axar Patel, as he has not played since the first game at Nagpur because of a finger injury.

**Bats of fury**

While the bowling pieces in this series have still not entirely fallen in their places, the hosts' batting has been a different story.

The top-order reshaped India's T20 batting in this series and third match resembled an extended Power Play. Abhishek has scored at a strike-rate of over 300 while Suryakumar and Kishan have maintained a strike-rate close to 230.

Such has been the fury in their batting that India have so far spent only a combined 25.2 overs in the park while chasing 209 and 154 (363 runs in total) in the second and third T20Is.

If the nature of the pitch and the amount of dew in Visakhapatnam are anything to go by, this match too will not be offering a different script.

The only out of sync piece, surprisingly too, is the wretched form of Sanju Samson, who has been given his preferred opening slot in this series.

Perhaps, dawdling in the middle-order the whole of last year without role clarity has affected his rhythm but the talent rush



in Indian cricket has made it mandatory for Samson to come good on almost all occasions.

However, pitiful numbers in this series so far -- 16 runs in three matches at 5.33 -- have made the ride rough for him.

But with a recuperating Tilak Varma

having an extended time away from the team, Samson might be getting another game here to vindicate the management's faith in him.

Perhaps, the team think tank can also consider giving him the No. 3 slot while pushing Kishan up to pair with Abhishek.

However, the Kerala man will be aware that he is closer to the tip of the rope more than ever before.

**Can Kiwis fly high?**

Little has gone right for New Zealand in the ongoing series.

Their batters found occasional spark

but bowlers failed to mount a response to Indian batters' onslaught.

That Jacob Duffy, with an economy of 10.30, is their most parsimonious bowler tells a story in itself, but his numbers shine bright in comparison to other bowlers.

They offer a stunning read too. Matt Henry (13.80), Kyle Jamieson (14.20), Mitchell Santner (13.14) and Ish Sodhi (12.50) have all been taken to the cleaners by the home side.

There are some peripheral concerns such as a possible promotion of in-form Daryl Mitchell higher up in the order, but if the bowlers do not self-heal their scars and manage their fears quickly then another round of walloping awaits them.

**Teams :**

**India:** Suryakumar Yadav (capt), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel (vice-capt), Rinku Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarthi, Ishan Kishan (wk), Ravi Bishnoi.

**New Zealand:** Mitchell Santner (c), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Zak Foulkes, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Bevon Jacobs, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Lockie Ferguson, Ish Sodhi, Tim Seifert.

Match starts at 7pm. (PTI)

## Nagdev wins Polo Cup crown

**CHENNAI, Jan 27:** Aman Nagdev of Noida emerged victorious in India's premier Touring Car Series, the Polo Cup, after a thrilling three-way battle at the MRF MMSC FMSCI Indian National Racing Championship here.

Nagdev, Aditya Patnaik and Ojas Surve (both from Navi Mumbai) were in the hunt to win the coveted national crown as the curtain went up on the final day of the championship.

The four-race championship, at the 3.717km long Madras International Circuit, saw Surve bag the crucial pole position in the qualifying for Race 1, with a lap time of 1:54.910s. Patnaik was a mere 0.126 seconds behind him and Nagdev a further 0.194 away.

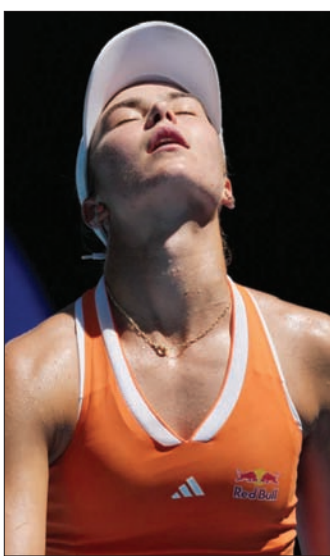
Nagdev got a brilliant start in the race but he was soon blocked off by Surve. The duo slugged it out through the first three corners before Nagdev streaked ahead. Starting fifth, Patnaik also had a fantastic start and was soon challenging Surve for the second place. Eventually Nagdev won the race, while Patnaik finished second, ahead of Surve.

Race 2 began under extremely wet conditions with a safety car involved initially. Surve made a brilliant move around the outside of corner 1 on Patnaik, to move from third to second before corner 2. He immediately challenged Nagdev for the lead around the outside of corner 2.

Surve and Nagdev went side by side through corner 3, but Surve came out ahead.

Surve then enthralled everyone with a wet driving masterclass to win the race comfortably, ahead of Patnaik and Nagdev. (PTI)

## Iva Jovic received tips from Novak Djokovic, but those couldn't help her against Sabalenka



**MELBOURNE, Jan 27:** Iva Jovic has received playing tips throughout the Australian Open from Novak Djokovic.

They worked very well until Tuesday, when top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka defeated the 18-year-

old American 6-3, 6-0 to end her run at Melbourne Park.

"Hopefully throughout the year I can keep having more moments with him because it's been amazing," Jovic said of Djokovic, the star Serbian who has won 24 Grand Slam singles titles, 10 of them at the Australian Open.

But even Djokovic could not have saved Jovic against Sabalenka in the quarterfinal match.

To be fair, Jovic has been doing just fine on her own, rising quickly in the WTA rankings.

She finished 2024 ranked just inside the top 200. Predicted rankings published Tuesday by the WTA showed her climbing to No. 20 — her highest spot.

Jovic had a chance against Sabalenka in the first set. Sabalenka took a 3-0 lead, but Jovic stayed in the set and had three breakpoint chances in the ninth game trailing 5-3. She lost 6-3 and lost her momentum, losing the second set 6-0.

Jovic referred to a comment that she attributed to Andre Agassi speaking about Djokovic, noting his ability to change styles and keep opponents off balance.

She said Agassi compared Djokovic with "a boxer and the way that he's going in for punches and then faking them out a little bit. I think the way (Djokovic) approaches the match is very impressive."

Jovic is the California-born daughter of a Serbian father and a Croatian mother who immigrated to the United States.

It was Jovic's first appearance in a Grand Slam quarterfinal, but she seemed poised from the start.

"I think that I kind of went into the match obviously not knowing too much about how it was going to look like in person, having not really hit with her in the past," Jovic said. "Our first meeting as well."

"I kind of tried to just bring that middle ground, and I think I have to be able to adapt to the game and what's necessary for different play

styles. I wasn't able to do that" against Sabalenka.

Jovic revealed her conversations with Djokovic earlier in the tournament. Djokovic confirmed he gave the young American some feedback, saying he was happy to help a player with Serbian heritage.

The 38-year-old Djokovic has stayed in touch.

"Yes, he did text me with some more tips throughout the rounds. I don't even know what day it is anymore!" Jovic said. "So we've been in communication, and I feel like we've built a little bit of a relationship now, which is amazing, and I wish him all the best for the rest of the tournament."

She plans to have more opportunities of her own at Grand Slams in the future.

"It's the quarterfinals but, you know, ultimately I hope to be in many quarterfinals," she said. "So I don't think this win or loss today is going to make or break my career." (AP)

## Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir makes stunning WSK debut in Italy, first Indian to seal P2 in qualifying

**LA CONCA (ITALY), Jan 27:** Eleven-year-old racing sensation Atiqa Mir made a roaring debut in the WSK Super Master Karting Series as she became the first Indian to set the second fastest time in a male dominated qualifying grid of 37 seasoned drivers. Embracing the mighty challenge after moving from mini (age 8-11) to junior category (12-14) in 2026, Atiqa showed remarkable speed driving in the OKNJ class for the first time.

One of the youngest drivers on the grid, the Formula 1 Academy supported racer defied all odds to set the second fastest time in qualifying and missed out on pole by only a tenth of a second.

The only female on the grid was on course for the pole with a stellar time of 49.76 seconds over the weekend before being pipped by Finland's Leo Latinen in the dying minutes of the session.

The Finnish driver got an extra lap while Atiqa didn't to finish P2, still enough to script history as she became the first Indian ever to score P2 on debut in OKNJ Class.

Atiqa had a front row start in all three of the heat races on Friday and Saturday, finishing 4th, 6th and 7th respectively. She also zoomed to the Fastest Lap in heat 1.

However, she did not have the luck she needed for the pre-final on Sunday. (PTI)

## ICE agents will have security role at Milan-Cortina Olympics, US sources say

**MILAN, Jan 27:** US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents will have a security role during the upcoming Milan Cortina Winter Games, according to sources at the US embassy in Rome. The sources who confirmed ICE participation on Tuesday said that federal ICE agents would support diplomatic security details and not run any immigration enforcement operations.

During previous Olympics, several federal agencies have supported security for US diplomats, including the investigative component of ICE called Homeland Security Investigations, the sources said. They could not be named because they are not authorised to speak publicly. (AP)

## Sabalenka beats 18-year-old Jovic, Zverev advances over Tien



**MELBOURNE, Jan 27:** Aryna Sabalenka beat 18-year-old Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-0 to reach the semifinals of the Australian Open on Tuesday before searing heat on Day 10 forced matches to be played under cover.

Alexander Zverev got the benefit of playing under a roof at Rod Laver Arena and advanced to the final four with a 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-1, 7-6 (3) win over 20-year-old Learner Tien.

The No. 3-ranked Zverev, last year's runner-up in Australia, reached his 10th Grand Slam semifinal on the back of 24 aces and just a single double-fault — which he served when he had six match points in the deciding tiebreaker.

Top-ranked Sabalenka, also a runner-up in Melbourne last year, is aiming for her third Australian Open title in four years. She won back-to-back titles here in 2023 and 2024 and lost the final a year ago to Madison Keys.

The first of the four quarterfinals scheduled on Day 10 was played outdoors, despite predictions of the temperature peaking at 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in Melbourne.

"I guess, yeah, as a woman, we are stronger than the guys," Sabalenka said her later news conference, laughing. "So they had to close the roof for the guys so they don't suffer!"

Sabalenka went up 3-0 in the first set and established her dominance early against the 29th-seeded Jovic.

Jovic had three breakpoint chances in the ninth game, which lasted 10 minutes, but wasn't able to convert against the world's No. 1-ranked woman. In the last game, Sabalenka served an ace on breakpoint and clinched it with another ace on match point. She saved all

five breakpoint chances she faced.

It gave her back-to-back wins over up-and-coming teenagers following her fourth-round victory over 19-year-old Canadian Vicky Mboko.

"These teenagers have tested me in the last couple of rounds -- incredible player," Sabalenka said of Jovic in an on-court interview. "It was a tough match," Sabalenka added. "Don't look at the score. She played incredible tennis and she pushed me to a one-step better level. It was a battle."

Jovic was born in California and is the daughter of parents who immigrated to the United States. Her father is Serbian and Jovic, naturally, has sought some tips from no other than Novak Djokovic.

Zverev said Tien's level had increased dramatically since last year, when the young American reached the fourth round.

He credited the recent work Tien has done with Michael Chang, the 1989 French Open champion, as coach. Chang won that major at Roland Garros at the age of 17, which remains the youngest for a male to have won a Grand Slam singles title.

"Yeah, he's a very good player. Very different than last year, for sure," Zverev said of Tien, the only player outside the Top 10 to reach the quarterfinals. "It was incredible to see how he played from the baseline. I thought he was playing unbelievable."

"For me to win, I think, you know, the serve was very important for me, because on the baseline, again, he was playing amazing."

The temperature topped 42 Celsius (108 F) at 5 p.m. local time, but started to drop ahead of the night session. Play was suspended on outside courts all afternoon. (AP)

## SAI Sports Science Division conducts workshop for coaches on advanced training

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** A four-day Sports Science Workshop for SAI coaches in archery and shooting, focussing on biomechanics, pressure management and emotional control, has begun at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex here.

Secretary (Sports) and Director General, SAI (Sports Authority of India), Hari Ranjan Rao, gave the opening address on Monday, underlining the need to deepen the integration of sports science into daily training.

"Sports science must be used effectively to support athletes, especially in disciplines where marginal gains can make the difference between participation and podium success," Rao was quoted as saying in a press release from SAI.

The workshop for SAI coaches in precision sports follows a series of coach sensitisation workshops, which started off in December last year.

Similar workshops have been held at the SAI Sports Science Division across disciplines like Hockey, Boxing, Wrestling, Judo, Athletics and now Shooting and Archery.

"Sports science has a crucial role to play in ensuring efficient training, injury prevention and career longevity, which ultimately reduces the financial burden on athletes and



their families," Rao said.

"We will increase sports science support across the country by expanding the number of centres and strengthening athlete support systems within national camps and centres of excellence."

The workshop brings together coaches, sports scientists, medical experts and performance specialists to "align traditional coaching wisdom with evidence-based practices."

The initiative is part of a push by the Min-

istry of Youth Affairs and Sports to conduct regular capacity-building programmes for coaches across combat, endurance, team and precision sports.

"Such focused engagements with coaches, supported by sports scientists, will positively contribute to India's medal prospects. Our vision is athlete-centric, coach-led, and backed by sports science," said Brig. (Dr.) Bibhu Kalyan Nayak, Director-cum-Head, Sports Science Division, SAI.

The precision sports-specific Sports Sci-

# 11<sup>th</sup> hour entrants Scotland announce T20 WC squad, pick uncapped Afghan-born pacer



**EDINBURGH, Jan 27:** Last minute T20 World Cup entrants Scotland have included Afghan-born uncapped pacer Zainullah Ihsan in their 15-member squad for the ICC event beginning in India and Sri Lanka on February 7. Scotland have replaced Bangladesh in the tournament with the latter refusing to play in India citing security concerns. Richie Berrington will captain a strong squad that includes eleven players who were part of the 2024 T20 World Cup squad in West Indies and USA. The team selection on Monday was the first made by new head coach Owen Dawkins,

following his appointment last month. Ihsan is the sole first-time call-up, with the fast bowler having recently qualified to play for Scotland. Tom Bruce, Finlay McCreath and Oliver Davidson will all travel to their first World Cup, following their involvement in T20 and ODI squads during the last twelve months. "The squad selection is subject to all player and staff visa applications being approved. Given the limited notice for Scotland's participation at the tournament and timescale for selecting players, two travelling reserves have been

selected while three others will be non-travelling reserves," said Cricket Scotland in a statement. Safyaan Sharif is a squad member of Pakistan lineage and his application will attract more scrutiny. Head coach Dawkins said the unexpected entry into the World Cup provides a great opportunity for the players. "It's been a whirlwind forty-eight hours for everyone at Cricket Scotland, and I know Steve, Trudy Lindblade and everyone in the organisation have been working solidly to get everything sorted for the players and

support staff since we learnt we would be participating at the World Cup. "We're all very excited and feeling privileged to have this opportunity. The players have been working hard in a fitness phase in recent weeks with Scott Hislen preparing for the ICC Cricket World Cup League Two series in Namibia at the end of March, and I have no doubt that this will help us in the next few weeks," said Dawkins. On the selection of Ihsa, head of performance Steve Snell added: "There's obviously a great opportunity for Zainullah Ihsan, and whenever he's played at youth level or for the "A" squad he's shown an exciting range of skills and bowled at genuine pace. We're delighted for him and excited to see how he performs on his first international tour." Scotland have replaced Bangladesh in Group C including first-timers Italy, West Indies, England and Nepal. **Squad:** Richie Berrington (c), Tom Bruce, Matthew Cross, Bradley Currie, Oliver Davidson, Chris Greaves, Zainullah Ihsan, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Finlay McCreath, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Mark Watt, Bradley Wheel Travelling reserves: Jasper Davidson, Jack Jarvis Non-travelling reserves: Mackenzie Jones, Chris McBride, Charlie Tear. (PTI)

# Bit of chaos now with ball flying everywhere: Oram on bowling against Abhishek, SKY, Ishan



**VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 27:** The sustained aggression of Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav has made it difficult for New Zealand bowlers to "remain calm" in the ongoing T20I series, but bowling coach Jacob Oram urged them to embrace the challenge and learn how to negate it. The three Indian top-order batters have put the New Zealand attack through the wringer, scoring consistently at a strike-rate of near 250 in the previous three T20Is. "It's been a little bit of chaos out in the middle with the ball flying everywhere, to remain calm and controlled and remember those plans and then obviously execute them. But I say again, it's all part of the learning," said Oram during the pre-match press conference here. The clean-hitting of Indian bat-

ters reminded Oram of Sri Lanka great Sanath Jayasuriya, who batted in similar manner from the 90s to mid 2000s. "Jayasuriya from Sri Lanka who kind of did the same thing at that time and I think that's just a natural progression of the game. I think what you see is the tendency for bowlers to have to catch up and that's our challenge now as the bowling coach and there are plenty of discussions happening." But neutralising three batters in prime form has been a massive challenge for the Kiwi bowlers. "Abhishek at the moment ... outstanding form, hitting it clean, let's just hope game two is reproduced in game four and we get him out early. We're not glazing over these results. "But the thing is he's (Abhishek) not the only one, Suryakumar has played well, Ishan Kishan in the

second game. We know there are challenges up and down the (Indian batting) line-up," said Oram. Oram's words found a reflection in pacer Lockie Ferguson, who bowled extensively at nets here ahead of the fourth T20I on Wednesday. "Yeah, he's batting well. He's full of confidence and he's playing some outstanding shots. We've seen players do this in the past. It's important to review, find areas where he's a little bit weaker and try to bring an aggressive brand of cricket into what we're playing," said Ferguson. "But there's no doubt that he's in fine form. So, sometimes it's best to try to get him off-strike, get him at the other end and bowl to the other batter," the pacer chuckled. The inclusion of Ferguson has added a touch of experience to the New Zealand bowling unit. But has it been tough for Oram till now to keep the morale of the young bowling group up in the face of a relentless onslaught by Indian batters? "I think there are a couple of factors. The first and foremost is a realisation that it's hard in these conditions. This isn't New Zealand with green grass and the ball seeming and bouncing. We mentioned before about the likes of Abhishek, SKY, Ishan ... it's a good side and we appreciate that. "I keep using the word challenge, so the challenge for us is to peel back those layers, to appreciate how hard it is here, but still find little things along the way that we can improve," he added. (PTI)

## I don't see Varun struggling with dew during World Cup: Kumble

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** The legendary Anil Kumble has backed leg-spinner Varun Chakravarthy to spearhead India's spin attack during next month's T20 World Cup as he believes he will have no issue dealing with the evening dew that could be more troublesome for a wrist spinner like Kuldeep Yadav. The T20 showpiece is scheduled to be held from February 7 to March 8 in venues across India and Sri Lanka. Speaking on JioHotstar, Kumble said dew is certainly going to play its part in the tournament. "...especially during the time of the World Cup in February and March, with matches being played late in the evening. It's not going to be easy. As spinners, you tend to get used to bowling with a wet ball; it's nothing new. "However, one aspect that India can certainly take comfort from is that I don't think it affects someone like Varun Chakravarthy because of the grip he has on the ball and the pace at which he bowls." India's spin trio of Varun, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel have been consistently doing well in recent months, but Kumble identified the Tamil Nadu man as the biggest plus among the tweekers. "I don't think dew will bother him (Varun) that much. Yes, it's not the same as bowling with a dry ball, of course, but with a wet ball, I don't see Varun struggling too much. "Similarly, Axar Patel should also be fine. The one person who might find it a bit more difficult is Kuldeep Yadav with a wet ball because of his bowling style. Having said that, Kuldeep is also used to bowling in these conditions." Due to their bowling style, wrist spinners are likely to find it more difficult to grip a wet ball. As a team India have displayed awesome form in the run-up to the tournament, and currently lead 3-0 in the five-match series against New Zealand. Kumble believes the defending champions have a very good chance of winning back-to-back titles, something that no team has done in the tournament's history. "I think when it comes to World Cups, winning back-to-back titles is not easy, especially in the T20 format. No team has been able to defend its title, and this presents a great opportunity for India to do that. "I certainly believe that the kind of form the team is in, and the strength of the playing squad, means India are well equipped to face any situation. India should certainly qualify for the semi-finals, and from there on, it's anybody's game. (PTI)

## Scotland hopeful of timely Indian visas ahead of T20 World Cup opener

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** Cricket Scotland chief executive Trudy Lindblade is confident that players of the national team, including Pakistan-origin pacer Safyaan Sharif, will get visas in time to travel to India for the T20 World Cup. Scotland were included into the T20 World Cup following Bangladesh's withdrawal citing security concerns despite the ICC insisting that there were no threats as per their assessment. Scotland will open their campaign against West Indies in Kolkata on February 7. Pakistan origin applicants of India visa attract more scrutiny and therefore taking more processing time. "We are all committed (to) working with the ICC to make that happen," Lindblade was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "The visa piece is always slightly an unknown, and it doesn't matter whether you've got three days or whether you've got 45 days. "Certainly that's been our focus in the last 48 hours: just getting those visas done so our players are all ready to go. They're all in the middle of submitting their visas and we will be there on the ground in India as quickly as we can, so it's just a matter of time now." Sharif, who was born in Huddersfield to a Pakistani father and a British-Pakistani mother, shifted to Scotland as a seven-year-old.

"(The ICC) can only give us the assurances of the bits that they can control and, absolutely, of the bits that they control, we are working with them and obviously they're working with the BCCI and local people on the ground there to make sure that we are getting all of that support that we need," Lindblade said. "So, absolutely, (they have given) the assurance that they can provide of things that were in their control. There is a team working very, very hard to not just help us, but to help 19 other teams as well that are also going to a World Cup. But we are their intense focus right now." As a contingency plan, Scotland will also apply for visas for two travelling reserves and three non-travelling reserves to ensure they can field a team in case of delays. "We [also] anticipate some support whenever we can [get it] from the BCCI," Scotland's head of performance, Steve Snell said. "I don't think we need to escalate that any further to get into the country, because you'd suggest that Scotland being invited to attend the World Cup and then not being able to get there wouldn't be a great look for anybody." Scotland will play warm-up matches against Afghanistan and Namibia in Bengaluru on February 2 and 4 before their opening match against West Indies in Kolkata. (PTI)

## With B'desh out of T20 WC, ICC reworking application process for its travelling media

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** The International Cricket Council is reworking the media accreditation process for Bangladesh journalists wishing to cover the T20 World Cup in India after the withdrawal of its national team citing security concerns in the neighbouring nation. The ICC is changing the application process even as some of the Bangladesh journalists claimed that their accreditation request was rejected by the world body. "There is a reworking of the process since there is a change in the number of requests and the schedules. The accreditation lists are being worked out accordingly. "Some of the Bangladesh journalists, who showed interest in covering the tournament despite their team's withdrawal, have started getting approvals," ICC sources told PTI. Roughly 80-90 Bangladeshi journalists applied for the media accreditation and, sources said, even if their team was participating in the ICC event, not all requests could be accommodated. "If you go by the country quota, you can't exceed the number beyond 40. The ICC goes by the recommendations of the home board and accordingly takes a call on the applications," sources added. In Dhaka, BCB media chairman Amjad Hossain said he has taken up the matter with the ICC. "The decision came only yesterday and we have sought to know (the details). An





explanation has been requested. This is an internal and confidential matter, but to summarise -- we wanted to know why this was done," Hossain told reporters in Dhaka. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior Bangladeshi journalist said it was the first time his media accreditation was not approved. "I have covered 8 to 9 ICC World Cups. This was the first time my application was rejected. We are awaiting clarity from BCB before reapplying," he said. As per the ICC assessment, the Bangladesh cricket team did not face a security threat in India but the country's cricket board still decided to not travel to the country. Subsequently, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland for the tournament beginning on February 7. (PTI)

## I'm some time away but when it's time, it's time: KL Rahul on retirement

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** KL Rahul has admitted that the thought of retirement did cross his mind but the India batter says it is still "some time away" and he will not drag on when the time comes. In an interview with former England skipper Kevin Pietersen, Rahul said retiring would not be a difficult decision as there is life beyond cricket. "I've (thought about it). I don't think it's (retirement) gonna be that difficult," the 33-year-old from Bengaluru, a

mainstay of India's Test and ODI teams, told Pietersen on his YouTube channel. "If you're honest with yourself, when it's time, it's time. And there's no point dragging it. Obviously, I'm some time away." Rahul has scored 4,053 runs in 67 Tests at an average of 35.8, while amassing 3,360 runs in 94 ODIs at 50.9. He has also scored 2,265 runs in 72 T20Is at an average of 37.75 and a strike rate of 139. (PTI)

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